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Resurgence & ECOLOGIST

July/August 2019 No. 315

£4.95 | US\$8.00



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In the company of cows

Sharing quietness can provide great healing, writes **Dave Mountjoy**



Grass Down Under the Stars by Jamie Heiden www.jheidenphoto.net

It was a sunny autumnal afternoon when I got the news: my beloved younger brother had committed suicide. He was supposed to be visiting us three days later, yet it just wasn't meant to be.

Five weeks later, after returning to our home in south-west France, I went straight to the wooded hillside where our cows had been in our absence. As I called out to them, heard them respond and eventually saw their heads coming out of the woodland edge, tears came to my eyes and for a moment all the grief just melted away.

Over the coming weeks, as the twice-daily round of feeding the cows began, I found myself becoming ever more grateful just to be in their presence. I witnessed, too, less identification with the pain surrounding my brother's death.

In the company of the cows, without any apparent effort or setting of intention, I began to slip gently into a deep sense of meditation. By meditation I mean quietness, a ceasing of all thought or sense of a separate self – what it is to simply be. It became clear during these moments with the cows that they already existed in this deep quietness – that for them the meditative state is the normal way of things.

Their presence and stillness enabled me to come to a finer appreciation of what meditation might actually be, for they showed me that it isn't something one can attain, but is in fact the very fabric of life itself. They helped me see that meditation is the one sole constant in what we think of as our lives. It simply is, free of all attempts at explanation or identification.

Whenever one of the cows shook her head somewhat threateningly, or refused to let me approach, I began to see that through her incredible sensitivity she was simply telling me that I was identifying with an anger or a fear that served to pull me out of the quietness of meditation.

The cows' constant encouragement to simply be quiet has led to an incredible sense of trust developing between us. This became increasingly evident with the small herd of Galloways we keep at our home. All of them now stand close so that they can be stroked and rubbed and scratched quite freely. The feeling of union with them and ultimately with the entirety of life, of a natural completeness free of fear and all thought, is, it seems to me, what meditation is really all about.

Supporting me in this way, then, the cows have helped me to acknowledge what it might mean to be quiet. We wanted to share this experience with other people, and we now offer retreats.

We may keep cows, but we feel we are serving them, not the other way around. We do not use them for milk or meat. We just like being with them.

www.beingwithcows.com