



Mindful Living Blog:

Ecological Belonging Collection

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Introduction

Welcome to the Mindful Living Blog – Ecological Belonging Collection!

This collection has been designed to bring together a series of articles from the Mindful Living blog, all of which centre on the theme of ecological belonging. The articles in this guide provide an introduction and an entry point into this topic, which you can explore in your own time.

Within each article you will find information on the topic, as well as an invitation. We hope that you will find these invitations thought-provoking and use them to engage in your own process of self-exploration and mindful practice. Above all, we hope that this guide will help to inspire you as you progress on your own journey.

This downloadable guide can also be printed. Please feel free to share it with others who you think may benefit from the content it contains.

As always, we really enjoy hearing from our readers and our wider community. Please feel free to share your thoughts and experiences with us. You can connect with us via the website or by emailing anna@dunami-somatics.com.

Happy reading!

Anna and Diana

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Ecological Belonging

In this article we will be exploring the concept of ecological belonging and how it can inform our daily habits and attitudes. In particular, we will also consider what the term means from an ecosomatic perspective.



Photo by Anna Dako.

What Is Ecological Belonging?

From the perspective of somatic practice, and more specifically through the lens of ecosomatic practice as practiced by Dr Anna Dako, ecological belonging refers to the development of a deeper awareness of our own presence *in* and *with* the natural world. It refers to the experience of trying to cultivate a symbiotic co-existence with the natural world and finding ways to learn to engage with, and develop our relationship to, the living environment. Ecological belonging invites us to consider our personal belonging within the natural world, how we inhabit and interact with it, and to consider ways in which we can be more mindful in our approach.

Yet, it is also important to acknowledge that this is but one interpretation of the term. There are many different ways in which we can understand and engage with the phrase 'ecological belonging'. How we interact and 'belong' not simply to, but also *with* the natural world, can

have individually-shaped meanings. The phrase can (and does) have different connotations for different practitioners within the field of somatic practice, as well as the wider field and discourse of ecological creative practices. However, at its core, the vast majority of interpretations and perspectives emphasise the notion that ecological belonging is a term which refers to the way in which we, human beings, identify with nature.



Photo by Anna Dako.

How Ecological Belonging Can Inform Our Daily Habits

At its most basic, ecological belonging firstly requires that we learn to become responsive to external stimuli, particularly when inhabiting a natural outdoor environment. What this means in practice is that we make a conscious effort to actively listen to the natural world and rather than simply occupy space in it, allow ourselves to react to it and engage in dialogue with it. As we engage with a natural space, we have the opportunity to create an experience which arises *from* the natural environment, as opposed to imposing our own experience onto it. In so doing, we begin to sow the seeds necessary to view ourselves as part of nature and the natural world, as opposed to being in conflict with it.

Whilst we may philosophically and intellectually understand the term ecological belonging, the more pressing question becomes how we can apply our understanding of the phrase to our daily habits, in order to improve our quality of life and that of the natural world we inhabit. In order to develop a more embodied understanding of the term, we must first learn to cultivate a deeper psycho-physical understanding. If we consider the work and perspective of

Dr Anna Dako on ecological belonging, then there are a number of simple strategies and exercises which we can apply to daily life to help us begin to foster a better psycho-physical, or *felt thinking*, understanding:



Photo by Anna Dako.

As you walk through an outdoor space, allow yourself to be guided by it. Allow your breathing to find its rhythm in response to the environment around you and for your feet to be led by the weight and contours of the ground beneath your feet.

Let yourself be guided in movement by the wind, or for your pace to be altered in response to the sounds of the birds or the fall of raindrops.

Listen to the small chirps, rustles and hums of the world around you and give yourself permission to respond with you own sounds and singing.

As you breathe in, visualize breathing the natural world into yourself. On the exhalation, visualize expanding and breathing yourself out into the environment, becoming one with it.

These simple exercises offer us the opportunity to slowly begin to explore our relationship to nature in a more embodied way and pave the way for a more positive and symbiotic existence with our natural world to emerge.



Photo by Anna Dako.

An Invitation...

As we retreat indoors, the natural environment can at times seem ever more removed. Our retreat can create a barrier that divides us from the natural outdoors. Yet, we are a part of that natural environment and learning how to belong within it is a crucial step we must all take for the wellbeing of our selves, as well as the planet itself.

We invite you to create a shared experience with the natural world around you. We encourage you to seek ways in which you can engage with the natural environment in a more responsive and reciprocal manner by undertaking one of the exercises outlined above. As you do so, allow yourself to remain open and responsive to the world around you.

Ecological Belonging Through Felt Thinking

From an ecosomatic perspective, ecological belonging means to develop a deeper awareness of our own presence within the natural world, as well as finding ways to engage with and nurture our relationship to the living environment. The methodology of Felt Thinking, as developed by Dr Anna Dako, is one way in which we can facilitate our sense of ecological belonging. In this article, we explore the practice and how we can use it to promote our own ecological belonging.



Photo by Anna Dako.

What Does Felt Thinking Mean?

Felt Thinking is an ecosomatic methodology which has been developed by Dr Anna Dako over the course of the last decade. As she describes it:

‘To say it simply, to feel think is to wonder about what there is in stock for us, everyday, simply by allowing some time and space to listen and contemplate, whole-bodily, nourished by open landscapes of self, yet shared with all other, discovery.’ – Dr Anna Dako

The practice of Felt Thinking is a process of deep self-enquiry which enables us to explore and bring to the fore the connection between nature (and the natural world) and our selves. Through the practice, we create an opening in which the environment can speak to us through

movement and creative expression. In so doing, we allow for an opportunity to emerge in which we can begin to engage in dialogue with the natural environment through movement.

As a result, we are then able to begin to connect to the living world in a more engaged and embodied manner. More importantly, through ongoing practice, we can gain better insight into how we are, how we exist and function, in the world and our place within it. For those looking to explore better ways of co-existing with the living environment and finding a more co-operative and ecologically mindful ways of living, Felt Thinking provides a start to the journey.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Practicing Felt Thinking

Practicing Felt Thinking may seem like a daunting experience, particularly for individuals who may not have experienced embodied practices before. However, it is a practice which is open to everyone, from all ages, abilities, backgrounds and experiences.

At its simplest, Felt Thinking is an improvisational activity, ideally practiced outdoors, which involves all the senses. It teaches individuals to open their awareness, including kinaesthetic and proprioceptive awareness, to all that is around them. Above all, Felt Thinking allows us to learn how to cultivate an open attitude towards listening and receiving, as well as supporting us in being present in the space, in the present moment.

In order to truly benefit from the practice, we must learn to stay receptive and responsive to external stimuli. In the case of supporting a sense of ecological belonging, this means being aware of and responsive to, the natural world and all of the stimuli that the different living environments have to offer. In so doing, we have the opportunity to begin to engage in a living conversation or exchange with the natural world.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Three Steps of Experiential Immersion

There are three core phases within the process of Felt Thinking, which Dr Anna Dako has termed the ‘three steps of experiential immersion’. During each phase, open questions are used to help enhance and shape the experience.

In **Phase One**, individuals tend to engage in free movement which is often wide-spread, leading to the creation of horizontal patterns. This phase tends to be characterised by sensual encounters with the environment through the senses of touch, vision and smell. It is a phase which focuses upon connectivity and is dominated by a desire by the mover to out-search, through listening, sensing and tuning in to the environment around them. This phase is shaped by questions relating to *Where* and *When* and focuses on developing receptiveness to physical time and receptivity in movement.



Photo by Anna Dako.

During **Phase Two**, a deeper psychological and more dynamic encounter begins to emerge. At this stage, movers begin to engage in experiential exchange with the environment, resulting in multi-dimensional patterns of expression in movement. This phase, guided by questions of *What* and *Who*, tends to lead to more animated co-creation. At this point, the mover's agency, together with that of the living world, is attended to in a more psychophysical manner. It is at this point that exploration of psychological time of experience can be attended to and in which experiences in lived exchange, in remembering, imagining and embodying are explored.

In the final phase, **Phase Three**, movers tend to explore more vertical dynamics. The connectivity between the more grounded, earthly metaphysical and the more spiritual and soulful depths of experience are explored. This stage brings the practice full circle, guided by open questions of *Why* and *How*, and promotes the discovery of deeper insights and intuitions about the ontological relation between the self and nature. It is a stage which creates space for inner shifts to take place and fosters the process of 'letting go'. Through it, movers can rediscover 'the natural' within themselves, leading to a deeper understanding (both sensed and lived/experienced) of belonging and of their responsibility in movement.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Summary

Crucially, each mover's experience of Felt Thinking will be individual to them, whilst sharing these common traits, which allow them to further engage in shared experience and understanding with others. Ultimately, Felt Thinking is an approach to (re)discover the connection between nature and the self and to find deeper meaning in our human experience, as reflected in our living condition. It is a practice which focuses on understanding the self and the world through the act of being with the environment. Through such practice, we have the opportunity to begin to reconsider our place within the natural world and what we can offer it, as well as what it has to offer us.



Photo by Anna Dako.

An Invitation...

We invite you to join us in experiencing Felt Thinking in practice. Use this as an opportunity to gift yourself some time in nature and to explore the benefits that the practice has to offer.

You could also undertake an [audio guided Walk to Wellbeing](#) in an outdoor location of your choice. The first two audio guided walks are freely available to access from the Dunami website [here](#). Remember to take a journal with you to engage in some reflective and creative practice.

Ecological Consciousness and Awareness

One of the most potentially difficult aspects of ecological discourse, particularly for those encountering such literature, ideas and practices for the first time, is often the terminology used. Many people, including practitioners and educators of ecology and sustainable practices, have a tendency to use terms which are believed or expected to be understood by everyone in the same way. Yet, as is the case with the terms ecological consciousness and ecological awareness, there are many instances where meaning can become interchangeably used, yet fail to be commonly understood in the same way.



Photo by Anna Dako.

What Is Ecological Consciousness and Awareness?

Ecological awareness tends to refer to education and knowledge. To become ecologically aware means to learn about and become better informed, and therefore more knowledgeable, about how our actions impact the environment and the associated ecosystems. By developing greater ecological awareness, we are thus able to understand not only the impact of our decisions and actions, but learn how to anticipate these changes before they occur and act in such a way as to protect our natural environment. Through greater ecological awareness, we can deepen our understanding and learn to find alternative

approaches and ways of behaving which promote the natural environment and which allow us to live in harmony with Nature.

Yet, *ecological consciousness*, refers to something slightly different and more nuanced. Ecological consciousness instead refers to a way of being. It is not only about becoming better educated in the field of ecology and sustainability, but instead, the term refers to an entirely different way of approaching, perceiving, experiencing and interacting with the natural world.

Ecological consciousness requires a deep respect for the natural world and all things within it. It's generally understood to be a term which reflects the psyche of an individual in relationship to and with Nature. In such cases, the cognitive, ethical and emotional aspects of an individual are all regulated through the lens of ecological consciousness. For such individuals, there is a deep connection to and engagement with all aspects of the Natural world.

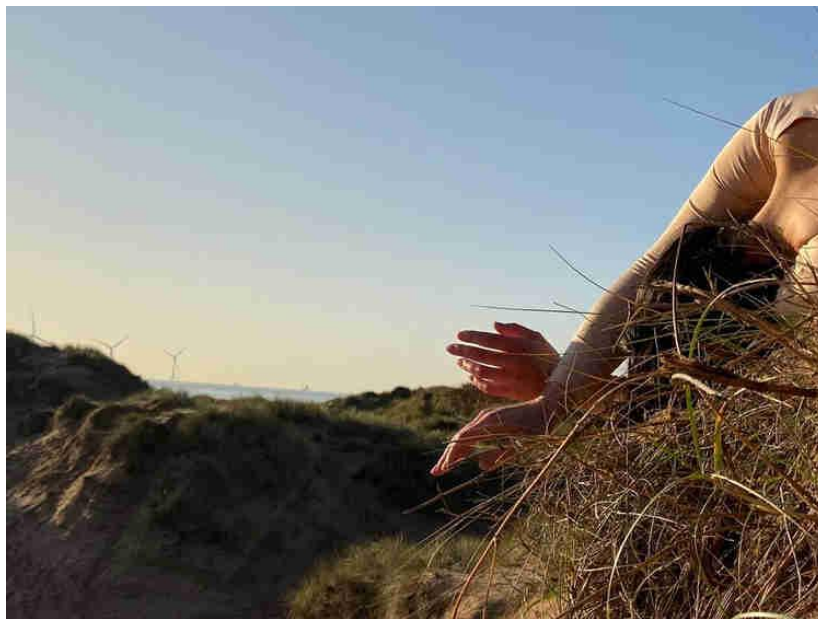


Photo by Anna Dako.

Application of Ecological Consciousness and Awareness

Ultimately, ecological awareness and ecological consciousness have become terms which are very often used interchangeably because they are very much connected and linked to one

another. On a very basic and general level, both terminologies reflect the growing realization and acceptance by society as a whole that we, as a species, need to become more aware, more conscious, of the natural world all around us. Furthermore, both terminologies have ultimately emerged from the growing social awareness that we need to make changes to the ways in which we live our lives, if we are to successfully take the necessary steps to protect our planet from further damage as the result of human activity.

Greater understanding of the impact of human activity and our choices upon our planet has led to a developing acceptance that all living things are more interdependent than was perhaps accepted in the past. As a result of such shared knowledge, there is a greater willingness to view the world and Nature through a more holistic lens.

Increasingly, issues of ecology are seen as a common responsibility shared by all living creatures. Both ecological awareness and ecological consciousness promote a system of values which require that all individuals and subsequently, we as a collective society, adopt more sensitivity to the natural world around us. In practical terms, this requires that we become more in touch with Nature and develop a value system which prioritises the environment above our individual needs.

In so doing, we will be better placed to make choices which reduce the negative impact of mankind upon the natural world, protect the environment and the ecosystems which we live alongside. Most importantly of all, such a value system will enable us to change our existing attitudes towards the natural world so that we may create a more sustainable lifestyle for ourselves and future generations.



Photo by Anna Dako.

An Invitation...

It can seem daunting to begin to engage with concepts such as ecological awareness or ecological consciousness. However, in reality, it all begins with a willingness and desire to learn more about the environment and what steps we can each take as individuals to protect it and help it to thrive.

We invite you to take some time to consider your relationship to nature and the natural world. How do you engage with the natural environment? Do you feel connected to it or far removed? Consider too how your everyday choices, from your chosen method of travel, to the amount of energy you use, to the amount of household waste you produce, impact the environment.

Begin to note whether there are small changes you could make to your daily lifestyle which could help to protect the natural world. If you can, make one change this week.

The first step to developing ecological awareness or consciousness is to become aware of your existing attitudes and actions. Through this awareness, you can then begin to make changes which can benefit the natural world all around you. Whilst these will take time, every small change made by every individual collectively adds up. Over time, these changes in attitude can become a part of your everyday normality and together we can develop and implement healthier, more sustainable lifestyle changes which benefit all life on our planet.

Ecological Consciousness and Awareness – For Daily Life

As previously explored, one of the key aspects of developing and fostering ecological consciousness is the ability to develop greater awareness and sensitivity to nature. By becoming more attuned to the natural world, we are better placed to observe our impact upon it and be encouraged to modify our behaviour and attitudes. In so doing, we can develop better habits and make lifestyle changes which benefit the natural world, as well as ourselves. In this article, we consider what actions we can take in our daily lives to become more ecologically conscious and aware.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Developing Greater Awareness and Sensitivity to Nature

There are many ways in which we can become more aware of Nature and in tune with it. In the first instance, simply spending some time outdoors in the natural world itself can be a fantastic first step. Make it part of your regular practice to spend a few minutes outdoors, be that in your garden, local park or local nature reserve.

During the recent years, we have all spent more time in our local outdoor areas. But rather than simply walking through them, take the opportunity to really engage with nature on your next walk. Take the time to pause and listen to the sounds. Allow yourself to be still and observe the natural environment and to open your awareness and senses to Nature. In so doing, you will become more familiar and attuned to it. Doing this regularly, even if just for a few minutes each day will, over time, enable you to develop a greater sensitivity to all the different aspects of the natural world around you.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Similarly, engaging in some embodied and meditative practices outdoors can be very beneficial. You can spend some time doing meditation outside and truly allowing yourself to become open to all that Nature has to offer you. Engaging in some mindful breathing practices can also be very beneficial and allow you to connect more deeply with the environment all around you. You can also engage in more embodied practices, such as yoga, tai chi, or in [Felt Thinking](#).

By engaging in such practices, you have the opportunity to reconnect with the natural world and to become more aware of your presence and connection with it. Over time, such practices will enable you to 'listen' more closely to the natural world around you and to learn how to develop a dialogue with Nature. Exercising this awareness will be mutually beneficial; supporting your own health and wellbeing, whilst allowing you to develop a greater appreciation for the natural world and the ways in which you can provide support for it in return.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Helping Educate Others

Every small act and change by each individual counts towards making a bigger global impact which will benefit us all. Yet, one of the simplest ways in which we can become more ecologically conscious is to help educate others, especially the next generation. Share your knowledge with others and use it to help educate and inspire them.

Take your children on walks with you and involved them in your embodied practices and active listening whilst outdoors. Encourage children to spend time exploring the natural world and learning to appreciate all that it has to offer. This will help them to develop a deep appreciation of Nature from early on and promote better habits as they grow up. By sharing your knowledge and understanding, you can help to empower others to make good choices as well.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Living A More Sustainable Lifestyle

Being ecologically conscious and aware also means making adjustments to our lifestyles and daily choices. If we are to live in greater harmony with nature, then it becomes imperative that we begin to live in a more sustainable manner.

There are many different approaches you can take. You can begin by eating more sustainably. For example, reducing your meat consumption, only eating fish which has been responsibly sourced, buying local produce and even trying to grow your own food.



Another important lifestyle change is attempting to reduce waste. Whether you decide to reduce your use of plastic or reduce your household food waste, every act counts. Consider too ways in which you can reduce energy consumption within your home, by turning off and unplugging appliances when they're not in use.

Reducing your carbon footprint is also important. Consider different options of travel and, where possible, opt for the greenest one. Try to reduce your driving and instead, aim to walk or cycle. Consider the carbon footprint of the items you buy as well, and try to swap your shopping practices so that you are buying more things locally or which use only minimal or eco-friendly packaging.



If you're looking for a bigger commitment or lifestyle change, consider making your home more sustainable. For example, getting better home insulation to reduce energy consumption, or using eco-friendly materials for any home renovation projects.

An Invitation...

Choosing to become more ecologically conscious and aware is already an active first step. This week, we invite you to join us in taking a walk outside in Nature. You may choose to repeat the experience with your family as well.

Choose a natural location which you feel connected to and which you would like to explore more meaningfully, in a deeper way. Begin by going for a gentle walk and taking the time to really open your auditory awareness to all the sounds in that space. Take deep breaths as you walk, allowing yourself to become attuned to the rhythms of the natural environment. Give yourself permission to pause and simply observe things which capture your attention.



Photo by Anna Dako.

At the end of your walk, take a moment to simply reflect on your experience and the natural world all around you. You can also use the opportunity to inspire some creativity, be that in the form of writing, art, music or movement.

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