

A close-up photograph of a forest floor. In the foreground, a young plant with several bright green, oval-shaped leaves grows from a bed of dark green moss. The moss is thick and textured, covering the ground. In the background, a line of tall, thin, yellowish-brown grasses or reeds stands against a blurred, dark green backdrop, suggesting a forest setting. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the vibrant green of the plant leaves and the moss.

The ANFT Way of Forest Therapy

M. Amos Clifford
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Chapter 1: Contrasting Some Emergent Theories in the Field of Forest Therapy

Ben Page

To understand the full promise of Forest Therapy and the different schools of thought that practice it, I find it helpful to think in terms of the problems that it addresses. These are big problems; it would be a grave mistake to think of them as anything less. These problems speak to the fundamental challenges that stand between humanity and mass extinction:

1. The first problem we may call **the degradation of human health**. We are experiencing a health epidemic that our medical system is unable to properly remedy and it is directly linked to our disconnection from nature. Hippocrates, the father of western medicine, identified that it is nature that is the source of health and the healer of disease. It should come as no surprise that our health is intricately connected to our exposure to elements such as clean air, sunlight, water, and plants. These natural elements not only heal disease, but they also maintain the strength of our immune systems, which keeps disease at bay.

On top of all the physiological ailments caused by our disconnection from nature, we are also seeing a rapid rise of mental health challenges around the world. Many experts agree that these health impacts are directly tied to digitalization, urbanization, overwork, stress, and loneliness. It is self-evident that we will not survive if we are not healthy.

2. The second problem we may call **the degradation of global ecology**. From small acts such as littering to macroscopic problems such as deforestation, we are seeing the devastating impacts of industrialization upon the Earth's biosphere. Such environmental degradation is not only a bioethical dilemma; it is also a threat to

our very existence. Without a diverse and healthy biosphere, human interests will rapidly become unsustainable.

3. The third problem we may call **the degradation of cultural values**. The root causes of almost all our most threatening problems are not economic, political, or ideological. The most pressing problems in our society are social, emotional and moral. I might broadly identify these as being in some way connected to the prevalence of apathy, greed, and selfishness in our culture. Our survival as a species cannot be promised without some form of cultural transformation that addresses these issues. At the core of this shift, we must learn to see the world differently, we must learn to think and perceive differently, so that we know how to fall in love in such a profound way that we will reflexively take good care of each other and all beings upon this Earth.

Forest Therapy is a complex idea in part because of the many ways it has been conceptualized. To varying degrees, different schools of thought may see its promise as more or less related to one of these problems over the others. In many parts of the world, the dominant schools of thought are hyper focused on the ways in which Forest Therapy might work to ameliorate the degradation of human health. In some respects, this is where the story of Forest Therapy began in Japan with the practice of Shinrin Yoku and Shinrin Ryoho. It was, after all, the efforts of the scientific community in Japan that first yielded the idea of ‘Forest Bathing’ as a complimentary health care practice. Today, we see many schools of thought evolving in East Asia and in Europe that are primarily asking the question of how do we engineer forest environments and forest therapy practices to be conducive to benefitting human health? Many of these practices follow a medical pattern of diagnosis and prescription in order to treat patients suffering from any number of physical or mental health issues.

The Japanese tradition of Shinrin Ryoho also incorporates some measure of ecological restoration, as some of the activities one might do during these sessions are designed to benefit the health of the forest. These activities might include planting trees, clearing weeds, and trimming plants in such a way as to promote healthy growth. In this way, some practitioners of Forest Therapy (particularly Dr. Iwao

Uehara) see the efforts of Forest Therapy as being simultaneously about promoting human health as well as the health of the forest.

The Association of Nature and Forest Therapy has designed a theoretical framework and a practice that seeks to address all three problems, but has a particular emphasis on the question of cultural values. In our view, the health benefits for both humans and the forest are collateral, or secondary, impacts of the restoration of healthy relationship between humans and the world. We aim to transform the ways in which people relate to forests and other natural spaces so that they feel deeply connected to those places. Beyond this, we also aim to transform the ways in which people relate to themselves, to others, and to the present moment in such a way that they feel deeply connected. Once such connections are generated, we believe that they act as gateways to pro-social and pro-environmental behavioral changes at a societal level. In this way, we understand the main purpose of Forest Therapy as being a vehicle for accelerating cultural change in the interest of community, reciprocity, and love.

If our health is the gift we may receive from Nature, and ecological renewal is our reciprocation, then we might consider our relationship as an act of devotion that ensures we may never forget our interconnectedness again. The highest promise of our work is not an outcome, it is a feeling of our being-ness and an appreciation for all things in this world. This feeling is in danger of being lost and forgotten, but it can be remembered and preserved. It is my hope that we will honor and cherish it, so that our work is in service to the generations of all beings yet to come in this world.

The methodology of Forest Therapy, as it is taught by ANFT, is oriented toward these goals: how Forest Therapy can help us to feel alive, fall in love, and take good care of the world in such a way that it benefits all beings.



Chapter 2:

The Core Premise

M. Amos Clifford

Note: This chapter is adapted from the now out-of-print Little Handbook of Shinrin-Yoku, which I wrote in 2012 when launching the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs.

My work is based upon this core premise:

All of our efforts to become an environmentally sustainable species must be rooted in deep relationship with nature; without this relationship, all our efforts toward sustainability will be subtly flawed in ways that will eventually be our undoing.

That's the Core Premise. It's what gives me a sense of the urgency and importance of my work. I don't think we're going to solve global warming, population pressure, deforestation, desertification, depletion of fish and animal populations, accelerating extinction rates, or any of the rest of it unless we first get our relationships with the more-than-human world in order.

Shinrin-Yoku: Accessible Nature Connection

Many times in my work I've observed that it can be very difficult to get people to participate in workshops or excursions that involve a significant amount of time in natural and wild places. A 12-day desert outing that incorporates a vision fast is a powerful experience that will definitely open anybody to a new depth in their relationship with the more-than-human world of nature. But perhaps .0001% of people will even consider it (that's one in ten thousand). A full-day "medicine walk"—a very abbreviated but still powerful version of a vision quest—is possible for many more people. But it still has difficulty competing with the myriad distractions and demands of the tamed world to which we have become accustomed.

The ANFT Way of forest therapy—in particular, the standard sequence—has been described as “four-day vision fast condensed into a three hour walk.” I think there is some truth to this. The model we have developed is based on a Jungian depth psychology and ecopsychology perspective that helps us understand the potential of each walk to be an experience of liminality—a time outside of normal time, in which the possibility of healing and growth is enhanced.

We hold the story that the world is sentient, and that it wants to be in right relationship with humans. The poet Mary Oliver speaks of this in her deeply inspiring poem “Wild Geese”:

*“the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the Wild Geese,
harsh and exciting,
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.”*¹

If these words ring true to you, if they open a door of inquiry or spark a sense of intuitive recognition, the ANFT way of Forest Therapy may be a good fit for you.

Our strategy as guides is based on the idea that our species evolved along with the plants and animals that cohabit our planet. Our bodies are adapted to breathing the air emitted by healthy forests. There is medicine in that air; by now most of us are familiar with the beneficial effects of that class of chemicals called phytoncides, the essential oils found in many types of woody plants, particularly conifers. One element of the healing power of forested areas is the natural aromatherapy from which we benefit by simply breathing the air beneath the canopy of trees.

In addition to the mechanism of aromatherapy, exposure to the forest environment bathes us in many other healing influences. The sounds of the wind moving through the trees; the background chatter of birds which may bring to us new and surprising ways of listening to the voice of the whole landscape; the changing weather and how it affects our sensing; the many textures of touch and of sight... all of these together provide a medicine that complements

and amplifies the effects of aromatic extracts. Forest and nature medicine researchers are linking health to wide variety of elements of nature. For example, exposure to the many shades of color that comprise the “green” we see in plants is itself calming and healing.

It makes sense that it should be so, for although we have recently in our history as a species learned to live more and more in cities and human-built environments, our DNA still recognizes the forest and wild areas as home. And as a home, the forest is a place of healing.

Our ancestors knew this well. They not only benefitted from the medicine freely offered by the wild, but also offered their own medicine back. Indigenous peoples maintained the vitality of their food larders, medicinal plant supplies, and sources of tools and fibers by “wild tending”—a type of constant gardening undertaken while walking along the trail. Pinch the top of the medicinal sage plant just so, and it branches out, providing more leaves while also increasing its capacity to gather sunlight and feed its roots.

The point here is that the land has grown up with us; it has evolved in way that benefits from our mutual relationship with it. The land wants to be in right relationship with us. And herein lies the very roots of our viability as a species: we must know what it means to be in right relationship. We humans have excelled at taming nature; but we must let this be a reciprocal process. We must let nature teach and tame us; thus, creating a viable human culture should be a joint project that includes the voices of the land and waters and sky and all who live there.

The land offers itself to us as a rich source of abundance of many kinds. But it is a mistake to think of nature solely in terms of “natural resources.” How well would any friendship with a person work out if we treated each other solely as resources? Relationship involves mutuality, an understanding that we are there for each other, instead of an attitude of “what have you done for me lately?”

The land needs us to listen to it, to sit with it in silence, to tend to it when it is ill, to cultivate its health and to act considerably toward it. The land needs us to love it.

What is Forest Therapy?

As far as I can tell, there is no single practice that is officially “Forest Therapy,” although there is at least one company that is insisting that their way is the right way. When claims like this are made I don’t agree with either the claim or the dogmatic spirit in which it is made. Forest therapy is a dynamically developing practice based on the general principle that it is beneficial to spend time bathing in the atmosphere of the forest. There is a long tradition of this in cultures throughout the world. Currently there are multiple groups creating iterations of this ancient tradition. And, at least from my perspective, it’s not just about healing people; it includes healing for the forest (or river, or desert, or whatever environment you are in).

There are some general guidelines:

1. There is a specific intention to connect with nature in a healing way. This requires mindfully moving through the landscape in ways that cultivate presence, opening all the senses, and actively communicating with the land.
2. It is not something to rush through. Shinrin Yoku walks are not undertaken with the primary goal of physical exercise. I prefer to avoid the term “hiking” because of its implications of physical exertion. It’s more about being here, than it is about getting there.
3. Healing interactions require giving generously of our attention. When I guide these walks I encourage the spontaneous emergence of a natural state mindfulness through an ever-changing and evolving series of invitations. These invitations are all crafted to slow us down and open our senses. We begin to perceive more deeply the nuances of the constant stream of communications rampant in any natural setting. We learn to let the land and its messages penetrate into our minds more deeply.
4. It’s not a one-time event. Developing a meaningful relationship with nature occurs over time, and is deepened by returning again and again throughout the natural cycles of the seasons.

Forest therapy is best thought of as a practice, similar to yoga or exercise or daily walking.

5. It's not just about taking walks in the forest. The walks are important, but there are other core routines that we can do that will help in our deepening relationship with nature, and in the exchange of health benefits between humans and the more than human-world. Among these practices are sit spot, place tending, acquiring nature knowledge, and engaging the active imagination through play, creative expression, and imaginal dialogues with other-than-human beings such as animals, trees, stones, and rivers.

I think these five elements together provide a framework for Forest Therapy practice, one that probably every organization and school interested in forest therapy can agree upon. From this common foundation, we each develop our own way. The remainder of this booklet is about the particular approach to forest therapy pioneered by ANFT.



Chapter 3:

Understanding the ANFT Approach to Forest Therapy

M. Amos Clifford

The ANFT approach to forest therapy weaves together three major strands. One is Japanese Shinrin-Yoku, the practice of Forest Bathing developed in Japan in the 1980s that has since become an important element of Japanese approaches to wellness. A second strand is the emerging field of ecotherapy, specifically vision fasts. In this strand we see Carl Jung's depth psychology as a major source of the theory that is the basis for ANFT's Standard Sequence.

The third strand is the core premise at the beginning of this book. ANFT was founded as a response to global warming and environmental catastrophe. The aim was, from the beginning, to ignite and re-ignite love for the more-than-human world. Embedded in this approach to forest therapy is the hope that *people will experience nature as alive, sentient, and sacred*. This is an approach that releases grief, kindles hope, and makes possible bright moments of joy. It may provide our species with its last, best hope.

I think that this intention is probably also part of what motivated the Japanese innovators who gave us the gift of this practice, as well as many of those who are now, like we have done at ANFT, forming variations and training programs of their own. We can see the intention of healing environmental harms among the Japanese leadership in sources such as Michiko Imai's essay in Forest Medicine (ed. Qing Li). Ms. Imai writes:

*"The future of forests remains uncertain. The advancement of urbanization...has often cast forest environments as an obstacle in the path of development...More recently there have been periodic calls for the expansion of forests in order to prevent global warming...the power of forests to maintain and preserve our world's environments is not limited to carbon absorption and fixation..."*²

I am in full agreement with these statements. I also agree with Qing Li explanation of the goals for forest therapy:

1. Forests for medical care and welfare. For general care and nursing to help fight disease or lessen the effects of aging.
2. Forests for treatment and recuperation. For necessary treatment and assisting persons patient recuperation during convalescence;
3. Forests for lifestyle-related disease prevention. For promoting good health by preventing lifestyle-related illnesses.³

These are beautiful goals, and are quite inspiring. When they are fully achieved, they will likely also serve the purpose that is the driving force for ANFT: people who experience the healing power of forests will be more likely to *fall in love with* the more-than-human world. And, having fallen in love, they will be more curious about how to let that love shape their lives in a way that embodies the love, as well as the grief and joy that comes with it.

Love, grief, hope, joy... these are experiences of the heart. They are embodied energies. The work of love requires us to cultivate our awareness of the intelligence and wisdom of the heart and the body. We developed the ANFT approach to forest therapy with similar goals to those listed above, *and* we are also explicit about capacity of forest therapy to help others become aware of the intelligence of our hearts, and how this intelligence links us to a greater sentience. That greater sentience is in each tree, each forest, each mountain and river, and in our beautiful planet as a whole.

Humans have always known about the intelligence of the heart and its essential connectedness to the sentience of the world. But in modern times we have not found support for cultivating our awareness of these “knowings” to a level where they actively shape our lives. Disconnected from our hearts, we fall prey to the cleverness of our brains and the whole world suffers. Healthy forests are places of dynamic, creative, and regenerative balance; inside them, as we come into relationship with forests and other natural environments, those relationships act as field in which we remember how to rebalance the cleverness of our minds with the wisdom of our hearts. *The ANFT hypothesis is that this remembering and rebalancing*

is absolutely essential to the survival of humanity. And we cannot speak of humanity apart from any of the other species to whom we are bound in sharing our planet. It can be a foundation for recalibrating how we live in the world. Because of how we inhabit our place in the global ecosystem, our success in this recalibrating is essential for the survival of millions of other species. This is not just a lofty goal; it is a fundamental responsibility that comes with being human. And forest therapy has a powerful and perhaps essential place in this.

Thus, at ANFT we see forest therapy as healing for people, yes; but also as healing for many other species, for landscapes, for rivers and oceans; for the entire planet.

How beautiful is that? Thinking on this is where I pause and make nine deep bows to the Japanese creators of this practice.

If in the forests of the world, guided by competent forest therapy specialists, enough of us become skillful at listening to our hearts' intelligence, a global cultural transformation might follow. Perhaps we would have a great awakening; we would stop our incessant wounding of the systems of relationships that our sentient planet has evolved over the long and patient course of uncountable millennia.

Again; the ANFT perspective: This awakening requires as a its foundation bringing people into contact with their heart intelligence. The path to doing so is rooted in somatic awareness. I think of a college professor who came on a forest therapy walk I guided. At the end of the walk, as we were sipping tea brewed from some herbs gathered along the trail, she burst into tears. She took a breath and shared, that as a consequence of her long career living her in head as an academic, she had all but forgotten that she had a body. The forest therapy walk was a powerful reminder; she remembered. This is a beautiful and essential first step for her own life, but also for how the life she lives ripples among the rests of us and through the more-than-human world.

The road to embodiment begins with the senses. Qing Li describes how to enjoy forest bathing:

*“People can enjoy the forest through all five senses: the fragrance of the forest, green colors of the plants, the murmuring of streams and singing of birds, the eating of forest foods and the touching of trees.”*⁴

Beginning with the senses is an essential principle of the practice that my colleagues and I have been developing over the past seven years. We work with an expanded palette of senses, adding at least four to the “all five” list. And, because doing so supports moving from experience to relationship, we pay particular attention to the ways in which sensory experience can become sensual experience: the emotional content within sensing. We’ve discovered that it a good place to begin is by calling attention to the infinite ways in which forest offer us experiences of pleasure: the sounds, touches of breeze, sights, scents, and aesthetic experiences that simply feel good in our bodies and in our hearts.

Opportunity to Expand Focus of Research

The research related to forest therapy is almost exclusively oriented to public health questions: what happens with cardiac health, with indicators of stress, with morbidity and mortality at different scales, and so on. The findings are very encouraging and unsurprising. They may be summarized thus: spending relaxed time in forests is generally good for people, provided risks (such as exposure to tick-borne disease) are mitigated through education and proper preventive measures, which are part of the job of the forest therapy guide.

The public health studies are important. But they do not investigate what ANFT predicts will be the emergent qualities that result from a regular practice of forest therapy. I would very much like to see research that investigates some of the additional dimensions of benefit. Our prediction—borne out anecdotally by the self-reported experiences of guide trainees and even of participants in single walks—is that as a result of forest therapy our sense of wholeness and authenticity will be enhanced as a direct correlate of elevating

our awareness of, and confidence in, the wisdom embodied in our hearts. We will become more truly ourselves. And when we do, our capacity to love ourselves, other humans, other-than-human beings, and the landscapes in which we live, will grow. Behaviorally, this will manifest as positive changes in how we spend our time, and who we spend our time with. We predict that forest therapy will energize us to find networks of relationships with others who share a commitment to the future not just of humanity, but of all species. Of people who are deeply in love with the world.

These are all hypotheses that can be measured by properly designed research. Another dimension of research would investigate what happens in the more-than-human world in areas where there is broad adoption of forest therapy, with a critical mass of regular practitioners and professional guides. Biologists, ecologists, and public health specialists could work together to see if there are measurable impacts on the health of the forest, such as increases in biodiversity and the return of native animal, insect, fish, and bird species that had disappeared from the forest. A good case study in Japan is AFAN Forest Trust, where C. W. “Nic” Nichols and his team have been working for over 30 years to restore a forest in Nagano province that had been reduced to a monoculture as a result of crop-oriented logging practices. Forest therapy, including equine-assisted forest therapy, has recently been integrated into AFAN’s works. This is reciprocity in action.

There are of course a great many more opportunities to expand our understanding of why forest therapy has the powerful impacts that we observe in those who we guide. I would like to challenge researchers to consider some of the outcomes described above, those related to authenticity and a sense of wholeness and purpose. I have met a few who are already doing so, and I’m sure that there are many more who are developing beautiful ways to expand our understanding. Meanwhile, practitioners in the field, myself included, continue to guide, observe, learn, and feel for ourselves the ways that our forest practices impact our lives on many levels.



Chapter 4:

Understanding the ANFT Way Through our Training Slogans

M. Amos Clifford

At ANFT, we've now (as of May 2019, when I am writing this) trained over 600 guides in 44 countries, and have accumulated a great deal of experience about how to train guides. One of the most useful tools in our training is a set of about a dozen slogans we use, brief phrases (mostly coined by me) to carry specific concepts that are important to our Way. Here are few of them.

SLOGAN 1: The forest is the therapist; the guide opens the doors.

This work is healing, but as a forest therapy guides, we don't see ourselves as therapists. We are guides. ANFT trains people in the skills and perspectives that comprise what we call "The Way of the Guide." People who are also trained therapists or physicians can readily integrate the Way of the Guide with their work, creatively combining the archetypal work of healer and guide. Many therapists and physicians are a part of the global community of ANFT-trained guides; each is finding creative ways to incorporate guiding. But they received their training as therapists elsewhere.

We think of the work of the guide as an archetypal process, not widely understood, best approached through a neo-Jungian perspective.

The principle difference between a guide and a therapist or healer is that a guide does not diagnose, assess, prescribe, or monitor progress. Instead, a guide slows people down and calls attention to their experience of their body, of their senses, and of the place they are in. When this happens, without further effort a web of relationships grows. The healing happens in the relationships, not because of clever interventions by guides.

By noting our inner experience, we come into relationship with parts of ourselves that may have been long neglected.

The senses are our interface between inner and outer experience; when we sharpen our awareness of our senses we begin to notice sensuous experience also: how we enjoy the touches and sights and sounds and other gifts of the forest. The sensuous experience is the gateway to relationship, and it is in the relationship of the person and the forest that the healing occurs.

As guides, we avoid forming any ideas about what the person we are guiding should receive. We say that determining (or discovering) the desired outcome is between them and the forest. It is unique to each person, and for each person the outcome is unique to each forest therapy experience.

To avoid a misunderstanding that sometimes arises, please note that we are not advocating that people embody the way of the guide routinely in all areas of life. But it is important to do so *while guiding*.

SLOGAN 2: All medicine is relational.

What do we mean when we say that the therapy takes place in the relationship between the person and the forest? It is simply this: that all life is relational, that all things and beings exist within networks of relationships. It is in deepest architecture of who we are to be always and ever in relationship to other people, other beings, the land and the waters, this planet, and the entire cosmos.

If our relationships are healthy, we are more likely to be. I am not referring only to our relationships with other humans, although those are of great importance. I am referring to all relationships. Our cultures shape the way we view and inhabit our relationships, often to our detriment. In the forest we are embedded in exactly the kinds of relationships to which our bodies and minds are exquisitely tuned.

We teach that all people are carriers of seeds of medicine; that we are born out of the earth carrying these seeds. They represent our potential to become medicine ourselves. By this, we mean that in

the way we learn to live our lives we become sources of healing to others, to our cultures, to the landscapes that hold us.

In the ANFT way, “coming to our senses” and “slowing down” is the equivalent of the seed of medicine that we carry falling to the ground in a favorable place for growing. The invitations that guides give are the water the seed needs. The relationships that develop are like the sunlight. Finally, the flowing of energy, attention, and love within those relationships opens the new field of possibility. Our seeds take root and we begin to grow and blossom into the fullness of our authentic selves.

Carl Jung pointed out that those who fail to become their authentic selves are more likely to be plagued by neuroses and dis-ease. At ANFT we conceive of forest therapy as being exposure to all the health benefits that are demonstrated by many studies; *and* as a journey toward individuation and authenticity.

The powerful combination of the Standard Sequence and the Language of Invitation, both core features of the practice we have developed at ANFT, frequently support people in having experiences they characterize as “transformational.” Something sprouts. ANFT guides are trained to avoid trying to manipulate the experience, instead leaving it wide open so the unique seed carried by the person meets the unique moment of encounter in the forest, and the sprout that emerges is what is needed in the moment by that person and possibly by that forest. This powerful healing is an emergent property of relationship. All medicine flows from relationship.

SLOGAN 3: Nature connection and culture repair arise together.

I think this slogan comes from Jon Young, founder of the 8 Shields institute and an important teacher in the lineages of several ANFT trainers.

It has several layers of meaning. One meaning is that the health of the more-than-human world mirrors the health of human culture. When we see ecosystem disruption, it is a mirror of dysfunctional societies. A key criterion for measuring the wellness of cultures is

the wellness of the lands and waters, other-than-human-species, forests and atmospheres. When we see wounds in nature, they are images and symptoms of the wounds of humanity.

In order to succeed with healing nature, we must be willing to discover and embrace the medicine needed to heal our cultures. The two arise together. Start not with one or the other, but with both.

In the ANFT way of guiding we create moments of intact culture within the group being guided. The way we know the culture is intact is that participants share their experience without being judged, diagnosed, corrected, comforted, mocked, praised, or any of the myriad other ways in which we tell each other, “your experience is not valid, except as validated by me, the expert.” How to be supportive in this way is a central part of the ANFT guide training. We know when we are succeeding at creating moments of intact culture because we observe those who we are guiding having deep experiences of connection with the more-than-human world.

SLOGAN 4: It’s Zen until you say so.

This is one that first appeared in a conversation I had with Ben Page. We have argued over who invented it. Our current compromise is that we both did. Although secretly I’m certain it was me, and he’s certain it was him.

In our approach, we refrain from suggesting to participants that forest therapy is a mindfulness or a meditation activity, even though of course it often turns out to be exactly that. The reason we don’t name it as such is that as soon as we do, we’ve introduced a concept that can get lodged in the mind in a way that gets between the person and their experience.

It’s easy to get caught up in trying to be mindful, or trying to create a meditation experience. If we don’t mention the concepts, people just naturally experience mindfulness and meditation. But as soon as we name it, they pop back out of it and return to trying to create something that was present all along. Of course it’s Zen, but as soon as you call it Zen it ceases to be so.

My suggestion to guide trainees is to leave concepts like mindfulness or meditation out of the practice unless you are a trained mindfulness or meditation instructor.

I think “It’s Zen until you say so” would make a lovely T-shirt or bumper sticker slogan.

SLOGAN 5: You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

This is a line from Mary Oliver’s poem “Wild Geese.”¹ We often refer to it as “the core invitation.”

When we develop the capacity to notice what our body is asking of us, and to be guided by it, we begin to inhabit our lives in a new way. This way of living is powerfully healing. We suggest to guide trainees that they return to this line repeatedly, and let it be an invitation. What does it mean, right here and right now, to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves?

SLOGAN 6: We don’t train you guide the way we do; we train you to guide the way you do.

This is an essential ethic in the entire Standard Sequence and the theoretical roots of the Way of the Guide. Each of us is born with our unique personhood, and our own ways of carrying the medicine of who we are into the world. The ANFT way provides a framework (the standard sequence), a theory (the Way of the Guide), and a set of skills such as the language of invitation. To these each guide adds their own personality, gifts, and internal sense of guidance.

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