

The dead bird was beautiful. It looked like it had just lay down on the cross walk and gone to sleep. I wrapped it in a fig leaf and brought it home. There was a fox near the dinning hall when we got back. I had buried the other four dead animals I found and I wanted to do something different for this bird. I sat down, put the bird in front of me, and waited for the fox to come eat it. It did not. It never came back. But it did not matter. I was honoring the lives of the bird and the fox simply by making the offering. The bird did not need to get eaten and the fox did not need to eat. I needed to honor this cycle of life for myself, so that I could feel connected to the world around me. When I honor the lives of animals and plants, I honor myself. I feel connected to the same energy that gives nature purpose and I find a certain purpose within myself. I try to bring this balance to my relationship with people, but this is much harder for me to do than with nature. In order to fully connect with the world around me in a way that feels balanced, I look to nature for guidance.

Persephone grows up in the lush, serene, eternal gardens of Olympus. When she dances, flowers spring up from her heels and even Zeus delights in her grace. Nothing dies and nothing is born in this garden. Even the wind holds its breath. One day, Hades spots Persephone dancing and falls in love with her. He drags her down to the land of the dead to become his wife, where it is so cold and so still only a pomegranate tree bears fruit and again there is no wind. But it is fruit of the dead, and cannot satisfy Persephone's longing for life. Slowly, her heart turns inward and joins the lost garden she loved so much.

Up in the world of the living, Persephone's mother, goddess of the harvest, shrivels in distress and the plants shrivel along with her. Harvests dwindle and famine spreads throughout the land. Seeing the world fall apart, Zeus demands his daughter back from Hades. But before Persephone can return, Hades tricks her into eating three seeds of his pomegranate. Now she must return to him three months of the year. From then after, Demetrious blankets the world in snow while Persephone is away and rejoices with light when she returns.

This cycle creates the balance of life and death. Without the decay of winter, new flowers could not grow in spring. "Death is the mother of beauty," (Stevens) and does not fight against life, but rather nourishes the soil and sustains it. If things did not die, new things could not grow and unfold their beauty.

Humans need this balance from nature in order to sustain themselves. Without it, we become lost in the icy world of Hades or drift away into Olympus's unchanging garden, unable to learn or change. With balance, we find our place in a web of interconnected beings. Every life is linked in some way. A flower needs a bee to be fertilized, which then grows into fruit that we can eat. This is the balance of life. When one organism is affected, the rest of the universe is affected as well, in the beautifully named "butterfly effect." Every individual is dependent on the world around them, as well as responsible for it. Sustaining oneself, therefore, means living in and with the

balance of the universe. Only when we fully connect to the world around us can we find balance within ourselves.

In order to fully connect to the world, people must understand all aspects of it. Our society puts constraints on the way we live by making rules to live by. We need some structure and consistency to ground us, and to allow us to live in relative peace. Yet we also need to understand the effects these rules have on us in order to understand how we connect to the world. Humans have found ways to do this through art, philosophy, poetry, science, astrology, and magic. We try to find the cycle of energy in nature, and bring it into our human world. Philosophy explores the balance of our minds reflecting the balance of nature; science, astrology, and magic attempt to put names on this cycle of energy; and poetry brings the intangible energy in nature into a tangible form by expressing emotions and ideas with words. Humans merge into this cycle when they break down the rules controlling them, and open themselves to the truth (and magic) of nature.

Around the 4th century BC, a group of ancient Chinese astronomers used a pole and shadows from the sun to find balance in the stars. By measuring the length of shadows at different times of the day, they found patterns in seemingly chaotic celestial phenomena. What we now call years, seasons, and solstices can be calculated from this eight-foot pole (Tsai). When these findings are charted, two interwoven fish-like figures appear making a circle. This is the Yin Yang symbol ☯; it represents the interdependent forces of nature. Dots of the opposite tone in each half show interdependency. The balance of light and dark forms the balance of life and death. All life is a part of this balance because all life is interdependent. In trying to map the stars, these thinker-scientist-poets found their place among them.

Humans are as much a part of this cycle as any other animal. The “morning wind,” of balance and life “forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted” (Thoreau 69), but it is a rare person who can find this flow within his or her heart. The balance that these men found in the stars is always there for us as well, just like the morning wind, but we must go out and find it for ourselves. The ancient Chinese astronomers found it by looking to the greater patterns of light and dark, but since the balance of energy runs through everything, you can also find it in the smallest corners of the universe.

Edward Osborne Wilson is an American biologist, researcher, theorist, naturalist, and author. His theory of biophilia, "the innate tendency to focus on life and life-like processes" (Wilson 1), describes humans' inherent connection to the world. Wilson has found a connection to the smallest of creatures—ants. Myrmecology, the study of ants, was an underdeveloped branch of research before Wilson started his studies. The story of ants begins with the evolution of flight. Early insects, or arthropods, evolved to have wings in their adult stages. Arthropods became more and more diverse thereafter, evolving into ants, bees, beetles, flies, wasps, and their many relatives (Wilson 1).

As arthropods evolved, they kept in common their mutual dependency on the colony. In a colony, individuals do not act on individual needs—they act on the needs of the colony. This forms a perfectly sustainable community. Every individual contributes to an overall balance that neither depletes resources nor the general health of the community. Wilson argues that even though a colony is contained and sustainable within nature, it is not exclusive. Unlike humans' ability to form a "separate faction on the basis

of personal and egotistic interests" (I Ching 13), the natural world welcomes all. If we can let go of egotistical interests and accept our place in the bigger picture of nature, we can find a biophilic connection to the rest of the world. Wilson devotes his life to understanding other organisms in the hope that "we will place a greater value on them, and on ourselves" (Wilson 2). By deepening our understanding of the world around us, we can deepen our understanding of ourselves.

Understanding ourselves allows us to find our place in the world and the balance of nature. By exploring the depths of our own mind, we explore the universe we live in. Once we get past the rules society makes, we can fully connect to the world around us by stepping outside society's placement of humans at the center of the universe. Time is one of the rules created by humans to help society exist—it decrees a linear way of living where life is ordered and controlled. Because time is a human invention, it does not exist in nature. Change exists in nature, but not in a linear way. Change in nature is a spiral, returning to similar but slightly different conditions cyclically. Seasons are not the same each year, although they exhibit strong similarities. Our construct of time necessarily limits the way we view nature as on a time line—a succession of events that follow each other—rather than allowing us to see the complexity and interconnectedness of nature, and thereby fully seeing that we are part of it.

If you cut away the outside of a tree, you find the hidden origin of its life within. Many layers encircle the original little tree stalk and time can be found with excavation (Penone). At the core of a tree lies its past, not part of the past but visibly existing in the present. Similarly, we see the beginning of our cosmos if we look deep enough into the night sky. Our cosmos is not linear as we like to think, but folds back on itself, with past, present and future existing simultaneously. When we view life as a spiral and not a timeline, we can connect to layers of balance that we are not even aware of.

Magic is a term we use to describe escapes or nonlinearities in time. It opens a hole in our linear thinking and lets hidden layers of the universe through. When I was little and I talked about the infinitude of stars, or what animals told me, my parents would ask where I heard these things. I would reply, "My bones told me." For me, magic is connecting to the unknown. It is finding beauty in the indescribable and becoming part of the mysterious forces of nature. When we experience magic, we question our perceptions and thinking, and move a little bit closer to connecting to the world in a broader, more truthful way.

Art tends to exceed time and place much as magic does, and is an expression of life beyond the boundaries of our rules. It is usually expressed in a non-linear way, so the rules of time do not apply. Through film, I create my own kind of magic by bending and exceeding the rules of time. Because I think in a non-linear way, I use film to express ideas as they make sense in my mind. I can explore, synthesize, and connect to the world around me in a way that feels more balanced than the traditional "man versus nature" view inherent in society.

In the story of Persephone, death and life give birth to creation. The only reason for change is to balance the death of winter and the life of spring. Persephone brings this balance by determining a time for light and for dark. She is the ultimate creator. When we talk about creativity and art, we are really talking about connecting to the balance of nature. Through art we shape the world around us, just like Persephone must shape each spring. She must create each new flower and design every leaf. She creates a cycle.

Things will return to similar but slightly different places each spring. Creativity exists in a spiral—forever folding back on itself, forever changing. It does not conform to society's rule of time. We must let go of the rules society puts on us when we create, and connect to the world through nature. Then we can truly explore ourselves and find balance with the world around us. When we become an artist like Persephone, we can find magic in anything.

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