

AWAKENING THROUGH NATURE

Wisdom Teachings from the Natural World

A Six-Month Nature-Based Dharma Immersion

With Mark Coleman

Spirit Rock Meditation Center

Starts April 24th, 2026

An Invitation

Something in us remembers.

Before the screens and schedules, before the endless noise of modern life, there was this: wind moving through trees, light shifting on water, the simple rhythm of breath and birdsong. The natural world held us. It still does—if we allow it.

Yet for most of us, nature has become something we pass on the way to somewhere else. A backdrop. A screensaver. A place we might visit someday when life slows down.

This course is an invitation to stop waiting.

The Buddha awakened beneath a tree. He taught in forests and parks, by rivers and under open sky. For 2,500 years, practitioners have gone to forests, mountains, and caves—not because nature is pretty, but because it strips away what's false and reveals what's true. The teachings we study on our cushions were first whispered by wind, demonstrated by seasons, embodied by every living thing.

When we practice outdoors, something shifts. Impermanence is no longer a concept—it is the cloud dissolving overhead, the leaf releasing from its branch, the sun rising and setting and breeze that never comes the same way twice. Interdependence stops being philosophy—it becomes the bee and the flower, the rain and the river, the undeniable truth that nothing exists alone. And the self we spend so much effort protecting? It softens at the edges. It remembers it was never separate to begin with.

This is not a retreat from your life. It is a return to it—to the living, breathing world that has been waiting patiently all along.

Why Now

Let's be honest about where we are.

Our nervous systems are shot. We're spending more time than ever in our heads—analyzing, optimizing, scrolling through endless content. Even our meditation practice can become another mental exercise: watching thoughts, noting sensations, trying to get somewhere. Meanwhile, the body waits. The living world waits.

Something is asking to shift.

For many practitioners, the cushion has become a ceiling. Not because seated practice isn't valuable—it is. But after years of turning inward, some of us sense there's more. The same instructions that once opened doors now feel familiar, even flat. We've learned to observe our experience. *But have we learned to belong to it? Have we learnt to be free in relationship to it?*

Nature offers a different doorway. Not better—different. Here, mindfulness isn't something you do or observe. It's something you enter with the living world. Attention softens. Effort drops. The teachings that felt abstract in the meditation hall become obvious among the trees.

This is also a moment of ecological reckoning. We scroll through images of a burning world, then wonder why we can't sleep. We know something is deeply wrong—with how we're living, with our relationship to the earth—but we don't know what to do about it.

The climate crisis is not only an environmental emergency. It's a crisis of disconnection. We've forgotten that we belong to the earth. No amount of policy will be enough if we don't also heal this wound at the root.

Practice can help—not as escape, but as return. When you've sat quietly among trees and felt yourself held, something shifts. Caring for the earth stops being an obligation and becomes as natural as caring for your own body. You act from love rather than guilt, from connection rather than despair.

And there's this: we need new ways in. Mindfulness has gone mainstream, which is mostly good. But something has also been lost. The practices that once carried the depth of the Dharma have been flattened into productivity hacks and stress-reduction techniques. Many people are hungry for something more—something that touches the heart, that connects them to life, that feels sacred without being religious.

Nature-based practice offers that. It's immediate. It's relational. It doesn't require you to believe anything—only to step outside and pay attention. For people who've grown skeptical of apps and workshops, the living world is a teacher that can't be commodified.

Now is the time. Not someday. Not when you're less busy or more ready. Now—while the natural world is inviting, while your heart is asking, while the window is still open.

The natural world is still here. The oak outside your window is perennially teaching impermanence. The sky is still offering refuge. The question is whether you'll accept the invitation.

What Makes This Course Different

Most meditation programs ask you to close your eyes and turn inward. This one invites you to open them—and step outside.

Awakening Through Nature is not a nature appreciation class with some Buddhism sprinkled in. It's not forest bathing or outdoor wellness. It's a rigorous, heart-centered Dharma immersion that takes seriously what the Buddha knew: the natural world is not a backdrop to practice. It is practice.

Six months allows something to take root. Weekend workshops inspire. But transformation needs time. This course unfolds slowly, the way nature does—one teaching building on the next, each month deepening what came before. By the end, you won't just know these teachings. You'll have lived them into your bones.

The structure supports real integration. This isn't passive learning. Between monthly gatherings, you'll practice daily—outdoors, in your own neighborhood, with whatever patch of sky or strip of green is available. Mid-month Zoom sessions keep the sangha connected. Daylong retreats offer immersion. The readings are carefully chosen to deepen, not overwhelm.

Mark Coleman has spent decades developing this approach. As a senior Spirit Rock teacher, wilderness guide, and author of *Awake in the Wild*, Mark has been refining nature-based Dharma practice longer than almost anyone. This course represents the distillation of that life's work.

What You'll Receive

Something happens when you practice this way. It's hard to describe, but people who've done it know: you come back to yourself. You come back to the world. You remember something you didn't know you'd forgotten....that you *are* earth!

Your nervous system will thank you. Nature down-regulates stress in ways that indoor environments simply cannot. Over six months of regular outdoor practice, you'll build a new baseline—calmer, steadier, more resilient.

Meditation will feel less like work. Many practitioners hit a wall. Practice becomes dry, effortful, another thing on the to-do list. Outdoors, something shifts. The aliveness of the natural world invites a different quality of attention—easeful, curious, receptive. Presence becomes natural because you're finally practicing in a natural environment, where attention is effortlessly drawn into the present.

You'll feel less alone. The boundaries of self will soften. You'll sense yourself as part of the web of life, the breathing world, the vast system of relationships that holds you whether you notice or not. The loneliness that haunts modern life begins to ease when you remember you were never separate.

You'll discover a refuge that's always available. Not a retreat center you have to drive to. Not a state you have to manufacture. Just this: the sky above you, the ground

beneath you, the breath moving through you. A patch of grass. A single tree. A few minutes of open sky. Enough.

You'll fall in love again. With the world. With practice. With being alive. Not in a sentimental way—in a grounded, clear-eyed, broken-open way. The way you love something you know is fragile. The way you love something you've almost lost and then found again.

How We Will Practice Together

- Six monthly half day retreats (three hours each), held primarily outdoors in the beauty of Spirit Rock's land, offering deeper immersion
- Mid-month Zoom sessions for reflection, inquiry, and sangha connection
- Daily personal practice in nature, supported by guided meditations and readings

Each gathering includes guided outdoor meditation, Dharma teaching, contemplative inquiry, and time for silent practice. Weather permitting, we meet the teachings where they live—among the oaks and grasses, under open sky.

Is This Path for You?

This course is for anyone who senses that their practice wants to grow beyond the meditation cushion—who feels drawn to slow down, to listen more deeply, and to let the living world become a teacher.

It is especially nourishing for those who already have some foundation in mindfulness or Dharma practice and are ready to explore new dimensions of awareness. If you long for a felt sense of belonging, if you're curious about what practice becomes when it moves from effort to intimacy, *if you want to remember what your body has always known*—this course may be calling you.

You don't need hiking boots or camping skills. You don't need to know the names of trees. You only need a willingness to step outside, slow down, and pay attention. The natural world will do the rest.

THE JOURNEY

Six Months, Six Gateways

Month One: Dancing with Life

Learning to Trust Change

Everything changes. We know this—and yet we resist it constantly. We cling to what we love, push away what we fear, and exhaust ourselves trying to hold still in a moving world.

Nature offers another way. Here, change is not a problem to solve but a rhythm to join. Clouds form and dissolve. Light shifts across the hills. Seasons turn without apology. When we practice outdoors, we feel impermanence not as loss, but as the very aliveness of things. The tight grip of resistance begins to soften. We learn to dance. We begin to flow with nature's rhythms.

Practices:

- Seated and standing awareness outdoors—opening to moment-to-moment change in sensation, sound, light, temperature, wind and the dynamic fluid nature of all experience.
- Walking meditation as a practice of beginnings, middles, and endings—each step a complete arising and passing away, while walking amidst an ever changing landscape.

Home Practice:

Daily meditation outdoors in a Sit Spot, however brief. Choose one natural element—a tree, a patch of sky, a stream—and visit it repeatedly, witnessing its subtle transformations over days and weeks. Similarly, attend to inner experience, exploring how the body mirrors ephemerality.

Readings:

- Joseph Goldstein, "Impermanence" from *Insight Meditation*
- Jack Kornfield, "The Truth of Change" from *A Path with Heart*

Month Two: Everything Is Connected

From Separation to Belonging

We live as though we are separate—isolated minds in isolated bodies, making our way through a world of strangers. But step into a forest and something deeper reveals itself. The air you breathe was made by trees. The water in your cells fell as rain. The calcium in your bones was forged in stars.

Dependent arising—the Buddha's teaching that nothing exists independently—becomes visceral when practiced outdoors. We feel ourselves held by a web of relationships too vast to name. Loneliness loosens. Gratitude arises naturally. We stop asking how to "connect with nature" and realize we never left.

Practices:

- Elements meditation—feeling earth, water, fire, and air as shared substance, flowing through body and world alike
- Web-of-life walking contemplation—sensing breath, body, and thought as threads in a single living system you move through

Home Practice:

Interdependence walks: moving slowly through the world while sensing the invisible conditions sustaining each moment—soil, water, sunlight, the labor of others, the gifts of ancestors.

Readings:

- Joanna Macy, "The Greening of the Self"
- Thich Nhat Hanh on Interbeing and Dependent Arising

Month Three: Being Nothing and Everything

The Freedom of Not Knowing Who You Are

Who are you when no one is watching? When there's no mirror, no role to play, no story to maintain? In nature, something remarkable happens: the relentless project of "self" begins to quiet. Boundaries blur. The watcher and the watched become less distinct. You forget, for a moment, where you end and the world begins.

Non-self is not a negation. It is an opening—a recognition that what we call "I" is not a fixed thing but a flowing process, inseparable from the environment that shapes it. In this recognition lies profound peace. We are not separate from life. We are life, knowing itself.

Practices:

- Open awareness meditation—releasing the center of experience, allowing attention to be everywhere and nowhere - while receiving the whole sensory field in nature.
- Deep listening—dissolving the boundary between inner and outer, hearer and heard

Home Practice:

Open awareness meditation in different natural environments and observe the entire field of experience as a doorway into presence and natural knowing
Notice moments of self-forgetting—when the sense of "me" fades and simple presence remains. What makes these moments possible? What calls them forth?

Readings:

- Rob Burbea, "Ways of Looking at Self and Not-Self" from *Seeing That Frees*
- Ajahn Sumedho, "Not-Self" from *The Way It Is*

Month Four: We Are Kin

Practicing Reciprocity with the Living World

Most of us were taught that the natural world exists for human use—a collection of resources to be managed, consumed, or preserved for later consumption. But what if we approached nature as family? As elders, teachers, companions on the path?

This month, we practice kinship. We learn to listen to the land the way we would listen to a beloved friend. We notice how much we receive—every breath a gift, every meal an offering—and we ask: what might we offer in return? When care arises from felt connection rather than obligation, everything changes.

Practices:

- Meandering meditation—moving without destination, led by curiosity and attunement . Seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, knowing and being known meditation
- Gratitude contemplation—sensing the constant support flowing from earth, water, air, and all beings as a support for appreciation and kinship

Home Practice:

Meditate with loving awareness - in a place —by a particular tree, a stretch of creek, or within your yard—and tend that intimacy of relationship. Visit regularly. Listen. Offer your presence as a gift. Practice expanding the field of kinship to include the more than human world.

Readings:

- David Abram, "The Ecology of Magic" from *The Spell of the Sensuous*
- Ṭhānissarā Bhikkhunī, "Touching the Earth" from *Buddhism and Ecology*

Month Five: In Love with the Living World

Opening the Heart Through the Brahmavihāras

Have you noticed how the heart opens outdoors? How beauty stops us mid-step? How tenderness arises unbidden when we witness vulnerability—a fledgling bird, a wildflower pushing through concrete, the slow patience of an ancient tree?

The Brahmavihāras—loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity—are not states we manufacture. They are natural responses of an awake heart. Nature evokes them effortlessly. This month, we let the living world teach us how to love without grasping, to care without burning out, to delight without possessing, and to hold all things with the vast patience of the sky.

Practices:

- Mettā offered to self, to the land, to all beings—letting loving-kindness ripple outward without boundary
- Balancing compassion and joy—holding both the beauty and the suffering of the world in a single gaze

Receiving love and benevolence from the natural world

Home Practice:

Daily loving-kindness practice outdoors. Wander with soft eyes, noticing beauty and vulnerability alike. Let the heart respond with care, love, compassion without needing to fix or change anything. Practice radiating love to all life in sitting meditation outside in your Sit Spot

Readings:

- Sharon Salzberg, "Metta: The Practice of Unconditional Friendliness" from *Lovingkindness*
- Mark Coleman, "The Heart of Nature Practice" from *Awake in the Wild*

Month Six: Awake and Naturally Free

Resting in What Has Always Been Here

We arrive where we began—but knowing it for the first time. After months of practice, something becomes clear: awareness is not something we create. It is what we are. It was here before we went looking. It will remain when all our seeking stops.

Nature mirrors this perfectly. The sky does not try to be spacious; it simply is. The mountain does not effort toward stillness. In this final month, we let go of becoming and simply rest—in presence, in awareness, in the living world that has held us all along. Awakening is not somewhere else. It is here. It is this.

Practices:

- Awareness of nature, nature of awareness—recognizing that what looks out and what is seen are not two. Dissolving duality between self and nature.
- Effortless presence in stillness and movement—Sensing how awareness is effortlessly allured by the natural world . Abiding in natural wakefulness in all moments

Home Practice:

Continue. The course ends, but the practice does not. Carry what you've learned into daily life. Let every step outside be a homecoming.

Readings:

- Gil Fronsdal, "Awareness and Liberation" from *The Issue at Hand*
- Ajahn Amaro, "Awareness Is Not a Thing" from *Small Boat, Great Mountain*

A Final Word

The land beneath your feet is teaching, right now. The sky above you is offering refuge. The breath moving through you is the same wind that moves through trees.

You have never been separate from this.

This course is simply an invitation to remember—to step outside, to slow down, to let the living world show you what has always been true.

We look forward to walking this path with you.

About Mark Coleman

Mark Coleman is an inner and outer explorer, who has extensively studied in the Buddhist tradition since the mid-80s. He is passionate about sharing his nature-based meditation practices and has taught Insight meditation and nature retreats worldwide for the past twenty years. Mark's journey with meditation began in his late teens in London as a punk rocker. He was drawn to the peace and clarity it brought. This path took him to India and the US, immersing in long retreats with renowned teachers in the Insight meditation including Christopher Titmus, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, and Sharon Salzberg, and later in the Dzogchen tradition with Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche and Tsoknyi Rinpoche.

But, it was meditating in nature that captured Mark's heart. When he moved to the US he fell for the vast landscapes of the Rockies, Sierra's, and the deserts of the South-West. An unabashed nature lover, he sensed nature as a perfect temple for mindfulness and began integrating meditation and nature as a path of practice for himself and later teaching others. He realized the joy, peace, wisdom, and freedom taught in Buddhism was accessible by meditating outdoors.