

## **Podcast Series, Holistic Nature of Us**

### **Episode # 13: Meet Rebecca Wildbear**

**judithdreyer.com**

Hi I'm Judith Dreyer,

Thank you for joining me for this pod cast series "The Holistic Nature of Us".

My intent is to take us, you and I, into a better understanding of the concepts behind our holistic nature and how that ties directly to the holistic nature of the world around us. How can we connect the dots in practical ways that we are nature and nature is in us?

I will be featuring authors and educators, practitioners and others whose passion for this earth helps us create bridges. We'll see what's trending, what's relevant to our world today, not just for land use, but to connect the dots between nature and ourselves. It's time for practical action and profound inner change so our natural world is valued once again.

And today I am so delighted to introduce you to Rebecca Wildbear. She is a therapist and wilderness guide since 1997 and does river and soul guides for the Animas Valley Institute. She is the creator and founder of wild yoga and offers classes and programs out of Durango, Colorado. She supports people in discovering their souls deepest longing and living a life of creative service while rediscovering their deep belonging with the earth community.

Hi Rebecca, good morning. It's a pleasure to have you here today.

R: Good morning. Good to be with you.

J: Rebecca, I met you in kind of a synchronistic way. I received Father Rohr's daily newsletter. He's the founder for the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque New Mexico and he often writes about how important nature is, not only for our own growth and development as a human being, but more than that. We need nature. He stresses that, you know, over and over again. He quotes Bill Plotkin, who's the founder of the Animas Valley Institute and the March newsletter about soulcraft, his programs connecting to nature and again deep personal growth. And the question I have for you is, you know, are we listening? You know today we are in a time of extraordinary challenge. We have very endangered species. We have imperiled ecosystems and there's a lot of deep concern, are we doing enough in a timely enough fashion? Tell me about this dot we're trying to connect today between what you do and nature and how important our connection is.

R: Great, thank you. Well one of the ways I feel like I am supporting the shift that needs to happen in our world is in shifting people's consciousness. I think it is Joanna Macy

who talks about holding actions, actions that support new technology and creations and also shifting consciousness. Shifting consciousness is kind of the focus. And, of course being out in nature and being in relationship with nature is one way that that happens. Because one way our consciousness deeply needs to shift is the realization is that we are really connected to the earth. That she is our mother. You know all the elemental parts of us come from her body and we would certainly not be alive without her. And how can we move into a reciprocal relationship with her as well as coming to understand our own wild nature, our own animal being and also our soul which is connected to our inherent purpose for why we're here.

J: Well tell me a little more about that. We are a little reluctant sometimes to talk about our wild nature. It conjures up, you know, all kinds of stereotypes. Give my listeners a little bit of an understanding of the wild nature and soul. Tell us more.

R: Great. Yes, sometimes it can be mistaken. Wild is sometimes used in a party or loud fashion, not that it can't happen that way. But wild really means, I like Bill Plotkin's definition in his wild mind book "self-willed". It's our innate animal self-willed way of being it's unique. My wild way might be different from your wild way and it can be subtle and small and quiet and gentle. But it's natural inherent way that we are when we're not trying to say have all the overlays in our head of how we're going to conform to what everybody else wants us to do or what the culture wants us to do. It's just the natural way that our heart and our body want to move. It has to do a lot with our emotions, our erotic nature, our spontaneity, our present centeredness. You can think about the archetypes Artemis and the Green Man for the ones that just grew up. Those archetypal figures just grew up and are most at home in the natural world. And no matter who we are we all have a part of ourselves like that. It might be hidden or latent and on in shadow, or it might just be ready to burst and all it needs is some time and it would connect. But either way it exists in all of us and it's a really foundational part of our wholeness, absolutely necessary for our journey in life.

J: I agree with you. I do a lot of dream work. I love Thomas Moore's work and Caroline Myss' work with archetypes and Andrew Harvey. All those great folks out there who are getting it into mainstream consciousness, how important understanding our soul nature is.

You take folks out into nature on river trips, mountain trips. How do you connect them with that part of themselves?

R: Ah well, we have...there are so many ways. First of all, just being out there. The wilder the place the better. That's why I love river trips. You know it takes you out away from any roads or trails, but the wilder we can go although, I've done this work on connecting to your wild self even in a city or in a retreat center. It can happen. There are a lot of kinds of invitations. Everything is always an invitation. There's wanders on the land people can go on to embody their wild indigenous one. And we also have suggestions for ways that you can do that. You know there are movements you can do. There are things that you can say when you're in conversation with the land. There's also ways of working with resistance. If there are parts of you that are shutting you down

from embodying that, you know a lot of times we have voices in our head, “This is really strange. This is so different to move like this.” You know if you’re really blocked in those ways then we have to work with where that’s coming from and how that’s trying to keep you safe. There are also ways; I do wild yoga, which is a kind of a body movement. When we get into our body, I always say my yoga is not Simon Says. Don’t do what I’m doing. Do what your body wants. I have suggested movements but my hope in my yoga classes is that people follow their own flow, and I offer a lot of choices for people at different levels. I work with a lot of beginners. In my classes, people come who have never done yoga, so I have to teach a very gentle class with some other options for some of the people who have done a lot of yoga. So that there’s an option for people who don’t have much experience enough to get into their body and have an experience. I have people often who tell me, “Oh gosh, I never would have thought yoga was something I liked but I really loved your class.” And it’s because they just got into their bodies. And everyone can do that. You know, dance and movement of any kind is a way that brings us into our bodies, so we do a lot of experiential dance movement kind of things as well.

J: Well cool, they say when you dance the earth dances with you, you know? I love that kind of connection.

Do you take people out, like in recovery, serious illness? Is it about adolescence or is it any stage of life that is looking to move to the next stage of life?

R: Yes, I’m a former psychotherapist and I used to work with people in recovery in wilderness therapy. I utilized a lot of these practices with those people as well. I think they work great with people in recovery as well. And most of the programs that I guide now are more focused towards soul encounter, and that’s hearing the subtleties of soul. We recommend that people have a certain amount of sobriety time already, at least a few months before coming on a program, otherwise they might be so overwhelmed by the addict part that is just getting used to not using that they might not be able to hear some of the other things that we offer. Somebody could still benefit but it’s just better to have a little bit of time in sobriety first. But either way these practices, I would say, work for anybody and everybody to connect to your wild self. There isn’t anybody in any place in life, at any stage, with any trouble that wouldn’t benefit. In fact, I love Bill Plotkin’s Wild Mind because it is all about embracing our wholeness rather than our pathology. Most psychotherapeutic, or traditional psychotherapy is focused on problems. You know, the diagnosis and this is focused on wholeness. Embracing our wild self and embracing the other aspects of our wholeness as a way to support ourselves in growing into who we really are. From there it will give us the strength to address whatever troubles we have.

J: Do you find people are open to working with the Medicine Wheel? I see that Bill’s programs are based on the four directions. Are they open to prayer when they get out there, that kind of respect with nature?

R: Yeah, I would say so. I mean most people who sign up for Animas programs have read the website. At least half have usually read at least one of Bill’s books, so they have a sense of what they are signing up for and the kind of thing, and they’re really ready to

go. Occasionally somebody comes who might be very different to but they usually seem to be able to kind of jump in and give it a try. My recent edge is how to reach out to the larger world that might not be somebody who would sign up for a program like that. You know I'm working on a book and how to write it in a simple way so that it might invite people in who wouldn't normally pick-up that kind of thing.

J: Good for you. We need that. We need that kind of thing out there. So, what's been the most inspiring part of this work for you?

R: Oh my gosh there's been so many inspiring parts. I feel inspired every time I guide a program. That's because in watching what happens for people with the land, I never cease to be amazed, really, at what's possible, even in a five-day program. And I suppose particularly on Quest, which are 3 days and 3 nights of solo. You know people go out... First of all, the people that we get that come to sign up and pay money to fast for 3 days and 3 nights, I mean you can imagine they're already pretty extraordinary people willing to offer themselves and their attention to the earth in that way. Then the gifts and mysteries that they come back with, it's just always... I can't remember what you question was but I'm always excited by what can happen for people. And I'm every turned on in this work by the possibility and potential for our people. I suppose that's what keeps me going, you know, because sometimes it is hard traveling and guiding, going, going, going and being around people all the time. But I just really believe that this is the best possibility that I can come up with for what could help our people. The idea is that people come on programs not just to make a better life for themselves. In fact, sometimes they could potentially even make it worse for themselves. That's always a possibility in terms of what gets asked for them could be something that's challenging, and a bigger responsibility, or letting go of something that they value. Although often people do feel stronger and more whole and more of themselves and more vibrantly alive after the programs. The point isn't necessarily one's personal happiness as much as it is listening to their purpose, their mission, their soul, what they're here to do, for all of us for the earth, and how to grow into a mature elder that they are.

J; Yeah that's what I really get inspired myself with. You know? I see so much innovation out there. We know that there are serious problems, right? Dough Tallamy in his book "Bringing Nature Home", he talks about the fact that there are over 4,000 species that are endangered today. We can't see that easily because if we have a bluebird in our neighborhood and we might have, you know, a grosbeak, we think okay, we've got some variety here, not just the robins and the blue jays. But what we don't see is how those populations are declining. When I talk about nature it's raising the awareness of how beautiful it is, how precious it is, and to get people turned on to going back home and maybe taking another step, another action, that brings in more respect and honoring to this planet for everything that we've gotten from it. You know we seem to be takers, is what I'm getting at. And how can we give back?

What is soul work, or soulcraft do about giving back to nature?

R: Yeah, I would say that, you know, it's kind of, in this kind of work in a way the giving and the receiving are a little bit similar. It's not such a, you know in the gross modern world taking, we take resources and things and we take things and we use things. In soulcraft practices we're giving our attention; we're giving our presence; we're giving our time; we're giving our listening ear, but we also are asking deep questions, things that we want to know and our ego and what it wants to know and what it takes can definitely be involved. But also, nature generally doesn't always give the ego its answer in that way. It gives it the lesson or experience that feels it is most necessary to have. And in our openness to really be taking in the guidance and wisdom that the Beings of the earth, that the animate nature world wants to reveal, that is a kind of giving and it's a kind of surrendering to our ego's comfort and our ego's agenda. Opening ourselves to the guidance and the wisdom, kind of that the earth is actually wiser than we are. That our mind is limited in what it can come up with and what if we turned our attention to the earth? And you know we also do have gratitude practices as well when we're out there. But I often think of our Quest ceremony, which is a 3-day, 3-night solo as one of the most beautiful giving to the earth. It's like, I'm going to empty my belly, be uncomfortable for 3 days and 3 nights because I so long for a connection with you and you know the wisdom that you would have to share.

J: Well that's an interesting comment. Years ago, I did a Vision Quest with my elder and you're right, the point is for us to give up something to say we value you so much we're willing to give up something and let's see what you have to teach us. The rub is, so to speak, what kind of an answer do we get in the moment and it may not come, as you said, in the way that we want. It is going to come the way we need and that's another lesson for our society, isn't it?

R: Yeah, totally, it is. And you know that is kind of the ego maturing. The adolescent ego that wants its way, that is destroying everything in order to get it, in order to keep its comfort, security, money, whatever it is that it wants. How can our ego really let go of those things and be initiated to a more mature way of holding everyone, all the people, all the earth in it's consciousness so that it can operate and make decisions more out of what's best for all?

J: Yeah, I like that. I love the idea of connecting the dots with the Quest. It's an emptying and then hopefully being open to receiving in any way, shape or form that is best for us so we get out of our ego mind, you know, how that should happen.

Tell me more about your work with your guides, and do you have any personal experiences yourself with connecting to soul and receiving guidance from nature?

R: Oh yeah. I have a whole lot of experience in that, connecting to soul. One of the ways our programs at Animas focus is on soul encounter. You know connecting to nature but also having a soul encounter.

J: Could you relate one for us?

R: Sure, I can share one that happened on my very first Animas Quest which was about 15 years ago. Soul encounter, there's often multiple soul encounters and so just having one doesn't mean you're done. There are multiple until what Bill would call "Soul Initiation", which means until the balance is tipped where you have such a full sense of your soul that your ego has become initiated in living a life in service to it.

This encounter that I'm going to tell you is more early on, which was on my first Animas Quest when I was 30 years old, 15 years ago, almost exactly 15-1/2 years ago. One of the suggestions that we get offered is to ask for our name. That's kind of one way of having a soul encounter is getting a whisper from a Being out there about, well what is my name? Which doesn't mean just what is my name but really what is my purpose, or it might be what is my purpose right now? Or what is the purpose you want me to most focus on right now? I asked that question every day while I was fasting, "What is my name?" and nature didn't give me an answer. Sometimes it did not respond and other times it kind of teased me and I heard like Spot, or things like, "you're not really ready for a name" which was probably pretty true actually. But on my last day I was the weakest, so of course when you're the weakest you're the most open. When I walked to my stone pile and back up, which was down a steep hill and back up the hill, and my heart, which happens often times when you fast, was beating really, really, really fast and I was feeling close to death, which reminded me of when I had cancer. I had cancer when I was 21 and I was close to death. I believe that was perhaps my first soul encounter, although I didn't know that that's what was happening at the time but that experience completely shifted my sense of the word and my sense of myself. I was feeling that connection to that time of dying and I went up to the rock, the gray rock, that was huge, that called me to that Vision Quest place and I asked again "What is my name?" And this time I did hear an answer 'Brave Heart' was the name I heard and of course my immediate response was, "No, that's not my name. That's a movie." Then all of a sudden, I just had flash before me of all the times in my life where I had been a brave heart and how delighted and full I felt. Then all the time these moments passed before me where they were sort of missed opportunities where I could have been (a brave heart) but I turned in the other direction for some reason, and the heartbreak of that, of that lost moment and then I had a sense then that it was true. So, I asked the juniper pinion forest, I said, "What's my name? You know, and it felt 3 times in a chorus they repeated it. And so yeah, that was kind of a first soul encounter and because I wasn't fully, I was sort of, I call myself a toe-dipper. That means I was trying this out. It was my first quest. When I got back, and I was eating food again I still wasn't quite ready to commit to that name, so it took another 6 months of waking up in the middle of the night and writing poetry and feeling my heart to realize that actually that is what is being asked of me. It's not just made-up and I'm going to take it on. I did a ceremony to take it on and commit to doing the best I could to live as Brave Heart, even though as most soul names it felt incredibly challenging because I'm shy and scared in a lot of ways. Since then, that was 15 years ago, I've had a lot more pieces and a lot more soul encounters and a lot more things happen in the last 15 years. But even now I would say, 15 years later, there are other mysterious threads to that name. Like my Irish ancestry and the rock that called me that had kind of continued to play in my psyche is like a name oftentimes isn't solid: it's this. It is more like a mystery that unravels over time and keeps giving to you forever.

J: Yeah, I can really relate to that. I was fortunate enough to have received a name and then I approached my Elders and they agreed with me and one of my elders who has crossed over, it was his first naming ceremony and I felt so honored. And you're right. When I connect with the name in specific ways I feel like there's another layer there. There's something else for me to, I don't know, absorb perhaps, to assimilate in a way. I really understand what you're saying. When I had that connection, it brought me to a different appreciation for the natural world. Because it's not just structure and form. There is a presence there. There is an essence there. There's guidance there. There is a way to connect that speaks to us but it uses a different language and I think that's why we're so resistant to it, because it doesn't speak our language. We have to be open to hearing its language. Does that make sense?

R: Totally, yeah. Yep, exactly. And I think that's the challenge of listening, isn't it, when people go out on wanders in nature sometimes It can be hard at first. Like, ah I didn't hear anything or oftentimes we admit something was said but we missed it. I believe soul is speaking all the time and so part of it is how do I attune myself so that I can actually hear what's being said. How can I make myself ready to hear what wants to be said?

J: I like that. How to make myself ready to hear it. You know there's research now, I don't have the author's name at the top of my head. He's from Germany and he's telling us in his book on trees that the trees cry. That the trees

R: Is it The Hidden Life of Trees?

J: Yes, yes. That's it.

R: I love that book.

J: And the trees cry when there's something really wrong out there. They communicate. When somebody a half an acre away needs a nutrient, they scramble and they have this communication system to help each other out and I'm blown away by that type of connection. I suspect that people like Bach and Beethoven must have this extra-sensory hearing. Maybe they've actually heard some of the sounds from nature and they've been able to put it in music for us to understand with our senses, you know?

R: Yeah, exactly. Yeah I think that's a great way of looking at music.

J: Yeah there's a gal that is going to be coming up on my podcast who does just that with plants and I'm really looking forward to her research and what she's discovered on that level.

Rebecca, do you have like 3 tips or something that my listeners can take away today to bring into their everyday life with the work that you do?

R: Hmm. Yeah.

1. well I think Bill's books are a great resource, especially starting with "**Soul Craft and Wild Mind**" reading those and seeing if they touch you or open you and the practices that they offer in there. There are a ton of them.
2. I would say, **spend time nature**. Spend time in nature and not time necessarily where you're doing something but where you can just sit back and listen and consider, what if the others could speak to you? What if they have an animate being, an animate presence? What if you could have a conversation? What if there's an intelligence here, a relationship you could open yourself to? What would you say to them? What do you imagine you might hear them saying to you?

J: Oh, that's beautiful. I love that. Grandmother Twylah Nitsch, she was the matriarch of the Seneca Clan, she crossed over a number of years ago, but she actually has a book where she received a small stone and that stone spoke to her and gave her the history of the world from their perspective. That's kind of mind-blowing, isn't it? That we can actually get that kind of information from a stone. In their tradition they are considered the record-keepers. There are countless stories in the native community about people who fall asleep on a rock. They end up with a whole story about what might have happened there. Or some kind of message for being there. I think that's for the second point that you mentioned, we forget how healing it is to just be in nature. And I'm assuming that the work that you do with your guides and your different trips, people have a chance to breathe again, dismiss all the technology and feel the wind, sit on the rocks and smell the water. We don't always make time for that, do we?

R: Yeah, exactly. Our lifestyle is a little bit too busy right; too full? And it is hard to listen and hear if we're already full, if our mind is already kind of hyperactive. How can we open ourselves to listen and feel the vulnerability of the conversation and what wants to be said?

J: Right. Anything else? Anything else you'd like to add today.

3. R: Well you asked for another tip so I'd say **dreams**. I know you said you have a series coming up on that. I'm super big into dreams. Every night we get personal messages, guidance. The others come to us in dreams. God comes to us. Whatever we want to say. The high intelligence comes to us in the dreamtime. So, record your dreams in the present tense. Write them down. Present tense makes it more here and now. We're a little closer to it than when we write it in the past tense. It's kind of distancing our ego from it so, yeah.

J: Great tip. It's one of my passions, so I love that you said that. Before we end, do you your contact information for my listeners? I'd love them to have your website. Any upcoming classes you would like to promote?



R: Yeah, I have my website. It is just my name. [www.Rebeccawildbear.com](http://www.Rebeccawildbear.com) and you can sign up for my newsletter then as well on my website. All my contact information, phone number and e-mail are on my website [rebeccawildbear.com](http://rebeccawildbear.com). As far as programs, I have a river one coming up that I'm very excited about. As I mentioned diving into, bringing people into the rivers, into the wilderness of the river and riding on the river is a real passion for me, doing this work on the river. June 4<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> we have a Wild Yoga Journey on the River trip where we are going to do yoga, being with the river, dream work, conversations with the land and ceremony for a whole week out there. I have a promo so if people sign up by April 20<sup>th</sup> for the river trip you get a free 60-minute dream session, so hopefully some people might be interested. Then the next program I have after that, coming up is a Wild Mind Program that's camping near the Telluride Colorado area, so if you want to delve more into Bill Plotkin's Wild Mind model you can sign up for that. I'm also doing training up in Vancouver, a mirroring training for people in the Wild Mind Training Program at Animas and a Quest in August in the mountains here in Colorado. So those are some up-coming things but they're all on my website so if you want to head onto my website you can look at them all more closely.

J: That's wonderful. I appreciate your information and I think the listeners appreciate that as well.

I notice that you talk a lot about poetry with the dreams and there's poetry on your blog, on your website, on Bill's. Do you have anything at your fingertips we could end with?

R: Sure. I know some poems by heart. Which one shall we go with?

J: Whatever connects us to the earth.

R: Okay, well how about Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese". That's one of my favorites. Do you know that one?

J: I know of that one, go ahead.

R: It's great because one of the things sometimes that I think stops us from connecting to the earth is that we've been domesticated. We've been trained, you know, not to get dirty, to act civilized in a particular way. But the first line of this poem Wild Geese is "you do not have to be good."

J: Hmm, I love it.

R: You do not have to be good. You do not have to crawl on your hands and knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. It's our wild animal body. You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. Tell me about despair, yours, and I'll tell you mine. Meanwhile the world goes on. Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of rain are moving across the landscape; the mountains the rivers, the prairies, the deep forest. Meanwhile the wild geese high in the clean blue air are heading home again. Whoever

you are. No matter how lonely. The world offers itself to your imagination. Calls out to you harsh and exciting over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

For a hundred miles through the desert,

Repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your

Body

Love what it loves.

Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

Are moving across the landscapes,

Over the prairies and the deep trees,

The mountain and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean

Blue air,

Are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

The world offers itself to your imagination,

Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –

Over and over announcing your place

In the family of things.

J: That's beautiful. Thank you. That is wonderful. I can only say thank you a thousand times for joining us at Holistic Nature of Us, and I hope all of you feel as inspired as I do by Rebecca Wildbear. Her talk. Her practical advice and reminding us about our wild nature.

This is Judith Dreyer, the author of "At the Garden's Gate", book and blog. For more information go to my website [www.judithdreyer.com](http://www.judithdreyer.com) and you will find information about this podcast as well as the transcript.

Goodbye everyone and have a great day.