



“Kids, Rewilding and the New Mythology” - A conversation with Dan De Lion, ReturntoNature.us and Willi Paul, Planetshifter.com Media (+PDF)

Rewilding means to return to a more wild or natural state; it is the process of un-doing domestication. The term emerged from the green anarchism and anarcho-primitivism political theories, in which humans are believed to be "civilized" or "domesticated" by industrial and agricultural progress. Supporters of rewilding argue that through the process of domestication, human wildness has been altered by force.

Rewilding is considered a holistic approach to living, as opposed to skills, practices or a specific set of knowledge.

Prelude

“The function of the dream is as the Gaian teaching voice. The Logos is returning.” – Dan

Willi - Please elaborate on this passage for me...

Dan - It feels that at this time, the actual “felt state” of the earth itself is coming to conscious awareness of the human endeavor. That nature is actually expressing itself to those who are becoming more receptive, and the ideas are always similar. That through tools such as the internet, psychedelic medicines, and collective education, our dreaming and imaginal internal state is coming to the physical world. It’s that the Gaian consciousness is demanding that dreaming will no longer be suppressed by rational control.

And in this way, the western model of mind is being squashed by a force beyond its limited conceptions. Is there more to reality than mind? Yep, but now the question is how do we work with the unseen. The collective dreaming space is a way in.

In this time of great work of awakening coupled by planetary devastation, perhaps human mass extinction, it is very likely that the voice of Gaia itself will rip through our minds and lead us toward solutions. That in the back corner of consciousness, there is a voice... this voice is the logos. It is a practice to access the power to dream-The inner realm, the imaginal space, which is where all solutions and inventions have truly come from, and will continue to come from. This inner guiding voice, seen as the logos by the Greek mystics, has been discussed openly many greats from Einstein, to Newton, to George Washington carver, to Masonoba Fukuoka, tell of altered states in which visions came to them.

The odd blessing is that no matter what our culture has done synthetically and culturally, we still dream, we still see visions full of archetypes with deep meaning. Some of them speaking messages of apocalypse, the need for change, the floodwaters rising, and peoples place in the need for an awakening.

We must all do our best to keep dreaming and paying attention to the symbols and significance of repeated patterns within our dreams, for it is there that the wisdom of nature comes to access us. If we, in community, practice conscious dreaming, it will begin to develop and unfold more of this vision. That we can see an inner landscape of “the way out” through this cultural “stuck point” we find ourselves in. The more we all pay attention and share our dreams with others, and discuss the symbols and try to find the meaning in them, the more we will see a map arise emanating from a source that is actually speaking a message to the collectivity of humans.

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Willi - Are you saying that we live in an altered state?

Dan - I would not suggest that the state is altered, but perhaps that the state of mind we are in is like an altar in which to view the world. A perceptual lens that is always evolving and changing. And within that, a largely ignored aspect of perception is that the lens by which we view through our belief systems do determine the possibility of what we see and experience. Under this awareness, then we must philosophically and culturally resolve the fact that, as Salvador Dali exclaimed “I am drugs” – meaning, that if truly consciousness is “biological” as science says, than everything we do, say, think, and eat or consume is indeed consciousness altering. That there is no stable state in essence.

And from this perspective, then, what we perceive of the “modern world” is actually a result of a drug stupor of tobacco, coffee, alcohol, and synthetic pharmaceuticals. And yet, you can see what’s going on in a place like Peru, where Ayahuasca is making itself known. Slowly the realization between plants and drugs is being more self-evident.

Willi - Can we be the voice of Gaia?

Dan - The earth, the Gaian system, is definitely seeking conscious conduits. The Dr. Seuss story of the Lorax expresses this sentiment perfectly. Through attuning with the Gaian system, our intent, will, message, and perception aligns with the intent of the Gaian system. Which, when we look beyond the childish misinterpretation of “survival of the fittest” and see the actual message being broadcast; symbiosis, then we can resolve the apparent disconnection between the voices within us, the head, heart, gut, and genital region. This takes a tremendous amount of self-work, self-reflection, and softening our awareness to see, and not defend our minds.

Darwin apparently had a sign over his office door that said “there is no higher or lower”, and within that wrote extensively on other “less popular” ideals of capitalism, such as symbiosis, and also wrote extensively on the plant brain and the intelligence of nature. Within the path of biology there are 2 paths, simplified as “telling the plants what they are good for based on prior research vs. asking the plant what it wants to teach us, based on its signature, habitat, taste (carefully done) and other characteristics of its “voice”. Within that practice is attuning to a waking dream state.

Willi - Can you give us an example of how you activate conscious dreaming?

Dan - A few ways of activating this conscious dreaming state and learning directly from the ecosystem are forest wandering, meditation, dreaming, consumption of plants, and trance work; as well as combining these practices in very careful and self-reflective ways. One of my most practiced ways to sync the dream and physical world is by taking time to meditate in the forest, to set an intention of opening and wandering to the mysteries of nature within that meditation and open up a mindful state of active dream bridging.

Within this practice, I invoke that all of the messages of nature will also be a metaphor for self, circumstance, prophecy of what is to come, similar to a dream. That by interpreting animals, plants, insects, etc., as a totem to the story of my life, I can extract relevant messages from the ecosystem. The totem messages that are given take time and contemplation to decipher, just like the messages and story of dream.

Willi - What are the values of Rewilding? Are they different for children vs. adults?

Dan - I find that the most valuable aspect of rewilding, for both children and adults, is an innate sense of curiosity that continues to push the boundaries of our own personal awareness and attention. The open way of wandering, when applied to practice, enables the universe to lead us through means that are not rational and go beyond every day rational comprehension. This is something that children innately have, when they declare that a specific tree or rock has a name, or they become friends with energies of the earth, which requires preserving the capacity as they grow, not telling them it's all unreal as we do in our rationalist culture. As if our modern culture really has a stronghold on reality =) For adults, the access of this waking dream, imaginative and agenda-less state is more of a challenge, where they need to practice returning to that, and getting their control issues out of the way. Then mysteries unfold daily.

Willi - What are some key symbols of Rewilding?

Dan - Key symbols of rewilding, shelters, Neanderthal, [Otzi](#), a Paleolithic diet.

Willi - How do we evolve past the agenda-less state? What does this feel like?

Dan - We want to set time to explore agenda-less wandering, to open up to coincidence, magic, and non-rational perception. Wandering in the forest leads us to many animal sightings, plants, mushrooms. In the practice of hunting/gathering, it's not a rational only experience that leads us to food and medicine. This is why indigenous people did so much ceremony around the hunt. As most of us have heard, the tribe would pray for the right deer to reveal itself in sweat lodge, asking the "deva" or spirit of that animal to bring the right one, that will do least harm, the injured or weekend deer. Very different than sitting in a tree stand.

When we enter the wandering state, we are led by our intuition, vs our intellect which analyzes the situation constantly.

Perception is a more holistic potential incorporating rational thinking, but not allowing that to be the dominating factor. With intuition, instinct, openness, observation, meditation, and rational thinking combined, we can truly perceive with all that we are equipped with.

Willi - What are common rituals of Rewilding?

Dan - Within the rituals of rewilding encompass everything from learning where our food comes from, to thanksgiving rituals, to celebrating the solstice and equinox, to sweat lodges, and magic, alchemy, medicine making, and even the ritual of reclaiming our money out of large scale capitalist models into local community, trade, and barter – redirecting energy in its many forms toward a less captive mentality.

Willi - Is Rewilding about survivalism?

Dan - I find that it may be today, because we are very disconnected from traditional living skills. So, as all of the popular TV shows show that you can "survive" for a weekend, and get back to a modern living civilization to get the calories needed to restore yourself from the ordeal which you would have died from. But this is only due to a lack of traditional skillset that would have been second nature by the age of 3 in traditional and indigenous culture.

In my practice and life path to thrive is the goal, and perhaps this is what indigenous people were naturally born into. A child was born into a surplus of food that their ancestors worked for to provide them the caloric necessity needed to grow their bodies and train to provide for their own, and for others.

Now a days we are often taught that “survival skills” are to get us back to civilization. Yet, as we in the rewilding community birth out of the “solo survival in the forest” mentality in to “tribe” mentality we will naturally develop a deeper sense of community. Within my practice, the goal in nature is to thrive, not to run back to the city. To find that we are home in the forest, not that we are in a temporary battle with nature to return back to some other place.

Willi - Tell us more about your Nature-based magic? Is this timeless?

Dan - Often we hear of the “pagans” or “Hindus” or “pre-Christian” traditions; most of which have been suppressed out of our culture. Yet, I find that the plants teach us these traditions directly. That the alchemy of mysticism and magic is broadcast directly from plants, minerals, animals, etc.

A great example of this: In rationalist thinking there is often a great confusing realization of how did indigenous/pre-modern people all discover the same technology at the same time all across the globe without being in “communication” (which is an assumptive idea). We see signs of this interconnection in the practices from flint knapping, to alchemy, to medicine and building methodologies. Within this complete void of realization, it shows, at least to me, that the Gaian system, the plants, the animals, are all broadcasting a certain set of timeless teaching skills that can always be reclaimed because indeed, they are the way.

That things are progressively unfolded through the alchemy of asking the right questions and taking introspective time to contemplate the answers given. This gives a great hope in realizing that, for example, the plant traditions will return because indeed the plants broadcast their knowing into the biological organism which is our bodies. And deciphering those messages is a great alchemy.

It seems quite clear to me that this is how all people discovered their medicinal and edible aspects in the first place, instead of the hubris of projecting a “trial and error” rationalist mentality upon them, which has so many obvious flaws to it. A great example of these flaws is to just watch a monkey around poison ivy, do they smell and sense it first? Or just eat it and die, and then all the monkeys avoid it? Apparently our ancestors didn’t know how to smell, touch, and nibble test a plant before sitting down to a meal of it?

A really great example of the collective receiving of Gaian wisdom is to observe the ingenuity of flint knapping techniques all over the world. It is a delicate art of prediction which as anthropologists and paleontologists discovered, each quantum leap in technique is suddenly found all over the world. It’s just one of many threads of the mysticism of the collective conscious that many mystics have expounded upon. The same can be found with fire making techniques. Primitive people were far more advanced, and in a very real way made much larger leap in technological revolutions than our own culture.

Willi - The Boy Scouts have been working in and valuing Nature since they began. Your thoughts?

Dan - In a way, the boy scouts organizations were an attempt to preserve Native American practices, perhaps even unconsciously. And yet, the problem with these and other organizations seems to have arisen after the “leave no trace” philosophy was adopted in the 70s. In the attempt at “conservation” we adapted a very “hands-off” approach to nature where the only way to interact with it was to “save it” and that touching it automatically means damaging something; and with it the concept of caretaker was lost. Of course, we don’t need to save the earth, we need to save ourselves to be able to reside on the earth, which is allowing us to stay, for the time being.

Through these leave no trace teachings, suddenly it became about staying on a trail, and not touching any plants which automatically concludes harming; and the parks systems reinforce this with stringent rules about removing vegetation. As a result of this mentality, great dualities have arisen and become strengthened; people go in nature to go somewhere or to get a certain amount of mileage/exercise, and then go to the grocery store, instead of hunt/gather and understand the balance needed within an ecosystem to thrive and survive.

The concept of wasting would never exist under such real life experience. This disconnect has led to a wall up when most people never go to the wild places; there becomes no translating medium. The interaction is like a mime with a glass wall up. This is why I teach through Return to Nature, for me it is a missing piece of "nature translation" in a way, seeing the patterns and helping others unfold them.

That said, it is very important that these organizations keep engaging children in the options to play in the mud, drink wild water, eat plants, and understand deeply that "packaged meats" come from actual animals.

Willi - Tell me about your experience with Joseph Campbell's initiation, journey and hero process?

Dan - Throughout my own awakening, while seeking to understand the subtleties of yoga, alchemy, and western mystical, as well as shamanic traditions, I discovered Joseph Campbell's work initially on yoga and the chakras and found audio lectures of the "perennial philosophy teachings" online, which opened up many doors of perception.

As I dove deeper into his work I found that there was indeed a huge continuation of Carl Jung's archetype work into a deeper level of mythos and mysticism, which indeed related and correlated that to the shamanic understanding that "spirits" or "energies" also have an archetypal representation. Of course, this was something that Jung wrote extensively on, but had not become popular due to the obvious boundary pushing that it would entail for his time.

As I searched and worked through his wisdom teachings, audio lectures, online materials, I eventually found a circular diagram of the hero's journey around the same time I was working with a shaman of the Peruvian Quechua tradition. I found the deep significance that the medicine wheel of the Quechua, north American shamanic, and Joseph Campbell's conception all showing the growth of life through the 4 directions of the circle, and that indeed we never return. And, because it is a spiral, not a circle, we keep moving forward never to "return" to the same exact place of the past, but indeed there are similar themes of season, time, age, and location.

Willi - Can the community be the Hero? If so, how?

Dan - The community is DEFINITELY the hero. One of the things I consider is that the age of the "enlightened ego" was very much defined by the astrological sign Pisces. This symbology is embodied in the Jesus archetype: Sacrifice, be the hero, and die for the sins of the world. This is the old hero, and perhaps also Martin Luther King, Ghandi, John Lennon, and many others were sacrificed in this way. What may be needed is the true Aquarian rebirth, which is that the community is the hero. And the Aquarian age being not necessarily something that will "happen to us" but something that we make manifest through our practice; something that the global culture is birthing. The Aquarian symbology is about saying there is no individual to "take down" that the cup is overflowing, that everyone knows, that all are becoming wise, enlightened, aware. That the issues and solutions we face are becoming global, blatant, and cannot be suppressed.

Willi - Why is Nature supposed to help humans survive? Isn't this the other way around?

Dan - The Nature and human dichotomy is an interesting one. Are we, as humans, nature? Or are we separate. Fundamentally, I feel that indeed humans are nature, and our intentionality is made to mimic the care of the ecosystem. Yet, we, through cultural and mythological ideologies have skewed that original intent. Simply stated,

the belief that we are not nature stops us from intuiting the “human purpose” within nature. That said, we of course know that humans are meant to be caretakers of the ecosystem.

If we look at much of the plants in biology they have enlisted Homo sapiens help to diversify and spread their seeds, to cultivate the wild, and to really do things that no other plants, and maybe no other mammalian organism can do. Yet, where is the empowered and realized method? It seems obviously that we, as a species need to first admit to the rest of the ecosystem that we have no idea how to care take, and that this will be a learning curve in the biological evolution of the planet, or we will just simply make such a mess of exploiting the ecosystem that we will hit the self-eject button, and bring a lot along with us.

It seems more and more relevant that the Gaian system does want us to be part of the biological thrust of diversifying, protecting, and preserving the biosphere that took billions of years to get to this point. And Gaia is pushing us toward that realization, but maybe we have removed (or at least severely reduced) the catalyst for the awakening of the human ecological purpose; psychedelics =)

Willi - How do you use alchemy in your practice?

Dan - Alchemy is truly the basis of transmutation of energy, so in that way alchemy is occurring all the time. And, on the grandest level this means a spiritual quest to transmute our inner darkness/lead into gold/light – With this philosophical understanding as our basis, therefore to alchemize with plants can mean to transmute a leaf into a proper potion, nourishing substance, or medicine, of which can include a topical salve, liniment, or internal tincture, tea, or ferment. Within these practices of “the great work” of alchemy, there is a parallel and practically same basis of understanding also be seen in the tantric yoga path, Taoist alchemical works, and of course the western alchemy so named during the renaissance.

The great 2, the duality between male female, are united to create a 3rd element. In yoga, this is seen as Shiva (masculine) and Shakti (feminine) and their union as a result of resolving the dualities into union. Of course the “male female” principle is an archetypal metaphor for all levels of dualities, and indeed aspects within. On the esoteric, alchemy is the way the mind splits things into categories (alchemical separation), and the recombination or ability to see the threads (tanu-trayate iti tantra) between things, is the recombination; 2 very integral and important aspects of alchemy.

On the basic exoteric (material) level, this work can be done even with taking a leaf from a garden, in ritual and prayerfulness, and creating a healing ceremony for tea to heal us, or another. I try my best to apply this practice in all herbal preparations that I make.

Willi - I use color, sounds and code to create new myths and ignite alchemies here. Are you using music to teach rewilding? Are you creating songs or stories with your students? What are the main themes?

Dan - I do write music and love to improvise song and music circles within my community. I write and sing of the mysticism of nature, the medicinal aspects of plants, as well as the passion and magic of the realizations that come along with self-discovery within nature. It seems crucially important to gather friends together and make musical prayers and intentions in the form of improvisation to the sacred lands and spirits that were once revered and worked with by indigenous people all across the globe. In reclaiming the ability to raise our voices together, to bring fourth meaning, to explore intimate connection, and to break through all of the fears and limits that tell us we cannot sing, or our voice is not worthy, we do find a tremendous alchemy, the alchemy of transmutating the throat chakra into a power center... and indeed, the voice of Gaia is within that space.

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Dan De Lion's Bio –

Dan is an Earth Herbalist, Forager, Musician, and Teacher dedicated to working with Nature to further the healing of the planet and the soul. He teaches through Return to Nature, providing classes, lectures, and seminars on wild food foraging, mushroom identification, herbal medicine making, as well as primitive and survival skills with a focus on wild foods and forest medicines.

He also incorporates the philosophies of yoga, alchemy, meditation, and mysticism into his classes, lectures, and seminars and brings a deep rooted indigenous medicine perspective of practicing intuition with plants, in a systematic and grounded way.

Dan grew up in a life full of exposure to plants in the herb and vegetable garden which his mother grew, with continuous herb books as part of his upbringing as well as roaming access to the back yard which led to a farm. As he grew with this passion, he began mushroom hunting at 20 years old, and soon realized that wild plants could also be foraged, and received his formal herbalist training in 2010 from Heart Stone herbal school in Van Etten, NY. That same year, he started his business Return to Nature as a vehicle for sharing his passion for herbal medicine and his outreach to build a community with a deeper expression of Nature as a continual and abundant provider of nourishment, medicine and spiritual connection.

Dan has been teaching and leading community workshops and gatherings throughout NJ, NY, and PA and the surrounding area since 2009, and before that toured extensively throughout the country and recorded 2 albums in the musical group, Natural Breakdown. In his herbal and spiritual explorations, he has also traveled across the world, from India, to South America, to many places in the United States seeking and sitting with teachers and guides who have deeply expanded his knowledge about herbal healing, deeper perspectives on causes of illness, and working in respect with the natural world. Through teaching and facilitating now hundreds of interactive workshops, plant walks and community gatherings, along with receiving global exposure to many forms and permutations of community he has built and helped raise a strong core community based on herbal practice, nature skills, potlucks, and regenerative methods in his local home town of NJ.

Teaching from a deep passion to inspire children and adults alike to return to nature and remember that there is deep treasure around each and every corner of life, Dan teaches through hands on mentoring with focus on engaging the senses in and with nature to create and bridge a deep connection to the earth and our immediate surroundings that continue to deepen in students for the rest of their lives. Dan also offers private mentorship to students of all ages.

Dan leads several group plant walks a month and teaches workshops in symbiosis with local communities as well as classes for any groups including birthday parties, boy scout groups, homeschooling groups, and just about any other occasion. His class topics include Foraging and herbal remedies, Community building, hands on herbal medicine making, how to harvest, identify, and prepare wild food, Mushroom identification, vegetable fermentation, kombucha making, bird language, and primitive and survival skills, and nature awareness.

Willi Paul's Bio -

Willi is active in the sustainability, permaculture, transition, sacred Nature, new alchemy and mythology space since the launch of PlanetShifter.com Magazine on EarthDay 2009. Willi's network now includes multiple blog sites and numerous list serves with a global presence.

SF. Mr. Paul has released 22 eBooks, 2293 + posts on PlanetShifter.com Magazine, and over 350 interviews with global leaders. He has created 71 New Myths to date and has been interviewed over 30 times in blogs and journals. Please see his cutting-edge article at the Joseph Campbell Foundation and his pioneering videos on YouTube.

In 1996 Mr. Paul was instrumental in the emerging online community space in his Master's Thesis: "The Electronic Charrette." He volunteered for many small town re-designs with the Minnesota Design Team. Willi earned his permaculture design certification in August 2011 at the Urban Permaculture Institute.

Willi's current focus includes the integration of permaculture, mythology and the Transition Movement and the Myth Lab – a technique that Willi is testing in his Mythic Roundtable series.

Mr. Paul's eGroups -

[Depth Psychology Alliance - New Global Mythology Group Founder](#)
[LinkedIn - New Mythology, Permaculture and Transition Group Founder](#)
[G+ Permaculture Age Group Founder](#)

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