

# Environmental Arts Therapy and the Tree of Life

## A monthly guide for your Soul's journey on this beautiful Earth

By Ian Siddons Heginworth

Review by Kate Phillips

I assume it is unusual to write a book review before finishing the text, but then it's unusual for me to write and thank an author for their work before finishing the first chapter. I write from halfway through the book and halfway through the year, crossing the threshold and stepping into the light as "the sun and the earth wrap themselves around each other like lovers". This book is structured over the calendar year and the reader is encouraged to move through the seasons with the book as a companion.

This book is eloquently written and it's tempting to just quote one after another of the many beautiful passages within it. Primarily written for a northern hemisphere audience, based on the seasonal cycles of England and Celtic traditions, it should not be passed up by those in the southern hemisphere as the wisdom is transferable and applicable the world over.

I placed an online order as the temperature began to fall in Melbourne, as the days grew shorter and we collectively began our descent into winter. Initial annoyance soon turned to delight when I realised that the book began in November, and that May in Melbourne was suitably comparable. I had assumed the start would be January or maybe spring, but how sensible and yet overlooked to remember that "all life is born in the presence of death" and that "each of our stories starts in the middle of someone else's".

This book had a specific appeal to me as an art therapist but I think its relevance is global. Ian's exploration of the power of metaphor is magical and reminds us that in nature we can find everything we need. His comprehensive understanding of the cycles of nature and the associated traditions combined with his own experience of working therapeutically with himself and others are obvious on every page. Do you know how Willow, associated with the month of February is related to Valentine's Day, funerals and the leap year? Ian articulates how these dynamics can help us as we encounter love, fear and grief on our journeys. There are practical nature based activities to complement the concepts presented and while I am yet to implement many of them; this mix of theory and its application is incredibly useful and enriching.

I felt moved to make artwork in response to the prose, which for most of the book, reads like poetry. I made images relevant to my own personal experiences, feeling more connected to myself and to the world around me. Although I didn't have a therapist to help contain my

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emotions I had art making and the natural world. This is not to say that the book is a replacement for seeking professional therapeutic support but rather it is a guide to help us access the resources available to us.

There is a large body of evidence to support the inter relation of wellbeing and connectedness to nature, as well as entire fields of enquiry and practice such as environmental psychology, ecopsychology and ecotherapy. There is also a diverse and growing body of evidence on art therapy, but there is a scarcity of literature that draws these fields together. For me this book represents and expresses the ancient and pioneering interdisciplinary exploration of creativity, well-being and the environment.

What you won't find much of in the text is explicit reference to psychotherapeutic frameworks. This is partly what gives the book its wide appeal but may disappoint the more academically minded or people working from a particular theoretical perspective. Ian recommends reading the book in chronological order, from November in the northern hemisphere (Autumn) and I wonder how it would be to start part way through with the relevant month, it seems such a shame to have to wait several months to start the book. I would love to see a sister publication specifically relating to south eastern Australia, as this is where I am and so much of this book is about place, and our sense of ourselves in relation to the world directly around us. But for now, I must return to chapter seven and the season it describes, to the blossom and the surge of spring; for now is the time to gather power, strengthen spirit, relight the fire of my heart and build my (sand) castle.

All quotes and paraphrases are from the book.

The book can be purchased online [www.lulu.com/shop/ian-siddons-heginworth/environmental-arts-therapy-and-the-tree-of-life/paperback/product-17820416.html](http://www.lulu.com/shop/ian-siddons-heginworth/environmental-arts-therapy-and-the-tree-of-life/paperback/product-17820416.html)