



My poweranimal is a
TURTLE

Marjan Verhaeghe

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“As someone thinks, feels and believes, so is their life.”

“All Life is connected to seven generations before and after itself”

*Dedicated to my children and grandchildren and ...
with all my heart,
Marjan*

Intro .....	.1
Turtle rocks in her shell .....	.5
<i>Tasks-stress.....</i>	.5
Turtle is holding binoculars .....	.9
<i>Procrastination</i>	.9
Turtle poses.....	.13
<i>Being angry.....</i>	.13
Turtle drinks tea .....	.17
<i>Difficult behaviors.....</i>	.17
Turtle blows soap bubbles.....	.23
<i>A busy life</i>	.23
Turtle makes a list .....	.29
<i>So much to do</i>	.29
Turtle sits quietly polishing a bone .....	.33
<i>Too much figuring out what to do</i>	.33
Turtle climbs on a blade of grass .....	.37
<i>Everything is against.....</i>	.37
Turtle on a stick .....	.43
<i>Act normal</i>	.43
Turtle and her backpack .....	.49
<i>Being short-tempered.....</i>	.49
Turtle is wearing a mask .....	.53
<i>Pretending to be different.....</i>	.53
Turtle looks through a funnel .....	.57
<i>Short circuit in communication</i>	.57
Turtle hums a lullaby .....	.63
<i>Continuous thinking.....</i>	.63
Turtle is dreaming .....	.69
<i>Impossible dreams</i>	.69
You know, Turtle lives in another world .....	.75
Turtle chews petals .....	.79
<i>Talking to the deceased</i>	.79
Turtle shows her altar.....	.83
<i>Talking with the deceased, continued</i>	.83
Turtle makes a string of beads.....	.89
<i>We are one big family.....</i>	.89
Turtle and the seven generations .....	.95
<i>Taking good care of the world</i>	.95
Turtle and the weeds.....	.101
<i>Treating all people equally.....</i>	.101
Turtle greets the day .....	.107
<i>Enjoying what is.....</i>	.107
How to find Turtle when it's urgent.....	.111
The end .....	.115
A word of explanation .....	.119

Intro

How lovely you chose this book to read. There a special someone I'd like to introduce you to. Her name is Turtle. You may imagine a big land turtle. She is already very old. With her dark beady eyes, she can look at you so wisely. And with the corners of her mouth slightly raised, she always seems to chuckle. She has a firm back shell where she can completely retreat into, head and paws and tail. Then she looks exactly like a big boulder.

She has always been there, at least I've never known otherwise. We get along super well together. To her I can say anything. Or more accurately, she just knows what I'm going to say. But before I tell you how it is that Turtle is so smart, I want to share with you how Turtle came into my life.

When I was a toddler, we had a real land turtle in our yard. She just lived there. I was allowed to feed her and sit with her. And I talked to her, too. And in fall I helped her to a cozy winter habitat in the back of the garden. And every spring I looked forward expectantly to the time when she would come out from under her sheltered spot. But then came a spring when she didn't appear when it got

warmer outside. She was no longer there. I looked for her everywhere and hoped every day that she would still show up. But it didn't happen.

I love animals; dogs, cats, cows, butterflies, birds, horses, sheep ... but with a land turtle I still have a special connection.

It's as if, how should I put it, as if I can also feel a little turtle-like.

So I was not surprised when a few years later a turtle appeared while I was quietly musing and daydreaming in the garden. She appeared in my daydream. She approached me slowly and sat down in front of me.

She was watching me very intently. And then suddenly she started laughing, laughing so hard that her shell shook. I didn't understand why, because I was thinking about very serious problems. But her laughter was so infectious that I automatically began to laugh along with her. When she finally stopped laughing, she closed her little eyes. And I closed mine too. For a while we both sat together like that, quietly and silently.

When I opened my eyes, the turtle was gone.

And the problem I was thinking about suddenly didn't seem so insurmountable. Because of all that laughing, I was no longer so caught up in it. I was very grateful for that.

That's how she came into my life. And I soon discovered that if I close my eyes and think of her, I can summon her just like that. That's why she's just called Turtle. She always appears. And even before I can say anything, I see her doing something that helps me with my question or problem. She just knows what I am struggling with at that moment. That's why Turtle is a power animal, my power animal.

In this book, I'd like to tell you a little more about those encounters.



Turtle rocks in her shell

Tasks-stress

From time to time I run through the house like a stressed-out chicken. Usually I am well organized, if I do say so myself. But then there suddenly comes one of those days when unforeseen things happen. Or something doesn't go as planned, or I need more time than I anticipated for a task. As long as I have the feeling that I can estimate how much time I need and how I'm going to handle it, I'm fine. If not, my brain starts thinking in circles, I get a pointy head and run nervously through the house.

I have already learned that at such times it is better to find a quiet place and try to distract my brain by thinking of something else. Not easy, because that brain is so bossy!

When I had yet another moment like that and was sitting on the couch with my eyes closed, Turtle appeared.

She was in a clearing in a forest, under some old oaks with wide branches. There was soft moss, fine grass and some small flowers. And around it were low bushes. I could hear birds whistling and water babbling. Butterflies were there too, but of

course I couldn't hear them. And there, in that cozy warm place, Turtle was lying, on her back, with her eyes closed. Quietly rocking on her shell.

That was such a funny sight, especially in contrast to how I felt. I spontaneously burst into laughter.

I heard her say: "Your thoughts determine your how you feel and what you do. If you can relax, that restlessness in your head will naturally stop. Then you will automatically know how to do things and in what order. Then you can trust again what your gut and heart are telling you instead of letting your brain determine everything."

I can totally believe that, I thought, but how do I do it? I am so tense.

I looked at her. Turtle rocked on for a while. If I could choose a favorite place, it would happen to look just like that. I heard her counting softly: "1 2 3", then nothing for a moment, "1 2 3" and then nothing again for a moment.

Automatically I began to match my breathing to hers: in 1 2 3, 1 2 3 out. After a while, the counting slowed down and so did my breathing. The stress disappeared.

When I opened my eyes, Turtle was gone. But I could still hear her voice: "Your thoughts determine your how you feel and what you do. So don't let your brain be the boss!"

I murmured quietly: "Thank you Turtle".

I stayed like that for a while. What Turtle taught me came in handy at that moment. I was already sitting in a quiet place, which was a first step. And now I learned that I can just fantasize a spot in nature that gives me peace. And then I can concentrate on my breathing. Counting will distract the brain and after a while it will naturally settle down.

Turtle taught me what I can do when I don't feel calm. I applied it several more times. At first it didn't always work out. But by trying again and again, it got easier and easier.

It is reassuring to find that your mind is not always the wisest, and that you may also listen to your body.



Turtle is holding binoculars

Procrastination

It was that time again. I had once promised to help one of my friends paint the bedroom. I had already kind of forgotten about it. But my friend hadn't. And when it was about time to paint, they asked me when I could help.

I really wanted to do it, but planning it was so difficult. That's why I kept putting off making concrete appointments. But the question did not disappear, of course. It kept nagging in my head. Even when I closed my eyes and tried to think of something nice. I wanted to go for long walks. I imagined myself walking by the sea, in a forest, along a beautiful path in the mountains. And then all of a sudden there was that question again.

And suddenly Turtle appeared there as well. She was standing on a path at the edge of a forest, peering through binoculars.

That seemed like a nice idea. In my imagination, I tried to do the same. I zoomed in on the horizon of the sea, I could see the mountaintop in sharp focus, I saw the birds in the trees up close.

Turtle shook her head. Apparently it wasn't like that according to her. And then I saw that she was holding the binoculars the other way around. Strange because then you could see things that are close by suddenly so much further away.

I guess she wanted to teach me something with those inverted binoculars. And yes, there came her story.

"Surely you now believe that I don't know how to look through binoculars? I really do. But it is fascinating to experience that something I see with my naked eyes here next to me suddenly seems very far away through those binoculars. Razor sharp. Take, for example, that tree here on the verge of the path."

That too seemed like a fun experiment. It then seems like you have a long way to go until you reach that tree.

And then I understood; it had to do with my procrastination.

Immediately I remembered that promise to help paint. Turtle was right: "Actually, you are kind of fooling yourself by procrastinating."

She peered through her binoculars again for a while, this time the correct way. She seemed to enjoy what she was observing. Then she disappeared.

I let my friend know I was eager to help painting and immediately gave up a few dates.

And honestly, I felt relieved after that. I was able to dream about walks and enjoy fun activities without that promise popping up time and again.

I closed my eyes and silently called out: "Thank you Turtle!"



Turtle poses

Being angry

It's hard for me; all this war violence all over the world, people around me who are angry with each other, speaking evil, bullying ... It makes me so sad. Sometimes I get angry at someone myself, but it never lasts long. I actually enjoy life more when I don't have to be angry about everything.

While I was once again overwhelmed by the way people treat each other and was staring sadly through the window, I suddenly saw Turtle in my yard. It was such a comical sight that I burst into laughter. She was standing on her hind legs, proudly erect. She stood in front of a large mirror. It looked like she was lovingly looking at herself.

She smiled at the grass, the butterflies, the flowers, the bushes and the big trees. She looked up and smiled at the clouds and the birds. Everything received a moment of attention. I followed interestedly what she was doing. Suddenly a bee flew rakishly over her head. In a reflex she retracted it for a moment. But when the bee passed a second time (or another bee), she stayed upright. With a friendly face she followed the animal's flight until it disappeared into the bushes.

"You know," she said to me then, "I was probably right in her flight path. That bee may have been trying hard not to fly into me."

I had to think about that for a moment. That's why Turtle didn't get angry; she could imagine how it could have been for that bee. And therefore she could understand that the bee was not targeting her.

But why was Turtle standing there looking at herself in the first place? What was she trying to tell me?

It was as if she could guess my thoughts. I heard her say: "Strong back, soft front." I had to think about that a little more. Turtle helped me with that. She explained that a back that is strong and at the same time supple can absorb shocks and thus protect your front. And because that front is then protected, I can safely open my heart. And she went on: "Then I can deal with difficult situations and persons in a gentle way. I can be sad or angry about what is happening around me, but I don't stay sad or angry. Because I can kind of imagine the other person's situation."

So far I could follow her explanation. But then I was still left with the question how to know if my back is strong and my front soft. Turtle replied: "In my case, of

course it's obvious, I carry my shield on my back. But it's not just about your back. It means you can learn something from your own anger. That's not easy. But every time you feel anger, you might wonder what that anger is actually trying to tell you. When you understand what makes you angry, why you get angry about that very issue, you learn something. Next time you will already be less likely to get angry or stay angry for a shorter time, simply because now you are a little wiser. That makes you more courageous. And if you feel courageous then you will naturally stand straighter. That's what I mean by a strong back. And when you stand straighter, your soft front is naturally more open. When you understand a little bit where your own anger comes from, you can also try to understand where others' anger comes from. Then you show your heart. Then your front is soft. You need both: a strong back and a soft front. You also need to make sure they are always well balanced. Once you have that, you can look at any situation from different points of view and try to understand it; even fear, anger and hatred. That doesn't mean you are okay with what is happening; it just prevents you from being dragged into it."

That gave me a lot to think about. I thanked Turtle for that wise lesson. I automatically straightened my back a little. And later, in front of the mirror, I might try a lovely smile.



Turtle drinks tea

Difficult behaviors

A while ago, I was meeting up with some friends. Since the weather was nice that day, we decided to have a picnic in the park. We chatted about all kinds of things. So we moved from one topic to another. And at one point we were talking about jealousy and how difficult that is to deal with. Not only in others, but also in yourself. And then someone in our group said that greed was also such an unpleasant one. And then we thought about all the possible behaviors we found difficult to deal with. We soon had a list that included sloth, vanity, greed, and anger. We had all experienced firsthand how it affects ourselves and those around us. We could also sympathize a little with someone who suffered from it. But we couldn't really think of a solution to it. We did figure out that getting angry wouldn't help. Nor should we ignore it or challenge it.

And then we heard the music of the ice cream truck. The conversation suddenly stopped. We looked at each other. It was as if we had agreed: we all looked for our purse and ran to the ice cream vendor as fast as we could. An ice cream was the perfect ending to our pleasant afternoon.

As I sat in the garden that evening and thought back fondly on our picnic, I remembered that conversation about difficult behaviors. I thought of talking to Turtle about it. And suddenly there she was.

She was sitting in the late evening sunshine drinking a cup of tea. She had found a cozy corner in the garden. And as far as I could tell, she wasn't alone. She had visitors. I saw her pouring cups for her guests. When she noticed me she signaled for me to come closer.

Her guests didn't seem to be happy at all. One looked angry, one seemed dissatisfied, a third guest looked like jealous and a fourth reacted as if he was being wronged. I felt sorry for Turtle. It is not pleasant when your guests are not happy.

Turtle remained quiet about it. She sipped her tea. Then she put her cup down. She pointed to her company.

"Yes, I have indeed invited guests who are not so happy. Occasionally I do that. If you have time I'll tell you a story."

I certainly had. And besides, I was curious about the connection between her tea party, the story and my questions about troublesome behaviors.

"Just wait and listen", Turtle responded to my thoughts.

"The story is about Buddha. He was born Prince Siddhartha Gautama, but at some point decided to leave the palace and live as a poor monk. He lived in Nepal and India a century before our era. One time he was sitting under a tree, very peacefully and quietly. He sat there meditating. At some point he felt that an unwanted visitor was approaching. One who tried to disturb his meditation. But Buddha did not let himself be distracted. He knew that visitor all too well. And he understood that he was not going to leave of his own accord, and that he would try to distract him for quite some time.

Instead of ignoring him or angrily chasing him away, Buddha said: "I see you, Mara, let's have tea." And he served him like an honored guest. He offered Mara a cushion so he could sit comfortably, filled two cups with tea, placed them on the low table between them, and only then took a seat himself. Buddha remained calm and friendly. Mara stayed for a while and then spontaneously left again. And Buddha quietly continued meditating afterwards."

That's a beautiful story. I kind of know who Buddha is. But I had never heard of Mara.

"The point of meditating is to sit quietly and calmly and not get carried away with your thoughts; on what you want to have or become, on whom you are jealous or angry, on what you fear and feel sad about. When Buddha suddenly felt such

thoughts and emotions coming up, he simply invited them to tea. He did not chase them away, nor did he want them to distract him from his meditation. He gave them a chair, they were allowed to be there, but he did not engage in conversation with them."

The wonderful thing is that thoughts and emotions that are given a little attention naturally become calmer. That's the magical power of that quiet sitting called meditation: it doesn't solve problems, but it helps you not to fight with them.

I understood. I could do the same when I feel jealous or angry or afraid of something. Then I could organize a tea party and invite them over. For example, I then put stuffed animals or dolls in a circle and give them each the name of an emotion or behavior that I am struggling with.

It's a wonderful trick I learned from Turtle: if I treat them kindly, suddenly they are not so frightening or overwhelming anymore.

Thank you Turtle for this valuable story.



Turtle blows soap bubbles

A busy life

Turtle was very concentrated on something when I suddenly noticed her. She slowly blew beautiful large soap bubbles into the air. One by one they left the blowpipe and floated away proudly. I greeted her, but she didn't even seem to notice. All her attention was on taking some soap, holding the blowpipe, orienting it to the wind, blowing and releasing. She kept looking at each bubble for a while and only then took some soap again to blow another bubble.

This encounter took place on a beautiful spring day. I had just taken the kitchen waste to the compost pile. It was so nice to be outside that I decided to sit on the garden bench. My head was spinning a bit. I had done a lot that day, but when I thought about it, I didn't feel like I had enjoyed my tasks. I had felt exactly like a robot. I was tired but certainly not fulfilled. I sighed deeply a few times and closed my eyes for a while. At that moment I saw Turtle engaged in something. She was standing next to me in the garden. From behind my closed eyes, I carefully followed what she was doing. I experienced what she was experiencing. Bubble blowing is a ritual. Every moment is important. Each step required dedicated attention. Those magical moments when the bell grows and grows and

then suddenly leaves the pipe and sails away majestically. So miraculous, that swirl of rainbow colors, the smooth changing of shape through the pressure of the air, the following of thermals.

Suddenly I heard her say: "It's important to do everything you say and do mindfully."

I actually didn't really know what she meant.

She very attentively blew another beautiful bubble. Then she said: "With this bubble I promise to myself that I will be more careful not to trample any more flowers. That is my intention."

What is an intention? Is it the same as a wish?

"An intention is more powerful. An intention comes from your heart. It's something positive. And importantly, you can almost see it happening already."

Okay, but then what can my intention be?

"I'm really not talking about great things you know. Your intention can be to do a task you are doing very attentively. Then you'll get a better sense of when you're trying to do too much. Or when you are going to do something that you are actually reluctant to do or that doesn't suit you. Intentions are just magical."

This sounds wonderful indeed. So it is important for me to think about an intention first.

"That seems like a good start", Turtle replied, "and above all, don't forget in that case that it's better to follow your feelings than your mind."

Good tip from Turtle!

"That's enough wise advice for today," Turtle said then. She took some soap and began to blow out slowly. "If you have an intention, we will send it into the air with this beautiful big bubble. When it bursts open your wish will spread in thousands of tiny splashes of soap suds."

I didn't have to think long. What I would like most of all is that from now on I will pay attention to everything that lives." Turtle looked at me for a moment. She thought it was a great intention but asked if I didn't have a smaller one to begin with.

Turtle took some soap, started blowing into the little pipe, the moment a beautiful bubble was ready to float away, I said, "From now on I'm going to pay close attention to my houseplants. I'm not only going to water them and take care of them, but I'm also going to talk nicely to them."

The magic lies in the dedication with which you blow the bubbles, speak an intention into them and observe them as they sail away.

Thank you Turtle!



Turtle makes a list

So much to do

Sometimes your head feels like it's about to explode. So much to do, so much you have to think about. So many things to remember and get done on time. And then suddenly another task comes along. And then I feel it becomes too much.

When I had had another of those moments and was therefore sitting quietly on the couch, Turtle appeared. She came to sit with me. When she had found a good spot under the cushions on the couch, she retracted her paws and head. I thought she was going to take a nap. But suddenly she reappeared from under her shell and waved with a piece of paper.

There were some scribbles on it. I saw the numbers 1, 2, 3. And also some little symbols and letters.

She explained to me that she wrote down all the tasks and chores on a paper and then gave them a grade. "Under 1 are the super urgent things and under 3 are the least urgent. Then come the little symbols. Those are also important. The asterisks indicate whether it is a task best divided into smaller tasks (2 or 3 asterisks) or not (1 asterisk). A task where it is recommended that you get help from others gets a

paw. A lightning represents all tasks that you can actually do right away. These don't take much time to complete and are easy to do by yourself."

After that explanation, she pulled her paws and head back in. It must be blissful to be able to take a quiet nap like Turtle, even though you still have a lot of tasks to do. I would like that right now, too.

Turtle always gives me wise advice. So I immediately started making a list. First, I very carefully wrote down all the tasks. With a title and a little explanation. Then I gave them a number and a symbol. Just like I had seen on Turtle's list. Suddenly I had a clear overview and also the beginnings of a schedule. And yes really, I could feel the difference immediately.

What a useful tip! My mind was calmer again. I settled cozily on the couch next to my power animal. I must have fallen asleep for a while. When I opened my eyes again, she was gone. I thanked her with a thumbs up.



Turtle sits quietly polishing a bone

Too much figuring out what to do

One time I secretly laughed hard again when I saw Turtle. She was sitting on a large boulder at the edge of the pond, at the back of the garden.

Can you imagine? A spot among the bushes and flowers where the sun can barely reach it. Where the pond ends in a puddle of pebbles. And at the edge a large boulder where a Turtle could bask in the sun. Actually a place where I would like to sit if I want to be alone.

It was in such a spot that Turtle sat. Wide-legged. And very intensely busy polishing something.

That day I was a bit lost, a bit listless. I wanted to do something to help others. I thought of all kinds of possibilities, but each time I shrugged my shoulders and thought: "no, I don't really feel like doing that". I sauntered outside. It was then that I noticed Turtle.

She felt me looking at her and stopped scrubbing. She looked at me and then at the thing she was holding between her front paws. Now I saw it, it was a bone. It was as if she heard me thinking: "That is pretty useless, polishing a bone".

"If you don't know what to do," she said, "it's because you think about it too much. You start thinking things up, in your head, with your mind. Just like you were doing now. And then something in your body tells you that you don't really want to do it anyway. You know what wise people from an ancient culture said? Large bones are hollow inside, that's a fact. If you can imagine yourself as a hollow bone, one that is open at the top and bottom, then what you really want to do or say will simply flow through it. Just like wind can blow through it. Then you suddenly feel what you want to do. For that, though, it is important to stop thinking of things you could do. You just have to wait patiently. Get a little bored. Until you automatically start doing something. And chances are, it's something you actually just love to do, but which you don't think is useful. Something you really enjoy doing gives you energy. It makes you happy and you radiate that. In doing so, you will automatically help others. People like to be with someone who is happy. That's why I regularly polish this bone. That way I don't forget that wise advice."

Even though it sounds a little crazy to think of yourself as a hollow bone, if Turtle points it out, it must surely teach me something.

I closed my eyes and imagined I was a big bone. From my head to my feet. And open on both sides. Everything can enter from above, everything can leave from below. A hollow bone can't hold on to anything.

Then I thought of a good plan. But how does that get into the bone? And then I understood: that idea didn't fall in from above. It came from my mind.

In that case, I better draw a little. Just like I often do when I want to relax a bit. Turtle had disappeared by now. I was grateful to her for that wise conversation. And actually I had already solved the thinking problem: Drawing is what I love to do most. It makes me happy. And who knows what I can do for others with it. Suddenly I really felt like it. It promised to be interesting.

What my head can and does is also important, but more on that in another story.



Turtle climbs on a blade of grass

Everything is against

In the summer, we always have little grasshoppers in the garden. Sometimes you see them hopping out of the grass at your feet. And occasionally you see one hanging from a blade of grass. But a Turtle hanging from a blade of grass, you may never have seen that before. Now you're probably thinking: that Turtle is too big and heavy for that. But imagine if the blade of grass were sturdy enough. And then imagine a Turtle, with its four legs firmly clamped around the stem, hanging from such a long culm. The wind is blowing a bit. The Turtle is having some trouble hanging on.

That was exactly what I saw as I sat in the garden feeling unhappy. Everything was against me. Or at least I had that feeling. For a long time I had been trying to get really good at handstand and cartwheel and all those other wonderful acrobatic gymnastics exercises. I wanted that so badly, but because it was not really working out, it made me a little sad. I was also a little angry with my body. Why couldn't I do that and others could?

"Can I come down now?", Turtle asked me. "Of course," I thought, "you're hanging there so unfortunate. Turtles aren't grasshoppers, are they? Why are you acting so crazy?"

"Hihi," I heard Turtle say, "you're trying to do something you see others doing, aren't you?"

I got it, Turtle wanted to make something clear to me. I was so curious about her story that for a moment I forgot to be sad.

"You don't have to mirror what others can or do. Everyone is a little different and everyone has their unique talent. If you want to enjoy what you do, it's best to first figure out what your talent is. That doesn't mean you can't do gymnastics. I just think acrobatic gymnastics is not your talent. Think about what you could do to find fulfillment in gymnastics."

I knew perfectly what I wanted to do! My sad thoughts were already ebbing away. I am good at drawing and writing. Maybe a comic strip about gymnastics would be fun or a song illustrated with drawings, or And then of course I still have to try it out myself first.

As I thought about this, I felt a different kind of enthusiasm than when I longed to become good at acrobatic gymnastics. I was grateful to Turtle for her brave stunt.

Normally, Turtle disappears the moment I understand what she wants to show me. Not this time, she stayed for a while and then very proudly told a story about an ancestor Turtle.

It's about the origins of Turtle Island. That is the name for the land we know as North and Central America. The original inhabitants still call their land by that name. For them, the Turtle played an important role in the creation of Earth. They still tell this story. Curious?

There was a time when the world had no solid earth, only water and air. The animals devised a plan to be able to live on land too. The good divers would collect sand from the bottom of the ocean. And turtle had offered to put the sand on her back because she had a wide sturdy back. Besides, she was a quiet animal and you could always rely on her.

Several animals tried to swim to the bottom of the ocean to bring back some sand. Each animal came back with some grains of sand. The last animal that tried to dive to the bottom was the muskrat. He stayed underwater for a long time. When he surfaced again, he had plenty of sand in his hand, but he was very exhausted.

Fortunately for them, a Sky Woman came falling down from the sky. Birds saw it happen and had caught her. They flew her to where the animals were busy bringing sand to the surface. Sky woman was just in time to take over the muskrat's sand. She put it on the Turtle's back. Then Sky Woman blew over the sand and it began to have life.

Thus the land began to form and thus Turtle Island was born.

That really is a beautiful story. And I also understood why Turtle was telling it to me now. Just by doing what she is good at, the ancestor turtle became valuable in this story.



Turtle on a stick

Act normal

Nothing more frustrating than people saying to you: "Act normal." What do they mean by that? What do they think acting normal is? Is that being calmer than you were at the time? Do they mean listening and doing what they say? Do they mean you don't fit in with them because of your behavior or because of what you say or dream?

What should you do with a statement like that? They upset you and you start doubting yourself. You quickly think there is something wrong with you. You are not as you should be. The worst part is that until then you thought what you were doing was normal.

When I was addressed like this once again, I secretly hoped Turtle would hear it and be able to help me.

She stood on her hind legs and looked up attentively. At first I didn't see what she was looking at. She had a long stick between her front paws. She signaled that I could come a little closer. Only then did I notice at the end of that long stick a green shape. It looked like a small Turtle.

When she noticed that I was watching her with interest, she put the stick down.

"You now think I'm just holding a turtle form in the air eh," she asked me. I nodded. That was indeed what I thought.

"Imagine that shape on the stick being me," Turtle continued. "I keep a small version of myself in the air because it allows me to look at myself. I want to try to experience what others experience when they meet me."

I could think of a few other ways to look at myself. In a mirror, for example. Or asking my friends or family what I wanted to know about myself. But they usually say something along the lines of: you're okay, sweet and helpful and sometimes a bit stubborn. Or: we love you, but sometimes we would appreciate it if you would just act like a normal person.

"Shall I teach you how to look at yourself? Because it's not just holding a stick in the air."

Of course I wanted that.

"Here we go. Sit down quietly. Close your eyes. Sit like that for a while without doing anything, just keep breathing in and out. Then imagine yourself walking away. Some 10 steps far. The image of yourself gets smaller. The image turns around and looks at you. Can you see that? That is your little self. Now first say hello to your little self. Then ask it, for example, what it really likes doing and

where it really would like to be? Keep looking at your little self. You love it and really want to know what makes it happy. Listen now. Not with your ears, not with your wishy-washy mind either, but with your heart and your gut. It may take a while for your little self to answer. It must first feel that it is safe to tell you its deepest desires. At some point you will surely succeed.

For example, you can ask it how it feels when it is in the company of your friends or when it is at the table with your family. That way you will find out whether it feels good in that situation or is actually uncomfortable. If it does not feel really happy, it is quite possible that it is because it cannot cope well with their behavior or with an agreement. Maybe it feels it is too crowded or it has a problem at that moment.

That way you will get to know yourself a little better. If something in your environment bothers you, you will react to it in your way. And that's what others experience then. And if you know that, you can see if there is anything you yourself can do to make the situation more enjoyable for yourself.

But if you are happy, you can just continue to be yourself. After all, we are all unique and so it's okay to be a little different."

At first, it was a little hard to sit still and wait for my little self to talk. I wanted so badly to get rid of my frustration.

But I tried again and again, and now I can already talk nicely to my smaller self. I also know now that I have a lot of imagination and I can do beautiful things with it, but that not everyone is like that. My mind actually works a little differently.

Turtle gave me another good tip before she disappeared again. She pointed out that we assume that everyone is like ourselves. But that's not so. When we see others doing something we would do differently, we react. Turtle promised she would tell me about that later.

I forgot to thank Turtle. I found it so wonderful that I could talk to my little self that I hadn't noticed she had disappeared. I sent her a thought message afterwards with a sweet thank you.



Turtle and her backpack

Being short-tempered

Before I go on a trip, I always carefully lay out the things I may need along the way. No more than strictly necessary because I have to carry that backpack for an entire trip. When I return home, I unload everything and throw away what is no longer useful. Logical right?

Yes, with a real backpack it is. But Turtle has taught me that we also carry an imaginary backpack. We carry it every day, she says.

That was a moment when I felt sorry for myself. I felt like everything was against me. I had left a party angry and sad. Someone had said something to me that I didn't like at all. It sounded to me like a reproach. And it immediately reminded me of situations from the past that I didn't like. It all came up again.

So that's why I was walking through the garden being a little angry and pathetic. And then I saw Turtle sitting there. "Aren't you okay?" she asked when she heard me mumbling like that. I didn't answer. "Take off your backpack," she then said. "I don't have a backpack on," I replied, "I come from a party." "And you left there angry," continued Turtle (Turtle just knows everything).

At that, she imperturbably continued emptying her backpack. When she had finished doing so, she began to sort the contents around her. Two piles she made. "These things here I keep and that pile may go," she explained. "You know, if you keep your backpack on for a long time it gets pretty full. More and more comes in and you don't take anything out."

I had never seen Turtle walking around with a backpack, had I?

"It's not a real backpack. Imagine you have an invisible backpack on right now. Do you know what's in it? All the events of the past that still make you angry or sad. Also things you have done yourself that you are not so proud of. You stuff all that in there."

I looked at Turtle a little dumbfounded. How does that make me any wiser?

Actually, you are still angry and sad about what was done to you in the past. Now suppose you take those events out of your imaginary backpack one by one and take a moment to think about why you would still be angry or sad now about that incident back then. Imagine the situation: where it was, what happened. And look at it the way an umpire would look at a match. Maybe now you can understand a little bit how that situation could have happened. Perhaps it was not really meant personally, or the other person was also unhappy and did not understand how their reaction affected you, ...

Therefore, I now have 2 heaps: the big heap may be disposed of, those occurrences I can now understand better and no longer make me angry or sad. In the small heap are a few incidents that I can't quite place yet. I still need some time for that. But if I put my backpack back on now, I will already feel a lot lighter. That prospect automatically makes one happier, doesn't it?"

Since Turtle always gives me such good advice, I was willing to try this crazy idea. All afternoon and evening I was working on it. Until I felt that all the troublesome things were out of my imaginary backpack. I took the time to think about each situation. I did as Turtle taught me in the story of Turtle drinks tea. I gave each event I dug out of my backpack a name and offered it a chair and a cup of tea. And then I listened to its story, just as you listen to a friend's story. Afterwards, I had two piles, one large and one slightly smaller. After that, I felt tired. I already understood that I would have to empty that backpack a few more times. But it made me feel good to walk around with a lighter backpack. And to no longer have to leave a party angry.

Turtle was long gone by now. To thank her, I sent her a big kiss.



Turtle is wearing a mask

Pretending to be different

I love masks. Masks of animals, of strange creatures, creepy masks or cheerful ones. Each mask has its own look. You can hide behind them so wonderfully. It is as if you then suddenly dare more. You can choose the mask so that it portrays the feeling you want to convey.

I find it more difficult when people have an invisible mask on. I am talking about people who pretend to be different than they really are. Then you have to find out who is behind the mask. That is exhausting. You just feel that something is not right. Especially if you yourself like to be open and honest.

Recently I found myself in such a situation. I had experienced a nice afternoon with some friends. We had gone to the park together. But when I got home, I felt a little exhausted. We had nice conversations, but at the same time I had the feeling that there was something more to it. Something I couldn't name. It prevented me from experiencing that afternoon as truly enjoyable.

Maybe there was something about the atmosphere at the place where we met, or there was a tension between my friends that I hadn't noticed, ... I couldn't put my finger on it.

So I laid on the couch thinking a bit. Then Turtle appeared. As if she was being called.

She seemed to be in a store where you can buy all kinds of things to dress up. She was busy picking out something and trying it on. She was standing with her back to me, so I couldn't see what exactly she was doing. After a while, she turned around. That was the strangest thing I had seen so far: a Turtle with a mask on. I looked at her questioningly. She seemed to catch my astonishment and then told me the following.

"When you put on a mask you are actually hiding your true face. Often you don't even know you have a mask on. In this case, I'm not talking about a real mask like mine. We just hide our deep feelings and pretend to be kind or sad. But it is quite possible that in reality you are angry or frustrated or feeling a deep pain. You don't want other people to dislike you or hurt you even more. That's why even as a child you learn to shield yourself. With an invisible mask, it works just fine. Everyone has one of these.

Actually, then, you know that people who hide behind a mask are in pain. Often because of something that happened in their lives. In fact, they are afraid to feel

more pain. Even though by now they don't need to. But as long as they don't feel safe and dare to just be themselves, that mask will remain.

You feel it when you are with them; what their face or their attitude tells you does not quite match how you experience them. Sometimes you find this out quickly, sometimes only after a while.

It has nothing to do with you personally. When you know that, you can just be nice to them."

Thank you, wise Turtle. I hadn't thought of it that way. I was determined to look at it that way in the future. And hopefully others will too when I have such an invisible mask on.



Turtle looks through a funnel

Short circuit in communication

This story could be a sequel to the story with the mask.

It happened on a busy day. I hurried to make an appointment with my big brother. We had been suggesting the idea of cooking together for a long time. So I called him. But that went wrong. He responded rather briefly to my proposal. To me it felt like he didn't feel like it. While I was really convinced that he would like it. The incident kept me busy. After dinner, I decided to go out in the garden for a while. A walk along the flowers, bushes and trees usually helps me relax.

And there stood Turtle. With a funnel in front of her head. What could she possibly want to accomplish with that?

"Good of you to ask", I heard Turtle say "I am doing the same thing as you." I suspected it had something to do with my thoughts. Whenever Turtle appeared there was always a connection to something I was doing or thinking recently. "Yes definitely," she responded, "it has to do with the way you are looking at the conversation with your brother at the moment."

I had gone outside with the idea of not thinking about that incident for a while, and then Turtle comes to talk to me about it. I didn't think her timing was very successful. It irritated me. I turned around and wanted to go back inside. But that was beyond Turtle.

"Do you want to know why I'm looking through the narrow opening of the funnel? Imagine what you'll see of this beautiful bush then."

She managed to tickle my curiosity. That always works. I could easily imagine what she could see through that small hole: a very small piece of bush.

"Right, yes, and that is exactly what is happening in your mind right now with the conversation with your brother and how you are reacting to it."

I can still remember the words. Also the tone of his voice. And how my enthusiasm was suddenly gone and I clammed up.

"If this conversation were a piece from a graphic novel, wouldn't there be earlier scenes? And would those be just about your brother or also about you and how your day was?"

I hadn't looked at it that way. I had to admit that I had a very busy day. I was tired, some things had not gone so smoothly. Maybe that irritation was in my voice when I called my brother.

"That's already a good reflection," Turtle encouraged me, "and now your brother's side."

How his day went I don't know, but what I can imagine now is that he did respond spontaneously to my voice. And then he might wonder why I was calling him so irritated. In that case, I would react a little short myself. Then I certainly wouldn't be enthusiastic about setting a date.

"It's a matter of broadening your perspective. Then you hold the funnel properly. When you can see more than just that incident, you can think of what preceded it and what it may cause afterwards, just like in a comic strip. That helps to relativate the problem."

I understood her explanation. But how do you do that when you are upset? Very simple, but not so easy when you are constantly thinking about a problem.

"You have already taken a good first step by going for a walk in nature. Then you automatically stop giving the problem all your attention. And you begin to breathe more calmly. When you begin to breathe more calmly, you automatically get space in your mind to think about how the situation could have arisen, like in a graphic novel." At that, Turtle turned the funnel the other way. "Like this, so."

It's nice that at such times I can communicate with my faithful power animal. I thanked her and walked calmly through the garden for a while. Then I made a phone call to my brother.

The wise thing about this experience is that I now know about the image of the funnel: if you change the way you look at things, then the things you look at change.

If a problem like this comes up again, I just have to think of Turtle and her funnel and I know what I can do.



Turtle hums a lullaby

Continuous thinking

I remember a super fun moment with Turtle. It was on a beautiful summer day; the sun was already disappearing behind the trees. It was warm but not too much. There was a gentle breeze. A perfect time to take a nap in my hammock. So blissful to doze gently while watching the teeming leaves above me. As it happens, my hammock hangs from the thick branches of an old oak tree. But before I can fully enjoy that, there is one more obstacle to get around. My mind doesn't immediately register that I am in relaxation mode and don't want to think for a while. All those thoughts prevent me from really relaxing. I tried several tricks. First I counted leaves. But I didn't actually find that relaxing. Then I imagined a pink elephant living in the crown of the tree. That went well for a while, but you can't fantasize endlessly. And the moment you stop imagining, those thoughts reappear. Then I thought of listening to my breathing. That was already more in the right direction. But after a while thoughts came up; about my body, my clothes, ...

I closed my eyes and thought about the next trick. Then I saw Turtle. She was also lying in a hammock. A smaller size than mine. Hers was attached to a higher branch of the oak tree.

"Isn't that fun, doing nothing together," she said.

Yes that's fun, I thought, but I can't do nothing as well as Turtle.

"You know, people always have so many thoughts in their heads and it seems like they can't stop them. Thoughts are useful. They allow people to think of things and make appointments and so on. But sometimes people would do better to interrupt that flow of thoughts and have a moment of rest."

She was absolutely right. That was exactly what I was running into now. But we don't have an on/off switch for that, unfortunately.

"People make up all kinds of tricks to get it quiet in their heads for a while. But because those tricks are all thought up by the head, they won't work well. After all, they keep your head busy by evoking other thoughts in it. Now just feel what your body wants to do automatically to relax."

Then Turtle was silent for a while and closed her eyes. Her hammock was rocking slightly. I even had the impression of hearing soft sounds. So beautiful how she lay there enjoying.

I thought about her instruction. But I didn't know then exactly what to feel. It made me a little drowsy. My eyes fell shut.

"Yes so," Turtle whispered softly in my ear.

And then, of course, it was over. But I had experienced it! And it wasn't a trick. What happened was that my head began to rock gently. And my hammock began

to move back and forth as a result. Barely visible. My body did that automatically. I was not aware of it. And the magical thing was that my head liked that so much that all thoughts calmed down for a moment. Until Turtle brought it to my attention. Then, of course, my brain felt immediately addressed and the thoughts were alive and kicking again.

"Yes so," repeated Turtle, "and to ease that transition you can also hum softly. It doesn't have to be an existing song. Just gently sing some sounds as they spontaneously come to mind."

I evoked in my memory a children's lullaby.

She noticed immediately: "It's not meant to pass by your head. That's why an existing song is not the best choice. Maybe you should pretend your belly can sing."

That wasn't easy. We humans are used to relying on our minds for everything. But it's just like that spontaneous rocking: if you don't think about it, the body can do what it needs to do. Wonderful isn't it.

I looked at Turtle to thank her. But she had closed her eyes. Her hammock wiggled slightly and I heard soft sounds.

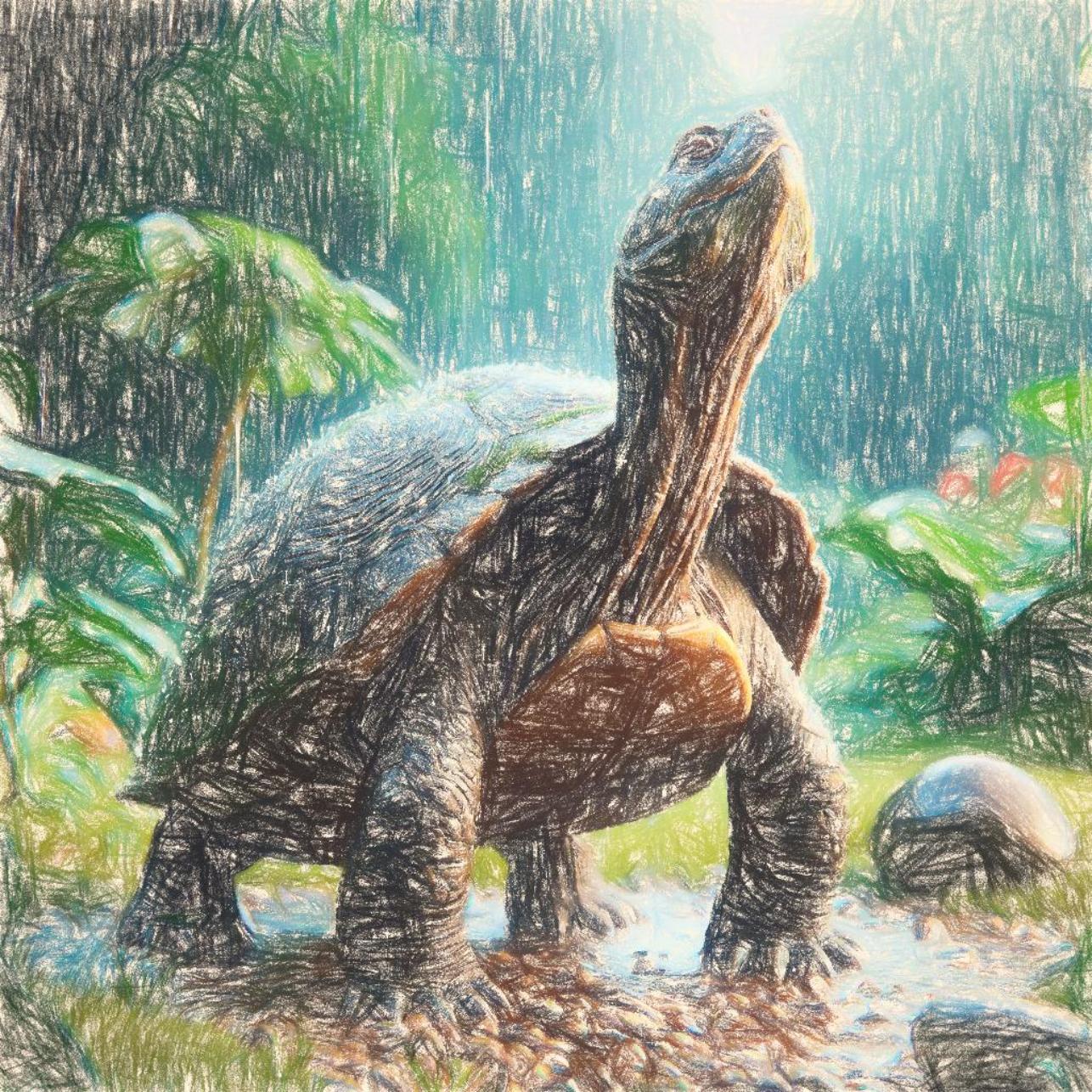
Oh yes, we also had a talk about thinking with your head and that gut feeling. Turtle thought it important that I understood why such a relaxing moment is necessary. Preferably every day, according to her.

“Some people are more into thinking; they want to look at and solve everything with their brains. Others are more feelers; they are primarily going to sense things. That is with the brain of your body; of your belly and your heart.

When you think with your head you are trying to understand how something is put together. It is useful to think critically, to make plans, to do practical things and make appointments. The brain in your body can't do that. But that in turn can signal to you that something doesn't feel right and you need to protect yourself or that it feels right and you can go for it. It can alert you to the fact that a little activity every now and then is helpful. It allows your brain to rest for a while. Afterwards, you can look at the situation with fresh eyes and start working with fresh energy. It's important to let each brain do what it does best.”

I will have to practice a little more to listen to both and understand that each brain can give me valuable information.

And what I find to be a very beautiful thought: relaxing in your hammock once in a while is actually an important activity. Thank you so much Turtle!



Turtle is dreaming

Impossible dreams

There is nothing better than snuggling under a blanket on the couch on a rainy day. With a cup of tea and some cookies. At moments like that, it often happens that you start dreaming about things you would like to be able to do or how you would like to be. And then you sigh a little, because the way your life is now, it seems like an impossible dream.

But that didn't take into account Turtle! Once, as I was sighing and staring ahead, I saw her standing in the garden in the rain. She was standing there wide-legged, as if to anchor herself firmly in the ground. And her head was raised. It looked like she was expecting something other than rain to suddenly fall from the sky. I kept looking at her.

"It is possible," she then said, "but there are a few things you will have to pay attention to."

I was all ears. That sounded like being able to do magic.

"If you really want something, you have to make sure it fits into your life. You will first have to take some time to figure out what you really want. Imagine a realistic movie starring yourself. Fantasize what your environment will be like, what your

role will be and how you will behave, what your days will look like, who you will hang out with, ... And what about the not-so-pleasant aspects, when things get tough? Let the movie play. And afterwards you ask yourself: Did that feel good? Does that make me happy? Don't let the answer arise in your head, but feel it in your body. When you are sure that your dream really suits you, then you can send out your wish. That's why I'm standing here like this now; head up and paws firmly on the ground; I dream a wish but I know it suits me."

Her explanation was clear. I understood that if, for example, you dream that you have a profession that requires you to be good at math, but in reality you find that subject really difficult and not fascinating, then it will remain just a nice dream.

I wanted to know how to express that wish, the best words to use and when to expect the change. A few practical questions.

"If you really feel deep inside that this is what you wish for yourself, you repeat that dream once every day. You imagine it as if it were already there. And if, during the course of the day, thoughts arise that tell you it's not going to work for you, take a moment to recall the dream. Then you will feel again what makes you so happy about it.

Don't underestimate the power of your imagination. Actually, you are a magnet. You are constantly attracting things, whether you know it or not, whether you

believe it or not, and the universe will respond to what you imagine in your mind and feel in your body. You can choose what that is. You attract what is most often and most powerfully present. So never put things into your desire that you don't really want or that don't suit you.

You cannot control when your dream becomes a reality. As long as you are convinced of your desire, you are on your way.

Well, then I have to think again if my dream really suits me. Maybe this fantasy was just fun to have in my head for a moment.

"Another tip: be grateful, that helps make dreams come true."

I was grateful to Turtle anyway, for that wise lesson. I now understood why she was standing there like that. She just felt deep down that she really wanted her wish to come true and then she sent out that dream. Just like you make a wish when you blow out the candles on your birthday cake.



You know, Turtle lives in another world

It sounds a little strange, but it is true: a power animal lives in another world. Not in the world we live in and can touch one another, nor in a world we can make up in our heads. They live in an invisible, inaudible, non-tangible world. Where exactly it is, I don't know. But it can't be very far away because they always sense when you are troubled by something. Then suddenly they are there to help you.

I am used to seeing Turtle appear at such a time. But a power animal can do much more than that. I can also summon her when I have questions about less everyday issues.

I'd like to share a bit about that as well. In all the stories that follow, Turtle got me thinking about some deeper questions about life and so.

But first I want to confide something else to you. You've probably already noticed: Turtle looks a little different every time.

Since she's not a real-life animal, she obviously doesn't have a real body either. At first, I did find it a little strange; I expected to recognize her by her shield or the way she walks or something. But now that I think about it, in a dream everything and everyone doesn't always look the same as in reality either. And that can also

vary from dream to dream. It takes some getting used to. But by now, I can recognize her by the way she wants to make something clear to me. Turtle likes a little humor and she usually does something that she knows will make me curious and want to listen to her.

She is never angry, will never blame me or tell me to do anything. This is also an important tip: if that is the case, that's not your power animal communicating with you. It is the voice in your head. If a spirit animal is trying to tell you something (it doesn't matter if it's with images or words), you can feel it in your body or experience it in a daydream...



Turtle chews petals

[Talking to the deceased](#)

She was chewing petals into little balls. White ones, yellow ones, pink ones, blue ones. She already had a lot of colorful balls lying around her. But I was so lost in thought that I didn't notice her at first.

Since I had found a dead bird in the garden a few days ago, I wondered what disappears from the body when you die. I buried the little bird in the back of the garden. It felt cold and stiff. Something had really disappeared from it. So what had just disappeared? Where had that gone? Who could I ask? All these questions shot through my mind. As a result, I walked inattentively through the garden. Until I tripped over a fallen branch.

At that moment I saw Turtle. She was sitting in that sunny spot by the bushes where she often sits. I watched her activity with fascination.

"That's a long story," I heard her say. I had time, so I let her know that I wanted to hear it.

"I will tell you what ancestors mean to us," she started, "and then you will also understand what happens when something or someone dies."

"Every human, animal, plant during its life has an energy. That's a force that allows them to breathe and do what they need to do. We call that the breath of life.

When someone or something stops living, that power leaves them. Their breath of life then draws away. From then on we call them ancestors."

I hadn't looked at it that way. Then surely I had sensed correctly that something had disappeared from the little bird.

But what about these ancestors? Are they really related to you? Do birds have their own ancestors?

"That's a fair question," Turtle noted. "Everyone and everything has ancestors. It is the energy of your deceased relatives and everyone and everything that lived before. Our ancestors are always with us even if you don't see them. And they are there for everyone. Just as I am with you."

What about people who were not so nice during their lifetime? What if they then become ancestors? Turtle understood my concern. "As we see it, most ancestors will want to help in a loving way. After all, they want future generations to do well and be happy."

That reassured me. So if you feel a not-so-nice ancestor wants to help you, just thank them and say you don't need their help.

But what was the connection to those petals Turtle was chewing?

"We have a special place where we lay small offerings to honor our turtle ancestors. We are vegetarians, so we like to give our ancestors a bite of the most beautiful and delicious petals. And while chewing them for them, I also talk to them. For example, we ask them for advice or we tell them what is happening in our lives, and sometimes we ask them to give us strength when we are struggling."

I suddenly had a lot to think about: the breath of life that is energy, energy that dissipates when you die, ancestors you can have a chat with, a special place to honor them. And so in fact my power animal was also an ancestor.

Turtle saw that it was a lot of information at once and promised to tell a little more about that special place in a future conversation.

I thanked Turtle for her wise teaching.

I understood that I had done well to bury the little bird. I closed my eyes for a moment and wished the energy of the little bird a good journey.



Turtle shows her altar

[Talking with the deceased, continued](#)

That conversation with Turtle about ancestry got a follow-up sooner than I expected. I had long dreamed of writing a story. I had lots of ideas, but for some reason I just couldn't seem to take action. I wondered what I was still missing. Would Turtle be able to help me with this?

Suddenly I saw her. She came from the very back of the garden. She smiled mysteriously.

"Good morning," she greeted me, "I think it's time to tell you something about those ancestors and a special place to honor them. Do you remember I promised you that?"

Certainly I remembered that. But why would she want to tell me about it now? Surely she always knows perfectly well what I'm going through. How could that help me write a story?

"I just spent a moment at the altar. I do that every morning. Just saying hello to my ancestors. Then I see if I can offer them anything and chat with them for a while."

I had never noticed before that there was such a thing as an altar in the back of the garden. Now Turtle is really making something up I thought.

She did not reply to my thoughts, but trotted me along to the farthest corner of the garden. A spot where no one ever came. Once there must have been a large tree there. Now moss was growing on the root stump and on the ground around it.

"The most important thing is that you pick a place where you can be alone quietly for a while. And then you see what is possible in that place. That altar can be anything. It can be a little table or box, or something you craft yourself. For me, it's just this old tree stump. On that spot you can then put something that reminds you, for example, of people or animals that were dear to you. The altar doesn't have to be finished all at once. And you may also make changes to it. Each object you put there can then be seen as something that connects you to the energy of that person or animal. Remember I told you that we call everything and everyone who lived before us an ancestor, whether they were really related or not.

It's good to visit the altar every day. You greet your ancestors. You ask them if they need anything. Or you just bring something; a flower, a candy, a drawing. That's why I gave them those chewed petals then. And then you can tell them something. For example, about what's on your mind and about what you would

like advice. If you are quiet and listen carefully (not with your ears but with your whole body) you will hear the answer. Just as I am helping you. Each ancestor does that in their own way. You will quickly find that out when you start talking to them. They are there to help you with love and patience so that you know what to do. That way you don't have to walk around with a thinking face all the time."

That explained why she showed up smiling.

It was a long explanation. But then what if I have a question and I'm not home and therefore can't sit at my altar? What if I'm traveling and can't stop by every day? "The altar and the objects you put there just help you sit quietly for a while and talk to those ancestors. If you're not home, you just find a place where you can be alone for a moment. Then sit there quietly and close your eyes. Then just call up the ancestor you want to talk to. They are always there for you, even when you are on the road. Just as I appear the moment you think of me, wherever you are."

I began to understand why Turtle was giving me this wise lesson just now. I know my grandfather was a good storyteller. He always had exciting stories up his sleeve when we visited him. Since he is gone, I miss those moments.

With him I would like to have a little conversation. I can put his pen on my altar. He is an ancestor who must surely be included.

"A good idea," agreed Turtle, "you have perfectly understood what I want to tell you."

I already had a spot in mind, in my room, next to all those pillows I have on the floor. I always find that a nice corner to sit quietly.

"An important tip," Turtle added, "don't forget to say thank you when you leave your altar or after a conversation with your ancestor."

I closed my eyes and was already dreaming about my altar and the ancestors with whom I might talk.

Thank you Turtle for your wise advice.



Turtle makes a string of beads

We are one big family

In the winter, I help the birds in our garden find food. Then I make a garland of peanuts. I put lots of peanuts on a string. And then I attach that long string between two branches of a tree. Little birds love them. When they have eaten everything, I make another garland.

One time I saw Turtle doing a similar thing. She made a garland of little shapes. Some looked like little turtles, but there were also other animals among them and trees and flowers. So funny, the trees were as big as a mouse or a dog or an elephant.

"In a string of beads, everything is connected by a cord," I heard her say. That is indeed why I chose a string. That cord holds all the notes together. But mine I hang in nature and may be eaten by the birds. I would bet my head that Turtle made hers for a different reason.

"This string is indeed not meant to be eaten. But this seemed like a good idea to tell you a little more about the energy I was talking about earlier."

I do remember. That was a whole new way of looking at the world. In everything is that same energy or power that makes it possible to live and do what you have to do: be a tree, grass, animal or human.

“That is indeed how it is. But fire and water also have that power. So do earth and air.”

I can imagine the power in fire and water, but on the power in air and earth I had to think for a while.

“Scientists have a scholarly explanation for that. I'll leave it to you if you want to look that up. I am a power animal. For me, it's simply important that I sense your energy clearly. Then I can help you.”

Then she was silent for a moment as if to think how she wanted to formulate the rest of her explanation.

If everything that lives contains that same energy, how should I imagine it? And then what is the link to the string she was making?

“That's exactly where I wanted to go, the link to the string,” she sighed with relief.

“You see, I have lots of different figures on my string. They are all the same size. I also slide them neatly against each other. Not to put as many shapes as possible on my string, but so they can touch each other. The string represents that energy. It runs through each little shape. It connects everything: people, animals, plants. I could also add air and earth and fire and water. All of that is interconnected. And

in my string of beads, everything is the same size. That's because I want you to understand that that power is there for everyone and everything and not a little bit more for some than others. Every animal or plant or human being can use that to grow and stay healthy and do things they need to do in their lives."

I think that's a very beautiful image, that we are all connected. But in reality, that is not the case, of course, I reasoned. "Yes it is," Turtle responded to my thoughts, "only it's not visible with your normal eyes. For example, try to remember how you felt when your best friend was sad. Or when your friend came to tell you something enthusiastically. Then you naturally started feeling a little sad or suddenly became happier. How do you feel when you open the curtain in the morning and the sun is shining? You people don't really dwell on that. Try paying attention to it for a while. You will find that a lot of what happens around you does affect you anyway. Sometimes it is very subtle and sometimes it is so intense that you cannot ignore it even though you would like to."

I looked at my string.

"And that's exactly why you're making that string now," concluded Turtle, "surely you wouldn't want those little birds in your garden to go hungry in the winter. That doesn't feel right, does it."

That was another wise lesson for me to think about.

But I was still left with a practical question: what happens to the ends of that string? Where is the beginning and the end of that energy?

"The ends of my string of beads are tied together. It is a closed circle. The force that gives life to everything pulls away when something or someone dies and then resurfaces when new life is born or germinates."

Then Turtle was silent. She saw that I found it a little hard to understand. No one had ever told me anything like that before. Then she came up with another image. "Think of a bowl of homemade pudding. A freshly made pudding that is not quite stiff yet. So the energy I'm telling you about is that pudding. You can put a straw in it. The straw then represents a person or an animal or a plant. That straw will fill up with pudding. And that human, animal or plant is alive. When you put another straw in that bowl, it also fills up with pudding. When you take out the straw, the pudding flows back out and disappears back into bowl of pudding. That's when a person or animal or plant dies. There are as many straws in that pudding as there are people, animals, plants living. Perhaps in this way you will understand better that we are all connected to each other."

Turtle saw that I did understand her comparison. That way I could imagine something about that energy. But it still remained a bit of a strange thought.

"I imagine you have enough to think about now. We'll continue our conversation next time if you feel like it." She smiled encouragingly at me and disappeared.
Thank you Turtle.



Turtle and the seven generations

Taking good care of the world

The last conversations with Turtle were very special. I learned to look at the world in a different way. What she told me, you don't learn in school. It's also super interesting to think about afterwards. In order not to forget her wise lessons, I wrote them down in a kind of diary. With little drawings, as I imagine it. And then I also wrote down all my thoughts and questions.

A question that concerned me very much was this: one day, I will be an ancestor myself. But suppose the people for whom I will then be an ancestor are not doing a good job. How should that be done? I would like everyone to try to live together. I know it sounds naive, especially when you realize how people treat each other now. Not to mention how we treat plants and animals and the earth. But in my imagination I can already see it before me.

Right at that moment, Turtle popped up in my dream world. She was drawing a strange tree. One with a lot of branches sticking up like a crown and with the same wreath of roots under the ground.

"Have you ever heard of the seven generations principle?"

I didn't know that. I do understand what seven generations are. For example, that is from the generation of our great-grandparents, over that of our grandparents, our parents, ours, that of our children, grandchildren to the generation of our great-grandchildren.

"That is indeed seven generations," Turtle agreed. "The seven generations principle has something to do with that. And it also has something to do with your complaint. Do you have a moment? Then I'll tell you where it comes from and what its meaning is."

For a story from Turtle, I always have time.

"Long ago in North America, a number of groups of native peoples lived peacefully side by side. Each group had its own name, but together they called themselves the Peoples of the Longhouse. The longhouse was the place where they came together to meet and talk about living together. The seven-generation principle is an important piece of their Great Binding Law.

For the Peoples of the Longhouse, for example, it was normal to share work and help each other. They also considered it natural to help their families. They had certain obligations to their own group and also to that larger group. For them, the earth was not a possession; you couldn't buy it. They were allowed to work it and

use it. So they were grateful to nature and the Great Creator because it provided for their livelihood.

The seven generations principle is part of that. That is a very unique principle and perhaps the finest one there is for living respectfully. It takes into account seven generations that have already died and seven generations that have not yet been born.

They honor their ancestors and are grateful to them. Because when those lived, they thought about the people living today in all the decisions they made. It is for our generation that those ancestors struggled. This is about the seven generations in the past.

They respect the world they live in because they realize that they are going to pass it on to future generations. When making decisions, they consider the impact the decisions are going to have on their descendants up to seven generations in the future.

If you think that way, you will automatically have much more respect for the earth and everything that lives.

The seven generations principle is about how we treat water and land, plants and animals, energy resources, as well as our relationships with each other. They believe that every decision they make together in this way makes the world a better place."

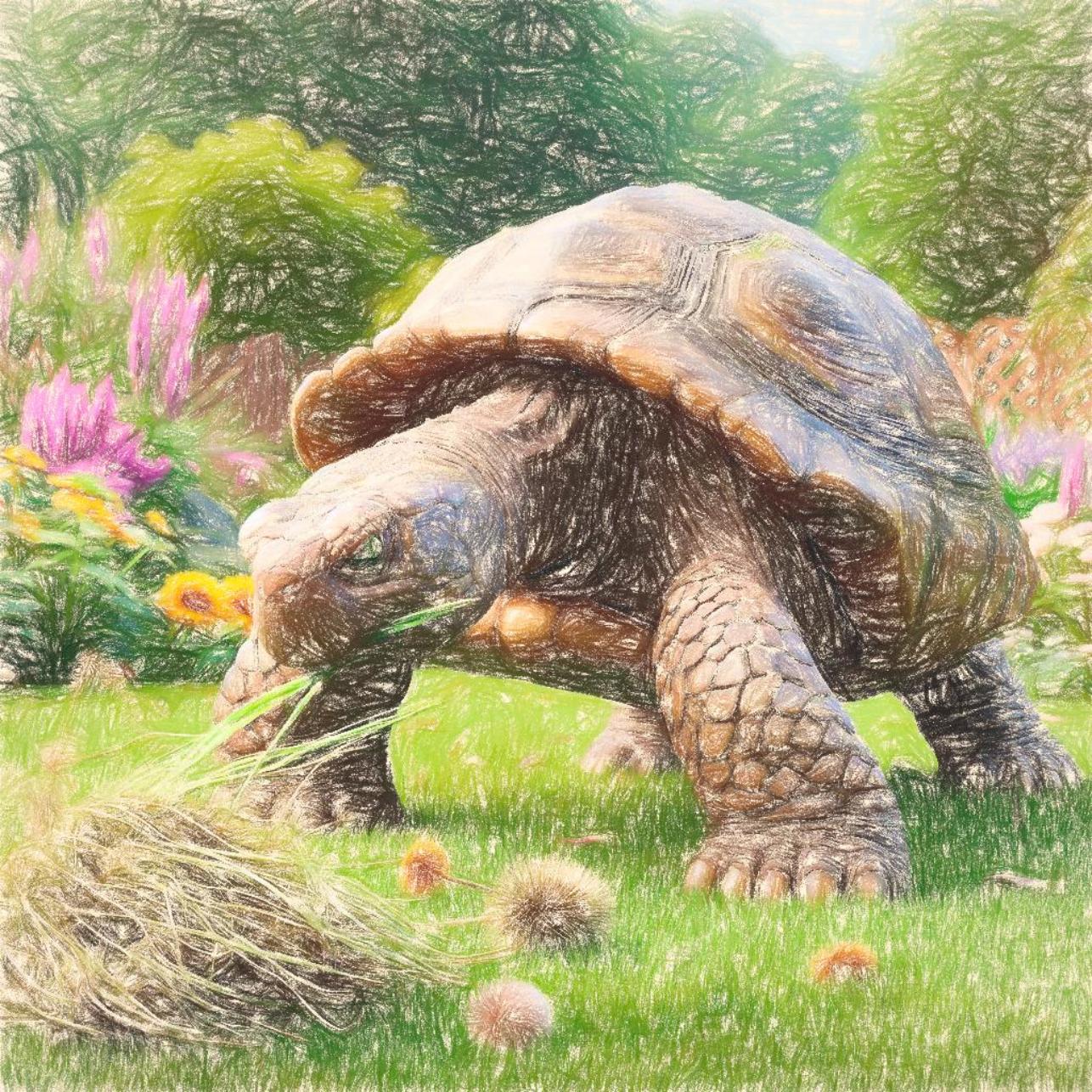
Turtle looked at her drawing and added something to it. She drew a circle around the tree.

“Through that circle I want to indicate that everything is connected: people, animals, plants.”

This story was a nice answer to my dream.

I think I will now rephrase my question. It is actually more important to know if we are doing the right thing now. That we think the right things and behave well. And that we are doing it together.

Thank you Turtle!



Turtle and the weeds

Treating all people equally

"There is no such thing as weeds," Turtle said. She was very definite about that.

Sometimes I walk in the garden and all of a sudden I see a plant standing among the grass. I have learned that it is recommended to remove it. The lawn should only contain grass. And where there are bushes and flowers, only those we planted or sowed ourselves should grow.

Once when I was walking through the garden with some weeds in my hands, Turtle approached me. She looked puzzled. "That's not how you treat plants, is it?" she addressed me. "Have you ever wondered why a plant appears in a certain spot and seems to like to be there?"

No, that's not what I'm concerned with when I'm removing weeds. But Turtle does have a point. People try to arrange their gardens the way they like them. We haven't learned that plants can also have a reason to grow somewhere or just not. If plants die we just put other ones out there.

Of course, now Turtle had made me curious about the way she looked at plants.

"Seeds land on the ground but whether they want to grow has to do with many factors. With the kind of soil, sandy or rocky or swampy, with much or little sun, whether the plants can withstand wind, next to which plants they grow up, ... Some plants you like in your garden prefer to grow in warmer countries. And plants you call weeds belong here."

She was silent for a moment. I looked at the little plants in my hand. Those had wilted a little by now.

"Just put those on the ground among the plants, they will digest and become food for the flowers, bushes and trees."

I certainly wanted to do that, but I had a feeling Turtle wasn't done talking yet. So I stayed a little longer.

"Can you tell me how you determine what a weed is? And why one plant is allowed to grow here and another is not?"

I couldn't answer that so easily. I had learned it that way. Actually, I didn't really know why. Because in a meadow I thought those weeds looked nice.

"If you can enjoy a meadow with dandelions or clover, if you enjoy walking in the woods among plants that you banish in the garden, then you experience that with all your senses, with your whole body. I suspect the choice of garden plants has more to do with your mind.

Do you know that a lot of what you now call weeds were once used to heal people and animals? You can eat them or make them into drinks. You can make salves from some of them. They were carefully cultivated in separate gardens.” What she told actually sounded much more natural to me than what we learned. And honestly, I actually like a garden with some flowers in the grass and grass that grows a little longer and attracts butterflies. And maybe there are plants among them that we can use in the kitchen. That would be wonderful.

“You know you people do the same thing to each other?”

I just knew, Turtle wasn't done talking yet.

“Some people you like and they may belong, some you don't. Those people then belong to the weed group. You then think that those are too different. But the mind is not always the wisest. Now suppose you are sitting on a terrace with a weed person and happen to start talking to each other. You then get to know each other a little. That's when you learn that that person also has dreams and desires just like you. Doesn't it then become more difficult to keep seeing that person as a weed?”

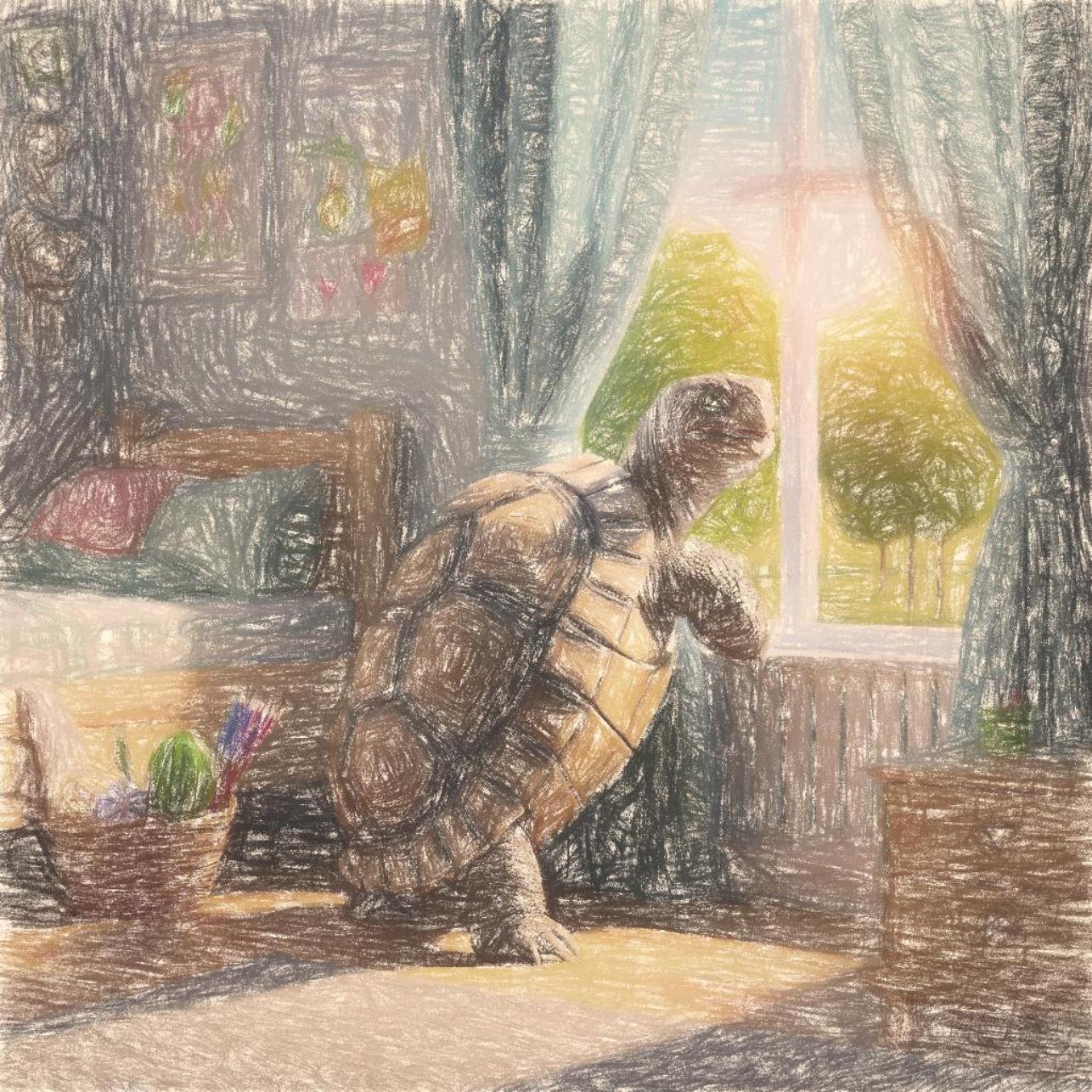
Yes, that is indeed true. No one likes to be put in the bin of weeds. I had experienced that myself when I was trying to be good at gymnastics. It was already hard for me to realize that I would never get good at that, but the most painful

part was that I wasn't really included in their conversations or allowed to participate in their gymnastics games.

It happens so quickly. You also don't always realize that you are excluding people by something you do or say.

"That's certainly not easy," Turtle agreed, "but if you listen to your heart first and ask your mind to hold off on judging for a moment, you'll go a long way. Therefore, you don't have to be friends with everyone or agree with what they say or do."

Thank you Turtle, this is something I will have to think about for a quite some time.



Turtle greets the day

Enjoying what is

Are you a morning person and do you jump out of bed as soon as your eyes open? Or do you need some time to wake up and prefer to do so without company?

It doesn't matter how you wake up, but it does matter how you start a new day. Turtle taught me that.

A while ago I had some trouble getting up. I felt unhappy. It wasn't very clear why. Or maybe, just maybe it had something to do with the stories I was reading on social media at the time. Some peers seem to be much luckier: nice trips, more money to spend, they look better in photos, ...

I certainly wasn't as eager as usual to get out of bed. If I could, I would stay a little longer and stare into nothingness. And so one morning I saw Turtle pulling open my curtains.

"What a wonderful day! Happy to experience it. How will I be living this day?" And then she turned to me. She sighed deeply. "I see you are not doing so well these days? Your thoughts won't leave you alone huh?"

She was right. That was certainly the case. I compared myself to others. Before I read those stories, I jumped out of bed excited. I felt happy the way I was.

"Your mind likes to compare. And then it bombards you with thoughts that make you unhappy. Because there will always be someone richer, more beautiful, more powerful, ... than you. It's a pity to waste your day on that."

Turtle had a good point there.

"Try to see the preciousness of each day. For example, you can think about things and moments in your life that make you happy, the people around you, and the love they give you. And importantly, the time you spend otherwise following what others share on social media, praise yourself for something you did or just didn't do."

I can't say that after her talk I immediately got out of bed in a cheerful mood, but from that day on things did get noticeably better. I followed her advice. Every day I tried to stop a couple of times what I was doing. Then I breathed quietly and then I complimented myself. That gave me good energy. Each day it got better. Now I jump back out of bed in the morning. Then I open the curtains and spontaneously say what I heard Turtle say: "What a wonderful day! Glad I get to experience it. How will I be living this day?"

By now I had also understood that what others share on social media is only a very small piece of their lives. My head made up that their life was better than mine.

Thank you Turtle, wishing you a bright day!

How to find Turtle when it's urgent

Suppose I want to ask Turtle something or feel near me at a time when I am not in a quiet place? How to do that?

Suppose you are sitting at the table with your family or hanging out with friends, and you are in need of your power animal. Then you can't suddenly sit with your eyes closed and ask everyone around you to shut up for a moment. So how do you solve that?

I asked Turtle.

We sat cozily together at the edge of a pond. It was a sunny afternoon. I think it was spring because little green leaves were already appearing on the trees and bushes. We sat silently side by side for a long time, enjoying the sounds of nature. And as it always goes, then you start thinking about all kinds of things. Then I asked Turtle that question; how I might summon her when it is not so quiet in my surroundings or when I am not alone.

I didn't think Turtle knew the answer to that, because she didn't seem to move. But that was because we were sitting next to each other. I hadn't noticed her looking at my hands.

"Hold up your hands," she then requested. I did. With that, she instructed me how to hold my hands. It became a shadow figure of a Turtle.

And suddenly I understood. Turtle is always with me.

Clever thinking on Turtle's part! I was completely reassured. This way I know I can always talk to her.

As Turtle taught it to me, I did find it a little too complicated. I needed my two hands for that. I decided to just hold my hand in a loose fist when I wanted to speak to her. I thought that was clear enough to call her. Besides, it was not so obvious.

Thank you dear Turtle for your wise tales, for your funny portrayals and the loving way you make me a little wiser each time.

The end

How did you find the encounters with Turtle? Maybe you found some tips that might help with something you are struggling with?

Feel free to call her if you want to discuss anything. Or maybe you want a loyal friend of your own who is always there for you? Is there an animal you have a special bond with? It doesn't matter how big or small, how wild or tame it is. Nor where it normally lives.

Then sit in a quiet place and close your eyes. Imagine that you are in a beautiful spot in a forest or by a pond. First, enjoy the surroundings a little: the trees, bushes, flowers, water, birds, sunshine or clouds. Then call softly to the animal you would like to meet. And ask it to come to you. Wait patiently for it to show up. Sometimes you can see an animal, sometimes only hear it, sometimes only feel it. It is different for everyone. Sometimes it doesn't come right away. Then try again at another time. Sometimes an animal other than the one you expect appears. If the animal that appears then calmly comes and sits with you while you think about your problem, you know it wants to be your power animal. And then it's a matter of sensing how your power animal wants to communicate with you.

Power animals live in another world, the world of ancestors. We don't have to take care of them or feed them. But what they appreciate very much is that we thank them when they helped. Or better: whenever they were there for us. Because sometimes we think they didn't help because their tips don't seem to work right away (when something needs a little more time, for example). But it's also true that they only help if it helps you move forward in life. And if it also benefits everything and everyone around you. After all, they want everything that lives to be well and happy.

Power animals are super loyal even if you don't think about them for a while. Oh yes, and to remind yourself that it is always with you, you can experiment a bit with a hand gesture or a certain expression on your face. Until you find something that works for you.

From the bottom of our heart, Turtle and I wish you the company of a wonderful power animal !

A word of explanation

Preface

The first quote is a free translation of, "As a person thinks, feels, and believes, so is the condition of his or her mind, body, and circumstances." Quote taken from a book by Joseph Murphy, *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*.

The second quote is a translation of a saying among natives of North America: "All Life is connected to seven generations before and after itself." This principle is touched on in *Turtle and the Seven Generations*.

Intro

A power animal or totem animal is a personal guide or advisor. Such a spirit animal gives symbolic messages to protect, inspire and to give you confidence. You do not choose a spirit animal yourself. You may recognize it because it appears regularly in your dreams, for example, or because you have a special bond with it. In the final story you get a hint about this. A spirit animal can accompany you throughout your life, but sometimes that animal only appears during a period of time or in a specific situation.

Turtle poses

"Strong back, soft front." This is a quote Turtle borrowed from Zen Buddhist Roshi Joan Halifax.

Turtle drinks tea

Mara is not really a person. In Buddhism, it is a name for all troublesome thoughts and emotions. Just like Devil or Satan.

Turtle blows soap bubbles

What you think and do influences your life. That's why it's important to pay attention to everything you say and do. Turtle borrowed this idea from a shamanic teacher, Sandra Ingerman.

Turtle sits quietly polishing a bone

Turtle borrowed the idea of a hollow bone from the Lakota Indians of North America. The shaman Fools Crow says: We are called to become a hollow bone for our people and anyone we can help. We are not meant to seek power or honor for ourselves. What we become as a bone is the pipeline that connects the World Spirit and people. (Freely summarized)

Turtle climbs on a blade of grass

This story is a shortened version of the creation story according to the original peoples of Northwest America. Each population group in that region has its own variation of the story.

Turtle looks through a funnel

"Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change." This quote by Wayne Dyer inspired this story.

Turtle hums a lullaby

The hint in this story Turtle borrowed from a Siberian shaman from the Altaj Mountains, Ahamkara Fox Arrow: if you make a rocking motion with your head, the thoughts will stop by themselves.

Turtle is dreaming

Turtle got the idea for this story from Alberto Villoldo: "Dream your world into being." And then she also thought of this English expression "Where attention goes, energy flows."

Turtle chews petals

The belief in ancestors exists in all traditional indigenous cultures around the world.

Turtle and the seven generations

Six original populations from North America make up the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Haudenosaunee is the term in their language for Peoples of the Longhouse. That was a very democratic and respectful community. The seven generations principle origins from the speech of Oren Lyons, head of the Turtle Clan of the Seneca. He gave that speech at the National Earth Day conference in 1995.

Turtle greets the day

Try to see the preciousness in each day. Turtle borrowed this idea from a statement the Dalai Lama once made during an interview.

The end

Power animals want all living beings to be well and happy. That is why they say they only help if it is "for the highest good." That's a shamanic principle.

BLURB

In this book you will meet Turtle, my power animal. It is a collection of short stories, each focusing on a recognizable situation from everyday life. The subtitles give a hint. It is about: experiencing that you have too much to do, that everything is against you, that your dreams about your life are not achievable ...

At the moment it becomes difficult, Turtle appears. She likes to act things out in a funny way. And then it becomes clear that there are other ways to look at that situation. In her way, Turtle helps to understand certain situations a little, so that you no longer have to experience them as difficult.

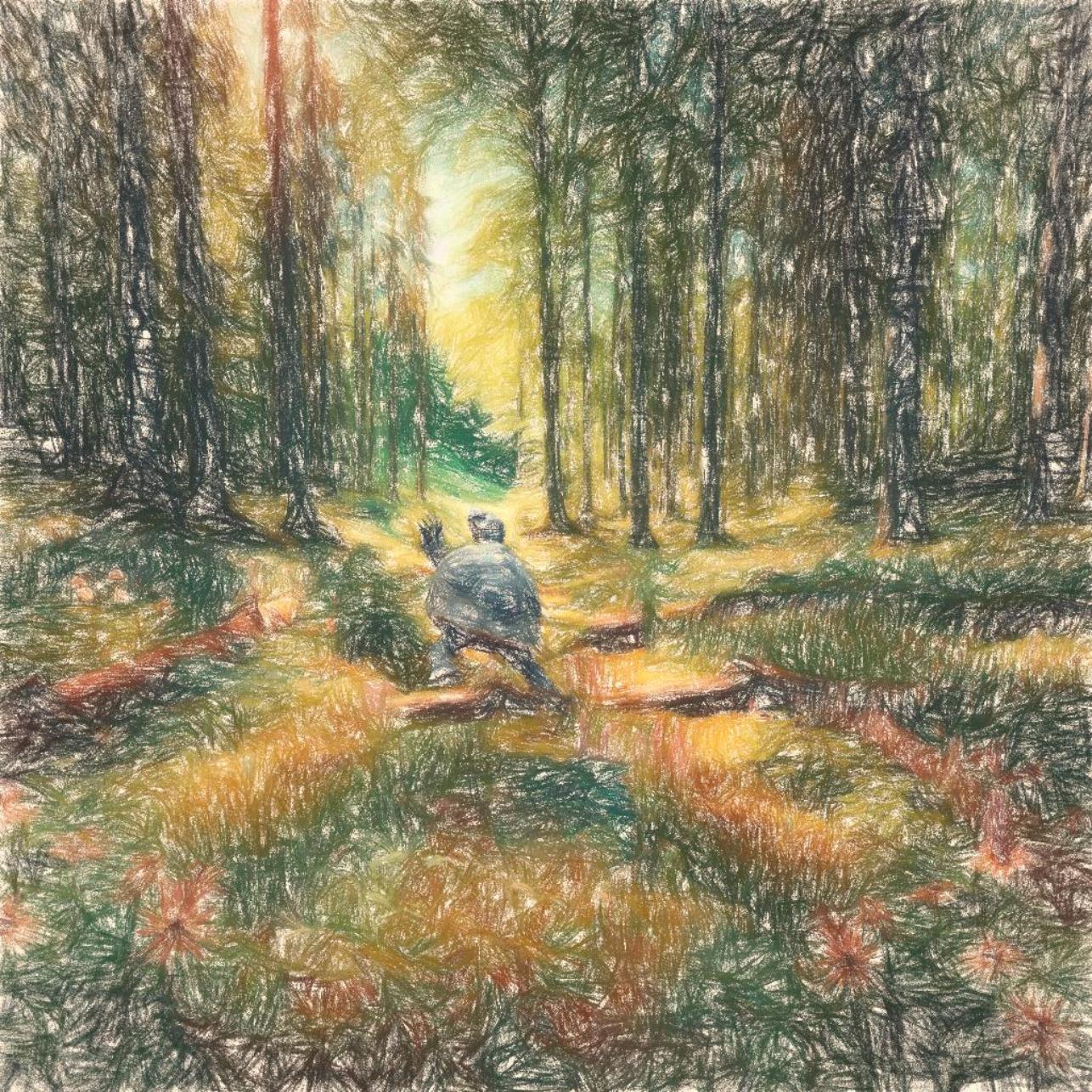
In the final stories, Turtle tells you a little more about ancestors and about our connection to everything that lives.

At the end of the book, Turtle gives one more tip. She knows that there is a power animal for you too, that wants to be there for you and help you.

(Age: 10+, reading or read-aloud book)

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