

Nature Awareness

A Course in Perceiving from the Heart

Peter Friebel

Copyright © VaraVild 2016.

All Rights Reserved.

Contents

Welcome	3
How to do this course	5
My own discovery of Awareness	7
I. Introduction	10
1. Tracker or 'Old Way' Philosophy	11
Tracker?	11

Welcome!

Welcome to the VaraVild self study course Nature Awareness. My name is Peter Friebel and I co-founded VaraVild with my wife Erica. I do not know your reasons for taking this course but I am absolutely delighted that you do! I do have a suspicion though: You probably want to discover, explore and develop your natural abilities for experiencing nature and, in doing so, restore a balance that you have a nagging feeling has been disturbed in some way.

My own reasons for developing this and related courses are to share my own astonishment and joy of the realisation that the world is intricately beautiful and that we ourselves, contrary to what our modern culture would like us to believe, are obviously and reassuringly part of its delicate fabric. Further more, I want this wisdom to once again permeate every aspect of our daily lives! In our philosophies, development of Personal Power and world view. The fact that we and Nature are unconditionally connected and completely interdependent is not one many have been raised to be aware of or even feel comfortable with. We will address all such issues and hopefully overcome them. How? Well, first we will have to learn the right way of observing and experiencing Nature. We need to learn how to be open to all of Nature's communications on all the channels available to us. In other words, we need to start seeing the world through "The Eye Of The Tracker" and become as a question. That is what I will start teaching you

Welcome

to do.

How to do this course

This course is a revised version of my on-line course NA1. The on-line version of this course is held on Facebook. During nine two-hour on-line chats we talk about Awareness, tracking and Old Way Philosophy in general and about the text and experiences of the exercises in particular. The participants get a relevant part of the text several days prior to each group chat so they have time to study it and do the exercises. This gives a chronological structure to the course that is reflected in both the text and the exercises in the sense that they are accumulative in nature. On that course, participants simply have no access to the text and exercises ahead until it is distributed.

On this course you have, and If you want you can read it all in one go. I strongly advice against doing that! There is no need for the same rigorous structure as with the on-line version but there are a few points in the text where it is recommended that the previous is well understood and that the relevant exercises have been done, experienced and contemplated without the risk of confusion and distraction of what comes later. I will point out those “boundaries” as they occur. Anyway, if you are like me, you will ignore this advice and read the whole text in one go, then find out that there might have been a point to the advice after all and start at the beginning again.

You will probably encounter some words, terms and phrases related to Old Way lifeways that are unfamiliar to you. To

How to do this course

help you make sense of them, you can find a glossary in the Appendices part of this book.

Once you have completed the course you can start using this text in a different way. Then it becomes a reference, a field guide and/or a template for your own workshops. I still regularly do many of the exercises described in this book as they never become old, boring, easy or unnecessary.

There is a third version of this course and that is an intensive seven-day workshop/circle here at my school in the Swedish wilderness. Even if you have done this course I can recommend the seven-day workshop as that is a fun, completely different and a much more immersive experience. For more information on how to proceed after this course see 'What's next?' under Appendices.

My own discovery of Awareness

I think it will be useful to explain how I came to be involved with Awareness and tracking and why those skills are now so fundamental to all of my courses. There were three very distinct experiences leading up to this.

Quite often, when I was out in the wilderness, either on a course or privately, I noticed that there was very little method or system in the way I navigate and find places or things. As a primitive skills instructor I teach other people how to navigate the wilderness but, to my own surprise, I was not strictly using those methods myself. There have been many occasions where I put my map and compass away because I felt I was going to miss the target if I would keep on using them. At first I did not give it a lot of thought and was rather proud when it turned out to be exactly the right decision. Over time, though, it became a pattern I could not ignore. It would take me several years to realise that I was, in fact, tracking the places and things I wanted to find.

Another pattern became evident in the selection of materials for friction fire. Friction fire is a very popular bushcraft but also a very difficult skill to master, especially here in the boreal forests of Sweden where very few suitable materials can be found. You can find complete books devoted to this subject and they will all instruct you to study and learn the charac-

teristics of various suitable species of plants and trees to construct the parts needed for fire starting by friction. When you become proficient you will certainly focus more on the characteristics than the species. Regardless of how you do it, it remains a skill that requires a lot of practice and knowledge to perfect. Yet, here again, I became aware of a pattern. Over time I noticed that I was not applying the knowledge I have on the subject such as doing the finger nail test or selecting the right species. (The finger nail test is a simple test for testing the suitability of a piece of wood for the hearth board where you push a finger nail into the wood. The mantra is: “easily marked but not damaged”) I found myself starting fires with a pine drill on a birch board and not even contemplating the madness of that in light of the accepted knowledge and practices. Of course, it is the characteristics of the parts and not the species that are important but at least you should make sure they possess those characteristics. In my case I just walked up to a piece of wood picked it up and ‘knew’ it was OK. It took me a long time to see the connection with the previous example.

Finally it all came together during a course I was giving. Even before our current focus on awareness and tracking my bushcraft courses contained elements of animal tracking as a survival and navigation skill. I like to use moose trails for that. Moose trails are excellent for navigating hard terrain. My students were fascinated by following the trail but as usual the trail thins out after a while and, before you know it, you are tracking a single individual. After a while they all said that the tracks had disappeared and they could not go on. I told them that they were indeed hard to see but that it was clear the moose had turned to the right, up the hill. They looked at me as if I was crazy. They maintained that there were no

tracks that could be read. At that point I took a step back from myself and viewed the ground from their perspective. I had to concede that, indeed, there were no visible tracks to be found. I told them that they were right in that there were no tracks visible. What I heard myself say next though kept me occupied for a long time. I told them that although there were no tracks visible, that did not mean that they weren't there. To prove my point I urged them to walk up that hill and to the right to see if the tracks would not return after a short while. Only after maybe 10 meters they found the tracks again.

This was the single event that really opened my eyes. From that moment on I started to research what connected these experiences and what their significance was. I had the nagging feeling that I was missing a very important aspect of primitive living skills but also of modern living skills and the human potential in general. The bigger picture started to make sense to me and I was convinced that I needed to completely change my teachings. I realised that in order to really master Earth Living one needs to really master tracking and Awareness and reconnect with the ultimate source of information: Nature.

“When we tug at a single thing in nature, we find it attached to the rest of the world.” - John Muir

Part I.

Introduction

1. Tracker or 'Old Way' Philosophy

From the Welcome:

“We need to learn how to be open to all of Nature’s communications on all the channels available to us. In other words, we need to start seeing the world through “The Eye Of The Tracker” and become as a question and that is what I will start teaching you to do”

Tracker?

Yes, tracker. Awareness and tracking are one. They feed each other. Through awareness man has been able to track and through tracking man became more aware. Practically all survival and bushcraft schools around the world seem totally unaware of this simple fact of human life and consequently they teach a cold and dead set of skills that does nothing to make us feel at home in the wilderness and, by extension, the world. Often it does the opposite in fact.

All aboriginal (hunter-gatherer) peoples in the world, both past and present, were or are aware of it of course. They have to be. Awareness and tracking are the key to their daily

1. Tracker or 'Old Way' Philosophy

survival or, as they would tell you, normal life. Survival and bushcraft schools are an invention of a completely different culture. A culture that has an intrinsic aversion for the *imagined* struggles and hardships of the so called primitive peoples. A culture that sees no advantage in cooperation with Nature and its laws but rather sees it as an enemy that needs conquering. We think we can tackle all of our problems by knowledge and skills alone. We truly believe that knowledge and skills will yield us ultimate mastery of the world and our own fates, that we can actually win. Any of the so called 'primitive' peoples will tell you without blinking, how misguided this believe is as it is based on the obvious falsehood that the world was only here for us to master.

The 'Primitive' people's culture has about three million years worth of accumulated wisdom and experience of living. We decided to throw all that in the bin for about ten to eight thousand years ago and 'take charge' by tilling the earth. All of a sudden, Nature, our partner in life became our worst enemy. Before, we were in tune with our environments, open to the communications of Nature. We were Aware, we 'tracked' the paths of our lives. Only two to four hours per day were needed to provide a rich varied and healthy diet for our clan (family group). It is pretty amazing and sad that we now truly believe they had awful short lives of hardships when in fact, today in our culture, we need to work at least twice or trice the time to be able to buy awful food and shelter that only makes us sick and unhappy.

But, in order to live *with* nature, as opposed to live *against* Nature, you need to be aware of it. You need to become mindful of relevant things in your awareness, the actual things you are looking for, dynamics that have a bearing on your tasks and goals in life. This process is called tracking. Most of us

1. *Tracker or 'Old Way' Philosophy*

think tracking is just following a series of foot, hoof or paw prints made on the ground. This is of course true but it is so incredibly much more. Tracking involves all our senses including the sixth one. Especially the sixth one: intuition! Tracking is centred on the Sacred Questions: “What happened here?” and “What is it telling me?” Following just foot prints is a very little aspect of tracking. In Sweden tracking on that minimal level is used to research large predators in nature reserves. They can only use tracking on snow. Real trackers, though, can track in any terrain or season. They can read the soil just as well as the snow. They will actually read all the sign, not only the prints, they will ask the sacred questions, notice minute details in the surroundings, interpret bird and other animal sounds and behaviours that tells them about their quarry's movements and intentions. They will feel the quarry move within them. They would be severely crippled indeed if all they could do was to identify and follow prints. Trackers are aware of their quarry on a much deeper level. They know that there is something connecting them with the quarry, making them one and the same: Nature. This is aboriginal tracking. It does not only enable you to follow footprints, it enables you to find the trail first! Tracking and Awareness are the most important survival skills of man and indeed any animal.

Although our culture has gone out of its way to totally eradicate the tracker state of Awareness in us —Interesting if you think about it really. The defining state of mind for a tracker is to be inquisitive and questioning at all times. How well do constantly questioning and inquisitive people fare in our culture?— it has not succeeded in erasing our ability to be aware and to track. We evolved to own these traits and it took over three million years. No amount of cultural pressure

1. *Tracker or 'Old Way' Philosophy*

can remove it from our being in only a few thousand years. So, even though we manage to ignore the tracker in us basically all the time, if we want, it is fairly easy to wake him/her up! Once we start to exercise our Awareness, the tracker in us will start to stir!

I feel I need to stress, at this point, that this is not, technically, a tracking course. Not in the sense that I will teach you the infinite intricacies of how to read and interpret physical sign. This course is aimed at raising your level of Awareness and that will simply manifest itself in increased tracking abilities. When I say tracking abilities, in this case, I mean the ability to become much more aware of your environment and to become mindful of your reactions, feelings and sensations induced by Nature and vice versa of course.