

## **EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES FOR STAGE 1, THE INNOCENT IN THE NEST**

*Please read chapter 4 (on stage 1), starting on p 75, before launching into these activities.*

### **More-than-human Nature:**

*Time: 1 hour or more, Materials: None*

Go out on the land and let yourself *be found* by a place or thing in nature that feels utterly innocent (page 80). Don't choose just any place. In fact, don't do the choosing at all. Let yourself be found. Wander on the land until you come upon a spot that truly feels innocent to you. Take your time. If you don't meet such a place, try again some other day and/or in some other area. If and when you do meander into a place that feels entirely innocent, then lay down. Just *be* there for a while. Then, let yourself sink into the experience of a completely healthy infant, a stage-one human who was born to a soulcentric family. Imagine that you are less than a year old. Let your deep memory remind you what this feels like. Just lay on your back like an infant who is not yet able to turn on her belly. You don't have human language. Look, listen, feel, and smell everything as if for the first time. Be aware through one sense at a time or a synesthetic blend of two or more senses. You're not able to label anything, like "ahhhh, this smells like pine." Loosen your grip on your verbal mind; give up naming things. You're not even thinking that this leaf is in front of that tree trunk. They just are. There are only images, scents, sounds, feelings, and movements in and around you. Your life is all about the senses and the body. Take it all in. No judgments, but lots of deep curiosity. You might want to move your limbs or make sounds. After a while, you might imagine that you are older than 12 months, so now you might crawl or touch things. Take your time. Let this be an adventure through the endlessly fascinating, sensuous world of nature. *Be* innocence. You are unquestionably in relation with everything. And everything is waiting *for you*.

Most stage-1 children have relationships with the more-than-human world that they forget or abandon as they age. They talk to trees, hear the song of the Earth, or play with invisible (imaginal) beings. Give this a try — again, or for the first time. During this activity, allow your innate sense of longing or knowing to guide you. Start small if need be — just reach out to the objects of the natural world that are waiting for you. Over the next several weeks, explore this new dimension of fully participating in this world. Let your healthy inner child lead you. Let yourself be surprised by what happens. Don't continue if, after several attempts, it feels inauthentic. Your goal here is a genuine relationship with the natural world.

**Applying your experience to everyday life:** At the end of these adventures, spend some time feeling into the experience you just had. What is innocence *for you*, and what is your relationship to innocence? How does innocence live in you (or not)? For the next seven days, get up just before dawn, go outside, and face east (or sit in front of a window that faces east). Let yourself be absorbingly curious about this innocent new day emerging all around you. Look, listen, scent and taste the air, feel the morning breeze on your skin. Observe this unfolding day with all the senses of an innocent one- to two-year-old. Do this for a minimum of 15 minutes. Afterwards, allow this newness, innocence, and awe to accompany you into your day. Notice additional ways in which innocence lives in you and in others. At the end of these seven days, note your personal changes that have emerged from this practice. In what ways will you continue the cultivation of your innocence?

In addition, it would be valuable for you to explore how friends and family members understand and experience innocence in their own lives. What does it mean to them? What images does it evoke? How do their responses broaden or sharpen your own understanding and experience of innocence?

### **Writing:**

*Time: 10 minutes or more, Materials: Journal or paper, and pen*

Close your eyes and allow yourself to fall into the kind of experience that you imagine a one or two year-old might have. Write about your interplay with the world. Because a child of this age is pre-verbal or early-verbal, you'll be using words solely to embrace the experience of the senses, the body, and the emotions — without any thinking *about*. Or perhaps all you will place on your page are scribblings with your non-dominant hand, expressing what a one- to two-year-old might experience in the here and now. Whether with simple words or scribblings, record your sensory experiences, emotions, desires, and your full presence with everything you encounter — sort of like a Zen master.

**Applying your experience to everyday life:** At the end of this activity, spend some time feeling into the experience you just had. What have you discovered about your relationship with innocence? Is innocence present in your daily life? In what way(s)? For the next two or three weeks, every day invite innocence more fully into your experience. Allow yourself to be thoroughly present with individual things, people, places, and experiences. You might also offer your attention to things, people, and events that seem exceptionally innocent. Take a few notes every evening on your discoveries about innocence.

### **Dreamwork:**

*Time: 10 minutes or more, Material: your journal; optional: drawing paper, crayons or pastels, modelling clay*

Go back through your dream journal and look for images of innocence. On a new page, record these images, and/or sketch them on drawing paper, or sculpt them with clay. In your dayworld, re-enact these moments of innocence from your dreams, using any helpful props. Sink into the dream images by feeling and sensing their every detail. Write about what these innocence images evoke for you: emotions, other images, and memories.

**Applying your experience to everyday life:** In what ways does this exercise further flesh out your understanding and experience of innocence? Choose one new dimension of innocence to cultivate for the remainder of the day.

### **Play:**

*Time: 30 minutes or more, Materials: see below.*

If you don't already have them at your home, go to a thrift store or a friend's house to find some stuffed animals, toys, etc. Allow yourself to play 1-2 times a week. If possible, do this outside on the grass or in the tub or someplace safe for a very small child when they first start to explore and play. Use your body as part of your play and exploration arena. Afterwards, spend some quiet time with your feelings and your body. What emotions, stories, and memories come up, if any? Do a slow body scan. What do you feel in different parts of your body? What emotional resonances do you have with these body feelings? The purpose of this activity is not to draw any conclusion but simply to bring alive the body's and emotion's own intelligences. As you do this, new awarenesses begin to arrive.

**Applying your experience to everyday life:** How will you integrate more play into your life? Make a clear commitment that serves you.

**Art:**

*Time: 30 minutes or more, Materials: things from nature or your home, a bed sheet*

Go outside and collect different kinds of natural things that you find in your backyard, on the sidewalk, in a park, in your garden, or a nearby forest. (If you don't feel like going outside, then collect small things of different textures from inside your house). Place them on a bedsheet in your room. Put a blindfold on. Now let yourself fall into the awareness of a stage-one human. You're maybe one or two years old: Touch, smell, feel, taste the different things on the sheet as if for the first time in your life. Be deeply curious, with your attention fully focused upon each object, using all your senses. No judgments or naming, but simply dwelling within an innocent, wide-open, present-centeredness — being here and now fully and simply, connected and relational to all that is sensed and felt in the moment, just as it is. As Piaget writes: "The infant exhibits an unquestioned acceptance of the given." Experience the different textures, sizes, and temperatures as deeply and fully as you can. As you move from one to the next, let your objects fall on the sheet however they fall. At the end, take your blindfolds off and appreciate the artwork you created on the sheet (or on your body☺).

**Applying your experience to everyday life:** For the next seven days, choose a time of day to take a break in your daily routine; spend five minutes exploring an interesting object as you employ the full curiosity of an innocent child. It might be a piece of wood, a fork on your table (something you notice at the start of a meal), something you eat very slowly and consciously, a fragrance you give full attention to, or a sound you let into your very core. (Doing this cultivates your curiosity and wonder (a stage-2 process) as well as supporting you to reclaim your innocence.)

**Questions to enjoy or ponder (to help you live more fully the qualities of a soulcentric Nest):**

- What was easy or hard for you in the above activities?
- What do you like/dislike about the stage of the Nest?

**Applying your experience to everyday life:** Which qualities of the Innocent do you live without restraint? Which qualities do you want to cultivate and include more in your life? How? When? Make a clear commitment to yourself that works for you.