



PRINCIPLES DESIGNED BY NATURE

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ORIGINS OF THE 8 SHIELDS PRINCIPLES



Gratitude...



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Artwork above by
Walker Korby

Gratitude and acknowledgements for every person, every being and every natural element that has contributed to the development of the 8 Shields Principles and all related, and supportive elements.

Gratitude for you being here and reading this now, and for your interest in principles that can help us all connect better with nature, one another as people, to ourselves more fully, to ancestors and to the future generations.

So many people have contributed, and where do you start?



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Let's start with the natural world all around us...

These principles come from primary observation of our immediate, natural surroundings and our greater Earth, our atmosphere, our neighboring Moon and other planets. Our marvelous Star, the Sun, and all the Stars around us.

The position and movement of the Sun and the turning of Seasons forms the basis for the 8 Shields Principles.

Gratitude for the wonderful Earth and Universe that supports us all.

The Living Beings of the Natural World that We Share This Life Journey With...

Observing the behavior of birds and wildlife at different times of day, and different seasons gave rise to many of the 8 Shields Principles.

Gratitude for the many and varied and wonderful beings that share this Earth Journey with us.

The People: Ancestors, Family and Friends, and the Future Generations...

Where to start? We might have to go back to the very first Humans. As long as people have existed (many agree for over 200,000 years and perhaps longer), the Sun has risen, traveled across the skies and set again. The Moon and Stars have been on their cycles around the Earth. The Seasons have changed. The plants and animals, storms and elements have moved around our Ancestors.

People have been observing, and have been influenced by these powerful celestial neighbors and elements.

Our nervous system, in its innate form and design, shares many similarities with that of the wild beings that move around us. We are instinctively and innately moved and influenced by these beings, elements, cycles of light & dark and seasons. The response to these powerful forces is automatic and unconscious, and drives magic and transformation.

Our Ancestors, in their response to and dance with these powerful forces and elements, have passed to us an ancient nervous system that still responds and can still dance with the same.

Their subsistence patterns and diverse and emergent cultures around this planet, all hold clues to this dance and response that travel to us today so we can live a good life in harmony with the natural world.

Gratitude for the Ancestors of all of us.



Our Families and Teachers...

In some places today, there are still family lines that hold intact some cultural elements that support our dance with and natural response to the elements, beings and natural forces around us. There are mentors, there are teachers, there are elders, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, children, grandchildren, friends and neighbors. All of these people contribute to our journey in understanding and discerning the 8 Shields Principles.

There are so many people who have influenced and helped to emerge and discern these principles, it's impossible to remember, or to name them all. Literally hundreds of people have contributed to this, perhaps thousands. And the 8 Shields Principles still evolve and grow today!

Thank you to the People in our lifetimes who have contributed to our journey of understanding and emerging these Principles of connection and wisdom from experience and direct observation.

The Origin Story may help with some more specific references to individual contributors...

Gratitude to all that we have not mentioned.



Short story of how this all started...

Some people today assume that 8 Shields Principles are taken from particular cultural lineages. From the beginning, since 1983, the founders and contributors have always been committed to observing nature directly, listening to people of all ages, and emerging principles that fit for now.

From the beginning, 8 Shields has been crowd-sourced.

Way back when things were still only based on 6 Shields, the founding group—including Jon Young, elder Ingwe and various staff and volunteers—very consciously chose to use a universal approach and to not appropriate any culture. This was, and remains, very intentional.

As you will soon learn, the basic framework for the 8 Shields is built first upon geometry principles starting with the X, Y & Z axes!



Roots in Our Natural Nervous System's Potential...

The roots of 8 Shields start very early really—the beginning of time for human beings. As long as people have been living in close and connected, reciprocal relationship with nature, people have been paying attention both consciously and unconsciously to the patterns and cycles of nature around them. Our nervous system is hard-wired for this and when we nourish our nervous system with these primary, natural connections we experience greater well-being.

Cultures move through time and evolve. With changes in conditions of our environments, changes in subsistence patterns, and dramatic, traumatic changes, culture shifts, elements of the culture drop away. Some remain.

Cultural Threads Through Time...

In the 1800's, Jon Young's ancestors left Europe for America. Irish immigrants came to Irishtown and settled together. This is where Jon's paternal Grandmother's Grandmother settled—alongside many other Irish families. They held their culture of nature connection especially for the children, their subsistence patterns as farmers, music and storytelling. Jon's paternal Grandmother was born into this Irish enclave in 1900—she was known as “Nanny Cecil”.

Jon's maternal lineage came to the United States as immigrants from Poland and Lithuania around 1898. Jon's great Aunt Carrie was born in Poland and joined her parents on the overseas voyage to a new land. In 1900, Jon's maternal Grandmother was born in New Jersey—“Nanny Bird” as she was known.

Both sides of Jon's ancestry were farmers, hunters and trappers. The Polish-Lithuanian families started a farm in Jamesburg, New Jersey and brought berries and other produce to market in Englishtown. They later settled (four sisters of five siblings in Jon's Grandparent's generation) along the shore of the Barnegat Bay in Seaside Park. There the families shifted to fishing, clamming, crabbing and continued their farming roots in gardens. The Irish side settled farms, trapped for game, hunted and fished.

Nanny Cecil was raised by her Grandmother, Annie McCormack in a clever way of mentoring nature connection. Nanny Cecil did the same for Jon, his older sister Kim and their cousins. Nanny sent them out on errands to gather fruits and berries (all the children participated), and sent Jon out to fish for dinner. Jon was also sent out on errands to catch various frogs, salamanders, snakes, butterflies and moths. When he brought them home, Nanny Cecil would ask for the story of the whole adventure, having Jon recall landmarks and experiences along the way. This helped Jon, from an early age, develop a keen sense of direction and ability to visualize his surrounding landscape in his mind's eye.



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Together, Nanny Cecil and Jon hit the field guides and identified the critters' species name—and it didn't stop there. Nanny Cecil insisted that Jon come up with a “personal” name for each being, make a terrarium for each, research to find out what they eat and make sure they were at home safe and sound. Nanny had a rule for Jon:

When Jon got bored studying and spending time with any being, or if they didn't eat for a day or two, Jon was to return them to their “friends and family” exactly where they were caught.

For this reason, Jon developed quite the menagerie of mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates that was ever changing and evolving.

Aunt Carrie, from the Polish-Lithuanian side, told Jon from an early age that the “birds were messengers that could tell us about the Ancestors” and other important things the living family needed to know. Aunt Carrie spoke to Jon about listening, and modeled a quiet attentiveness that helped Jon appreciate patience, silence and stillness in nature.

When Jon was 10 years old, he was an avid and very motivated, hungry naturalist who wanted more experience, more knowledge, more connection and more skill. He was searching for a mentor...

Grandmothers and Grandfathers for the Children...

In Jon's research in Anthropology (between 1979 and 1983, really to the present), he learned that all hunter-gatherer traditions shared something in common:

The young children were raised by the Grandmothers mostly (sometimes Grandfathers). The Grandmothers' job was to connect the children deeply to nature, to help them develop common sense with hazards, to learn to identify tracks and signs of important species, to learn to gather the foods and other gifts from the plants and trees and much more. The children will be brought through a rite of competence in relation to their place which involves awareness, sensitivity to what's going on around them, the ability to find their way and navigate on the landscape, to contribute to the family and village, to share their stories and more.

This was exactly what Jon was lucky enough to experience with his Grandmother's generation. Through these experiences, Jon was prepared for what happened next...

In 1914, Ingwe (M.Norman Powell) was born in the rural Western Cape Province in South Africa of British descent. His family hired the local Bushman Grandmothers to help raise the children. He had a similar early childhood to Jon, and even more profoundly connected to the wilds of Africa with these amazing San Bushman mentors.



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In 1920, Ingwe's family moved to a remote wilderness in Kenya. The nearest European settlers were 28 miles away before there were roads and cars like there are today. For this reason, Ingwe's only playmates were the Akamba children and grew up at the Village Fires (as he said) with the stories of the Elders, mentoring from other adults and older youth, and neighboring Bushman tribes. He spoke more of the Akamba native language—Kikamba—than he did English...

Aunties for Older Girls, Uncles for Older Boys...

When Jon was 10, he was standing on a street corner with a large Common Eastern Snapping Turtle on a fishing line that he had caught. Jon was stranded there, as the boy who helped him get the turtle to their neighborhood had to leave suddenly with his family. Jon was alone and wondering what would happen next. There was no way for him to get the turtle home, another half mile away, on his own.

At that moment, Tom Brown, Jr. drove up to the corner, spotted Jon and saved the day. This started a mentoring relationship that took over from Jon's Grandmothers and an "Uncle" stepped in to finish Jon's rite of passage and initiation.

In Kenya, Ingwe experienced a similar fate with his older brother, Ndaka, and he was adopted into that family. Musame was Ndaka's father and helped to mentor and raise Ingwe in the ways of tracking, survival, hunting, trapping, the language of birds and animals and more.

Tom did the same for Jon, for he had been mentored since the age of 7 by an Apache Scout and elder he calls Grandfather.



Tom Brown, Jr, Ingwe and Jon in 1992 at the Tracker School in Asbury, NJ.

1979... Jon's Research Begins

When Jon was a freshman at Cook College, Rutgers University, he had experienced 8 years of deep mentoring with Tom Brown, Jr. By the age of 18, Jon knew all the hazards, reptiles and amphibians, many invertebrates, the mammals and their tracks and sign, low-growing plants and their uses for food, medicines and crafts, the ecological indicators, the heritage species, the bushes, trees and woody vines and their uses for shelter, water, fire and food, as well as the birds by sight and sound. Moreover, Jon knew the language of birds and animals in his area and could predict the approach of humans, foxes, raccoons, housecats, owls, and a variety of hawks—all based on the calls and behaviors of the wildlife. Jon had developed a high level of skill as a wildlife tracker as well.

When Jon went to college, he was sure he would meet others who had these skills and interests and was surprised to discover that this wasn't the case. Some knew birds well. Others knew



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flowering plants. Still others knew trees. Noone could track, model any skill with wilderness survival or recognize—or even believe in the possibility—of bird and animal language.

Jon was thoroughly confused by this. He thought for sure that everyone must know these things, and then he began to ask,

“What’s happening here? What’s this teaching me?”

These were questions that Tom had asked Jon—over and over for nearly a decade in many situations. This was instinctive now for him.

In 1978, Tom wrote his first book, *The Tracker*. Jon devoured this book and discovered the answer to his question. Tom was from a lineage of mentoring he called Coyote Teaching. This was a way to train the next generation through a sophisticated form of mentoring and questioning, errands and challenges, and generally learning the hard way. Jon dove deep into research on this topic and found its traces all over the world among hunter-gatherer nomadic peoples on five continents that Jon focused on.

Jon worked part-time as an instructor at the Tracker School throughout his college years. After 5 years at university, Jon graduated and started his first project, Wilderness Awareness School, based on his research into his childhood and his Grandmother’s practices, his 8 years with Tom’s advanced mentoring and anthropological, comparative studies.

All of this was organized in a long list of cultural elements that seemed universal for child-rearing, mentoring and connection to the natural world. Jon used Roman numerals and outlines to organize his findings. He based his programs for young people in his community in Monmouth County, New Jersey on this pattern and map. Jon essentially generalized and “universalized” what his Grandmothers and Tom had done for him for another generation of young people.

Later in 1983, Jon met Ingwe. He shared his research and project with Ingwe and he soon joined as a true Elder to help Jon. Ingwe often focused on training the parents, while Jon took the children into the wild lands to learn and experience.

When Ingwe looked at Jon’s binder of research he said,

“Look, Jon, you have gathered all these wonderful teachings and wisdom from our ancient Ancestors that are very Sacred. These are exactly the ways I was raised with the Bushman and the Akamba. But, you have organized them using Roman numerals.”

“Don’t you realize that Romans are the ones who got us into this mess in the first place?”

Jon didn’t totally understand what Ingwe was referencing at the time: historical trauma and colonial conquest and its disconnective influence through time.



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Ingwe said,

“Our Irish Ancestors, the Akamba, the Apache, the Martial Arts traditions of Asia, and seemingly all native people organized their teachings and culture using the four directions. We must do the same, and we cannot use any specific culture. We must do this in a universal way that works with our modern culture and diverse people.”

Jon asked,

“How do we do this?”

Ingwe replied,

“We will ask the children that we are mentoring about how they feel and what they observe at sunrise (east), midday (south), sunset (west), and we will ask the teens about midnight (north). We will ask them about how they feel and what they observe in Spring (east), Summer (south), Autumn (west) and Winter (north). From there we will discern the archetypes of these categories. Will add the Earth (down or alternately the southwest direction) and the Sky (up or alternately northeast direction). We will organize all your research into these six categories.”

This is exactly what Jon, Ingwe and the staff and volunteers did at Wilderness Awareness School for several years before the patterns began to emerge and settle into a consistent form.

This is when the Six Shields were “born”.

About twenty years later, at the urging of Jenn Wolfe, we added the Northwest and Southeast to complete the diagram and spent years crowd-sourcing across North America and Europe, and the Hawaiian Islands to figure out what these two new directions offered. Thus, the 8 Shields model was formed.

In the early 2000's, all of Jon & Ingwe's research and practical experience, as well as the experience of people that they had trained, came together and was re-organized from six categories into these new 8 categories. In 1995, the *Kamana Naturalist Training Program* was published based on 6 Shields and around the same time, the first edition of *Seeing Through Native Eyes* followed to support *Kamana* students and inspire others.

Ingwe passed away in 2005, at the age of 92. His influence and legacy remain through this world-wide network of practitioners and many published works.

In 2007, *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature* was published based on, and exhibiting the principles and details of the 8 Shields approach. *Kamana* and its associated media were



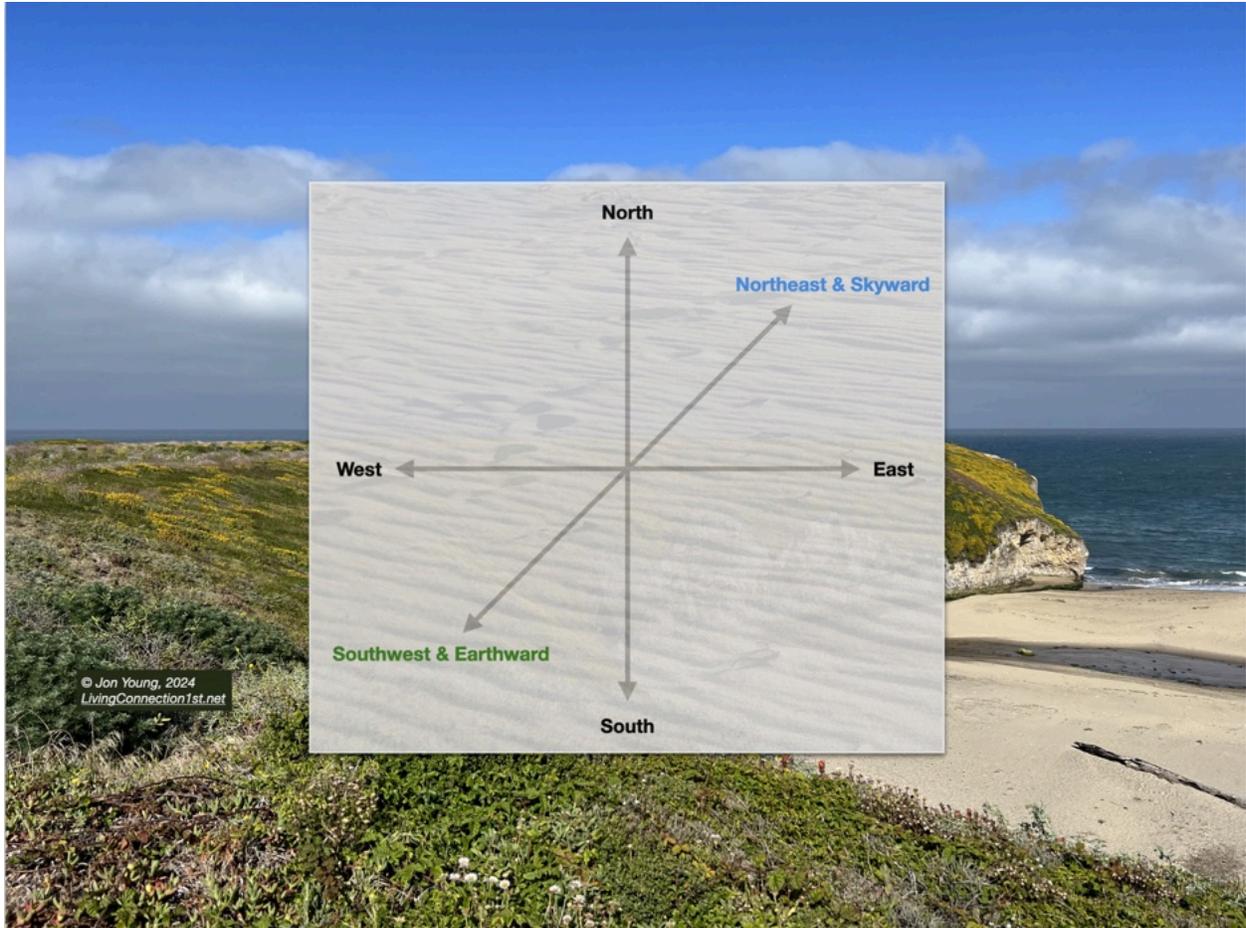
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retrofitted to follow 8 Shields over the next few years and in 2014, the second edition of *Seeing Through Native Eyes* was recorded with a live and interested audience based on 8 Shields.

Sometime around 2010, the 8 Shields Institute formed and later transferred to the Nature Connection Mentoring Foundation (around 2017). In 2020, due to the pandemic and other challenging experiences, the 8 Shields Institute disbanded. That brings us to recent times.

Southern Hemisphere...

In 2010, when Paul Raphael, an Odawa Peace-maker from Michigan, Jon Young and Byron Palmer traveled to South Africa to film a documentary, they led a program on the 8 Shields. During this workshop, it became clear that there needed to be a Southern Hemisphere version of 8 Shields where the sun rises in the east, travels to the NORTH and sets in the west. The same happens when Jon is in Australia or offering workshops with folks based in Australia and New Zealand. The 8 Shields is continuing to evolve, and this website will evolve along the way...

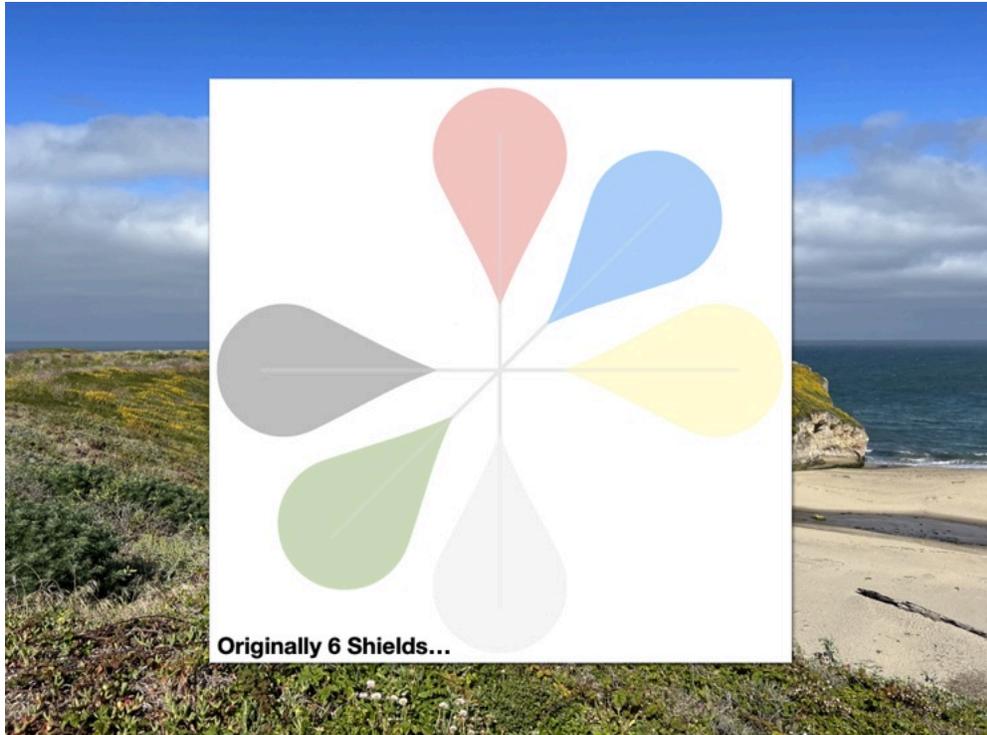


The first organizing pattern was based on 6 directions and became the basis for the original Six Shields principles through Ingwe’s leadership and guidance, and crowd-sourcing with hundreds of children and teens.

Ingwe literally suggested that the east to west axis would represent the “X” axis of three dimensions. North to south would be the “Y” axis, and up (sky) and down (earth) would be the “Z”. This would get the model into three dimensions.



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The “shields” were a collection of sensory activities, roles in the community, species to build connection and experience with and knowledge about, connection exercises, mentoring principles, cultural elements and design principles. Ingwe chose the word “shields” over “curriculum” as curricula are not as holistic or many layered as what was required to pass these principles and skills to others through camps, youth programs, workshops and mentoring experiences.

A full description of the 8 Shields are described in more detail on the Design Principles Tab.



8 SHIELDS DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Principles...

The summary of what follows is simply this:

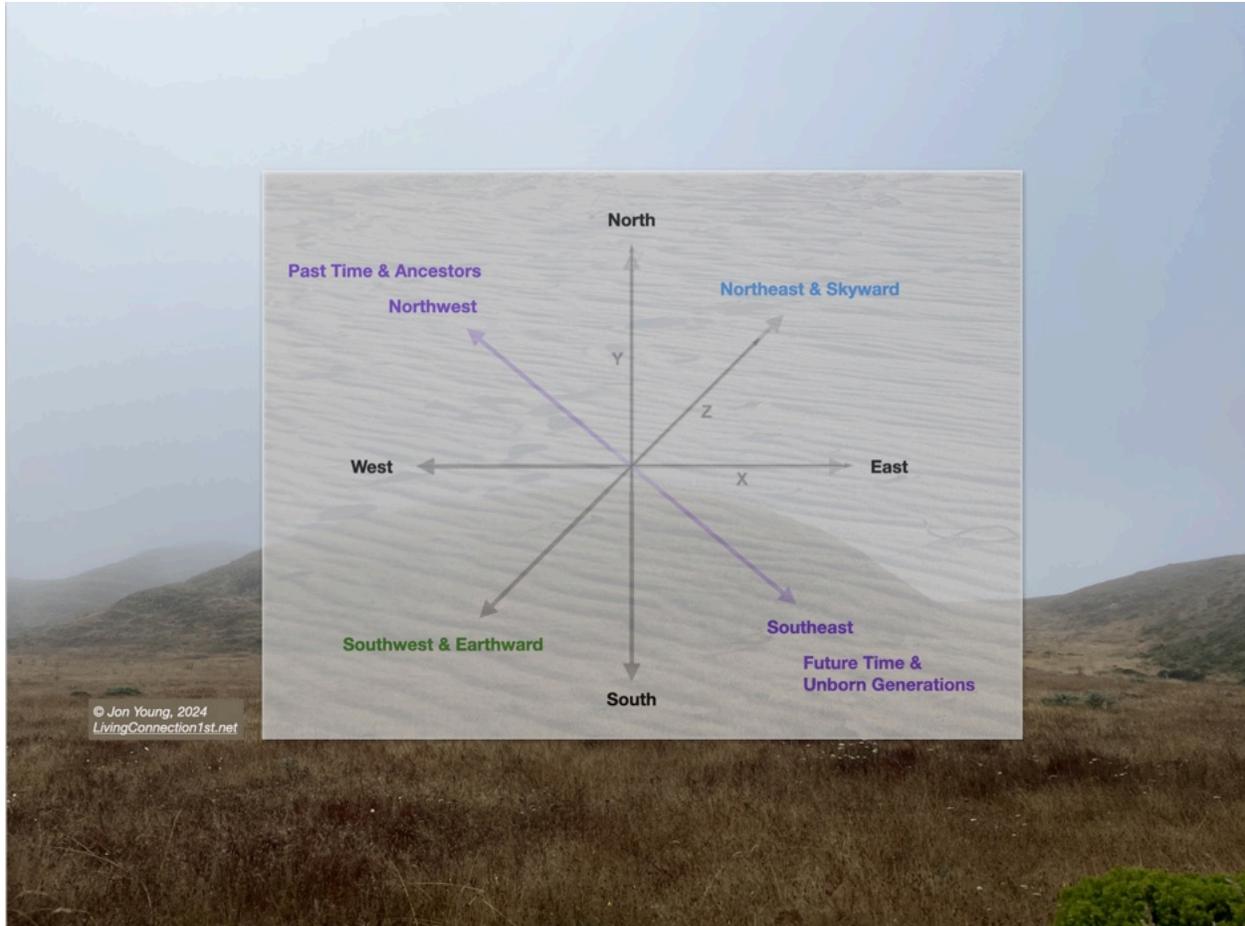
There are many “layers” to 8 Shields Principles. Many, many people and 8 Shields practitioners contributed to, and continue to contribute to the evolution of this model. People—literally from around this world—have contributed to this evolution.

For this we can all be thankful.

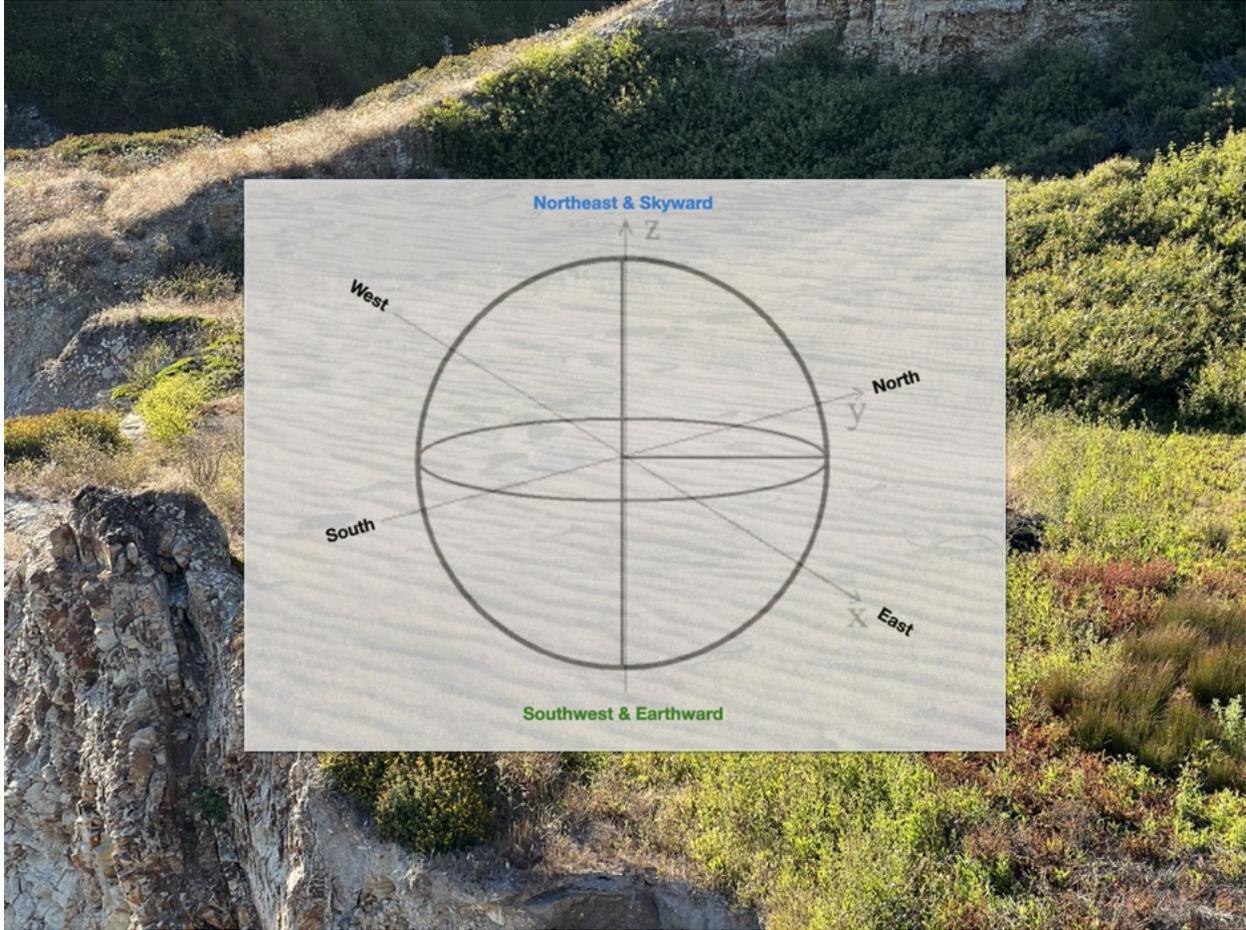
What follows are some graphic images representing the most fundamental principles. There’s plenty more to learn and study, and a good place to start is [Coyote’s Guide to Connecting to Nature](#) and the [512 Project](#) (for cultural elements).



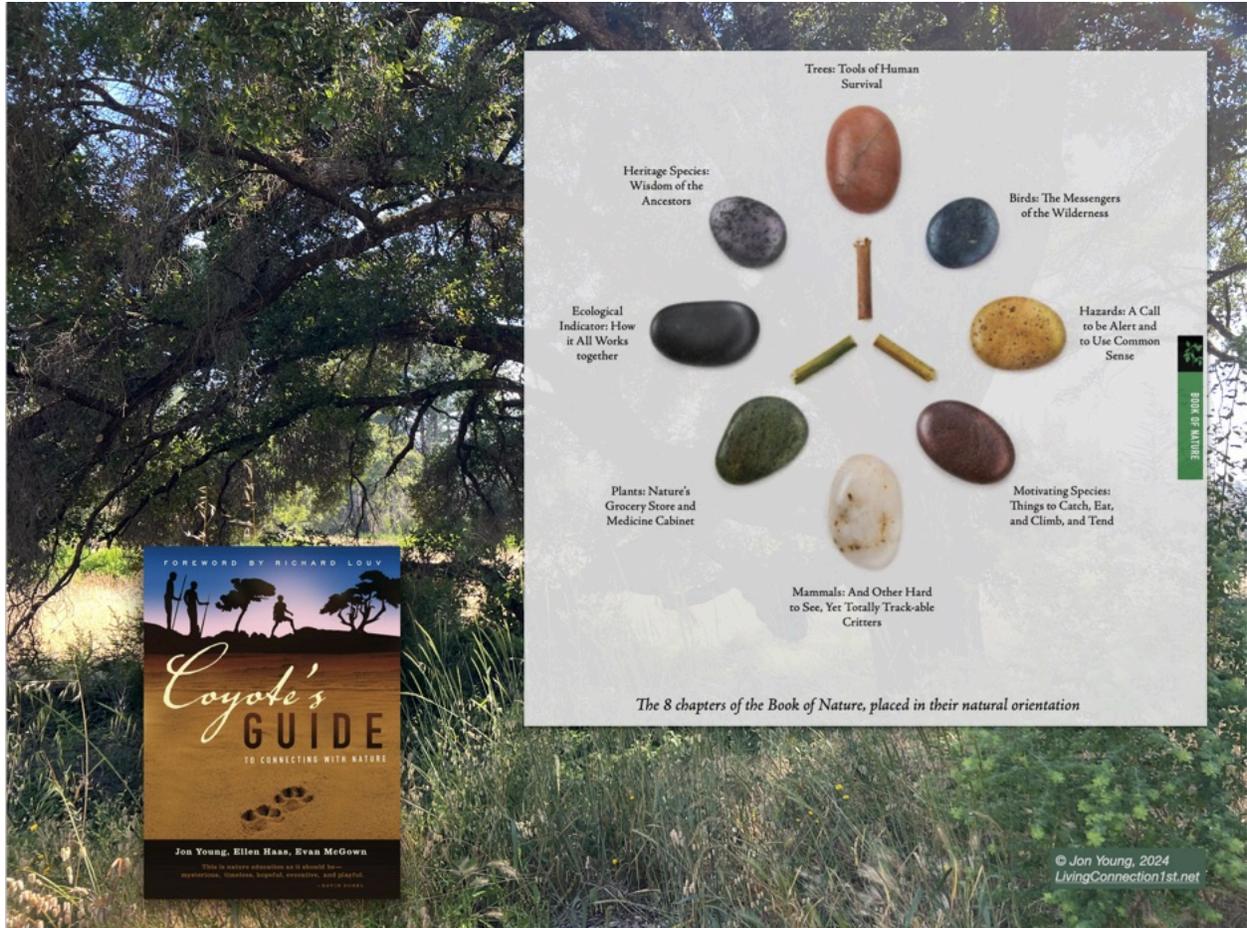
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Six Shields became 8 Shields with the addition of the Northwest and Southeast. This added the dimension of past, present (center) and future. This is the 4 dimensional foundation of the 8 Shields Principles model as of 2023. Perhaps there will be other dimensions added in the future!



Time & Space Layer generating a sphere. The Earth is a sphere, as is the Earth's atmosphere. Spheres are everywhere in nature. The 8 Shields is not a 2 dimensional model, it is 3 dimensional, and 4 dimensional when accounting for time (Northwest to Southeast axis). The 8 Shields form a sphere, AND it's not static but moving and whirling. A physicist looked at this model with Jon Young and told him that it represented the flow of a torus field—like a black hole!



Coyote's Guide is Based on 8 Shields...

The 'Book of Nature' points at the 8 Shields. This is the species, elements and practices layer of the 8 Shields model. More will be shared below on this concept.



Details on the Layers of Shields & Species within the 'Book of Nature'... Here are some of the details of the "Book of Nature" layer of 8 Shields. This is a map of the ancient nervous system's potential within all human beings to deeply connect to the Earth and all the beings and elements we share this Earth with.

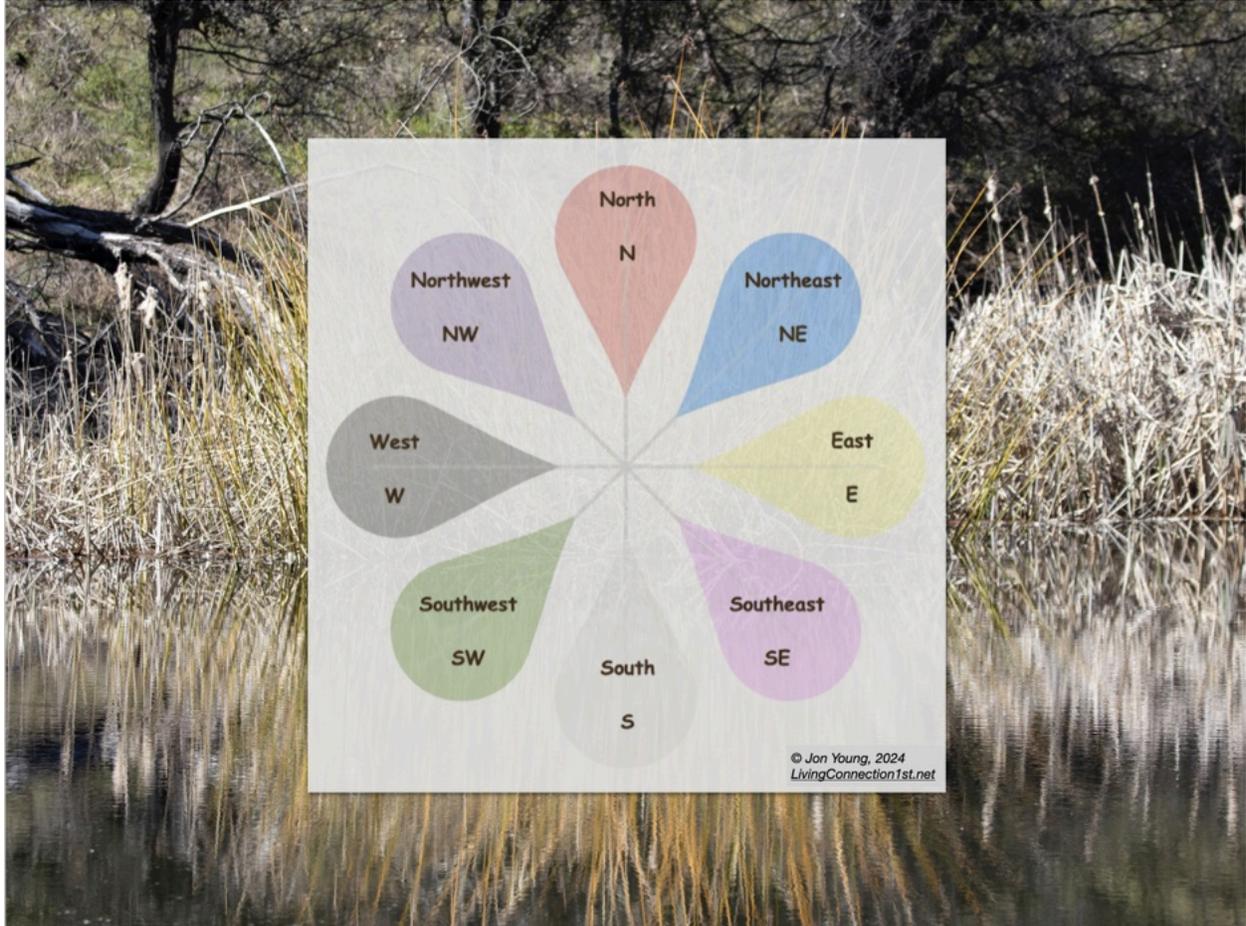


The Peace-tending Principles...

Jon Young, Ingwe, instructors, staff and volunteers worked with [Jake](#) (1946-2010) and [Judy](#) (1942-2023) Swamp, as well as Mike McDonald of the Kanienkehaka Mohawk Nation from 1990 until Jake’s passing in 2010. These three were and are all traditional members of their culture and Longhouse community.

Jon, Ingwe and the team at Wilderness Awareness School began this collaborative and consultative relationship with these traditional Peacemakers with a treaty. The elements of the treaty included that the Wilderness Awareness School leadership would find a way to apply universal principles of Peacemaking within their own cultural context. The above diagram shows the result of this treaty and relationship.

The Peace-tending principles represented are literally built into and make up the FOUNDATION of the 8 Shields model. The primary goal of these principles is to help people better connect with nature (as a foundation for personal peace), other people and themselves.



The directions and shields together. The color of the North, East, South, West, Northeast and Southwest Shields honor the memory and contributions of Lakota Elder Gilbert Walking Bull who contributed to the understanding of this model. These colors are not intended to represent the cultural elements of Gilbert's family line. The Northwest and Southeast Shields are colored along the spectrum related to the color purple and pink respectively.



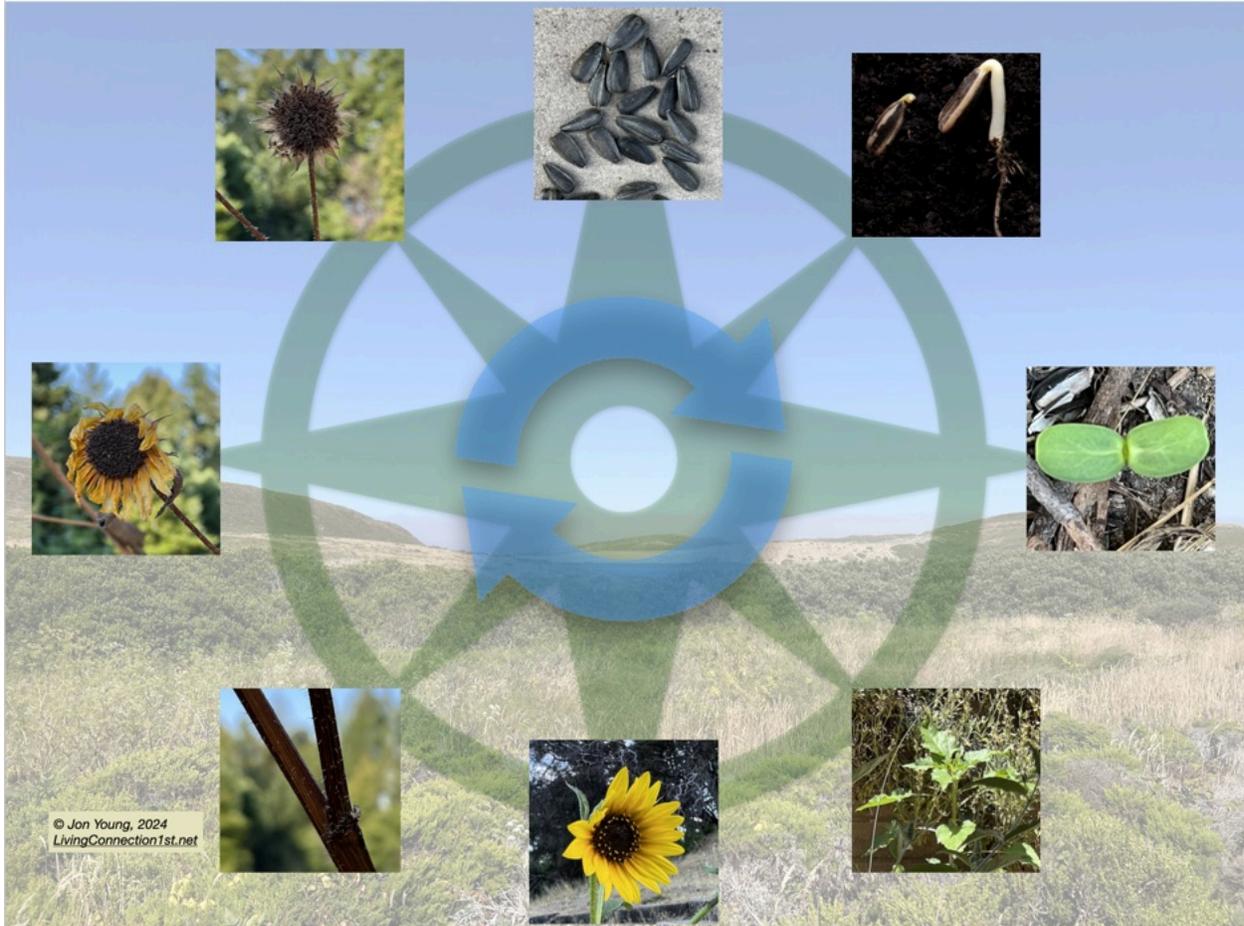
The Layer of the Sun Cycle. In the Northern Hemisphere, the Sun rises in the East, moves to the Southeast at mid-morning when the birds and animals move about and busy themselves with subsistence and maintenance needs. When the Sun hits Solar Noon it reaches the zenith of its path and is the highest for the day. At this point, the Sun is positioned due South. The hottest part of the day, represented above with the Cream Cups flowering and when it's time to slow down and focus. The Southwest is represented by the golden light of midafternoon when the animals rest in their daybeds (and we humans take naps or siestas). The West is Sunset when the people gather by the fire to share meals, and the birds gather together to rest. Just past twilight, the average annual position of the Sun is below the horizon but to the North of where the Sun has set. This is a time to prepare for rest, deep reflection on our day and sleep. The North is Midnight when we are asleep. The Northeast represents pre-dawn, dreaming and that mysterious time halfway between midnight and sunrise.



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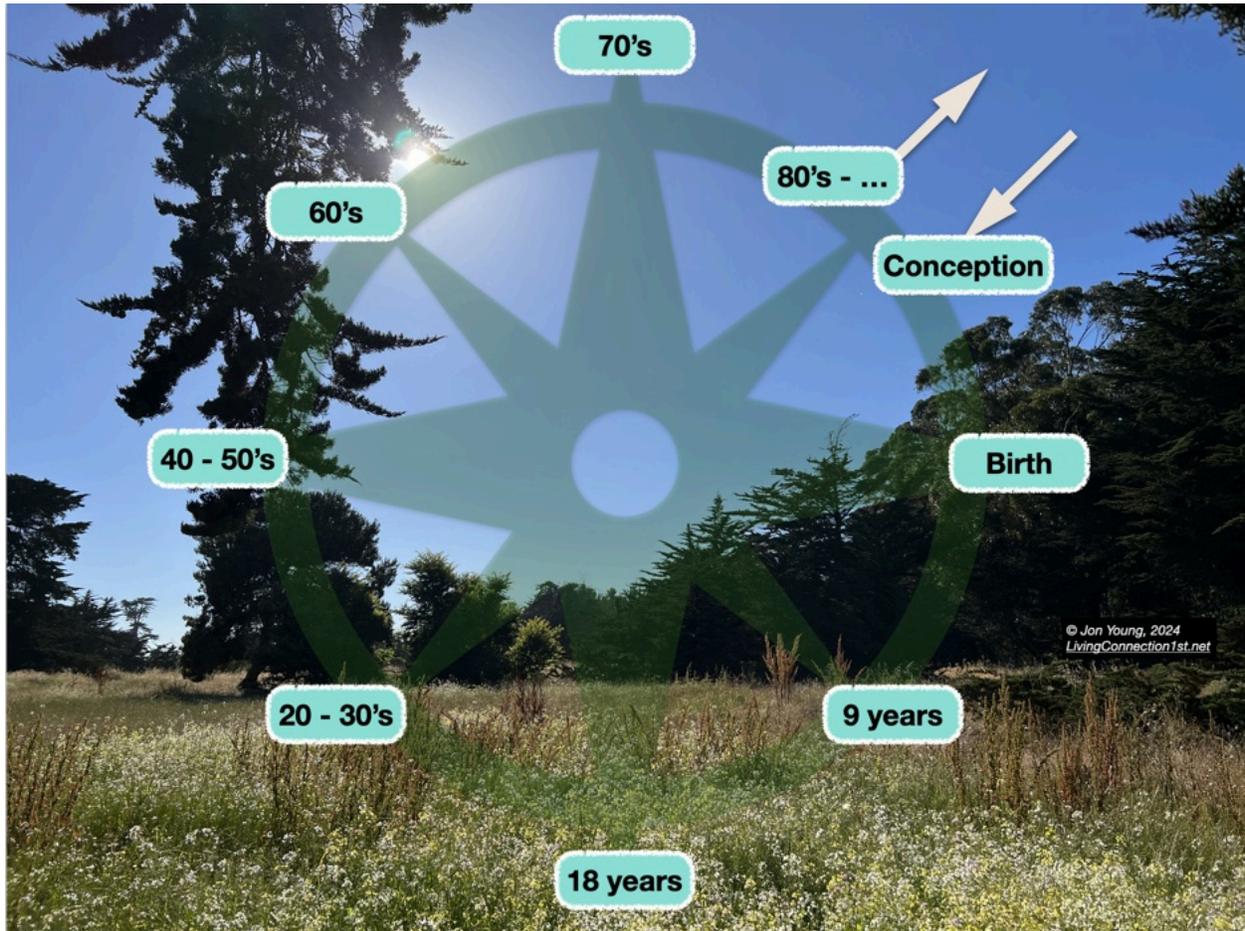
The seasons are very similar to the times of day in the Northern Hemisphere. The East is Spring, the South is Summer, the West is Autumn and the North is Winter. The subcardinal directions reflect those “inter-season” energies. These have correspondence to Celtic holidays at these 8 points in the annual cycle.



Germination Photo [18302217](#) © [Bogdan Wańkowicz](#) | [Dreamstime.com](#)

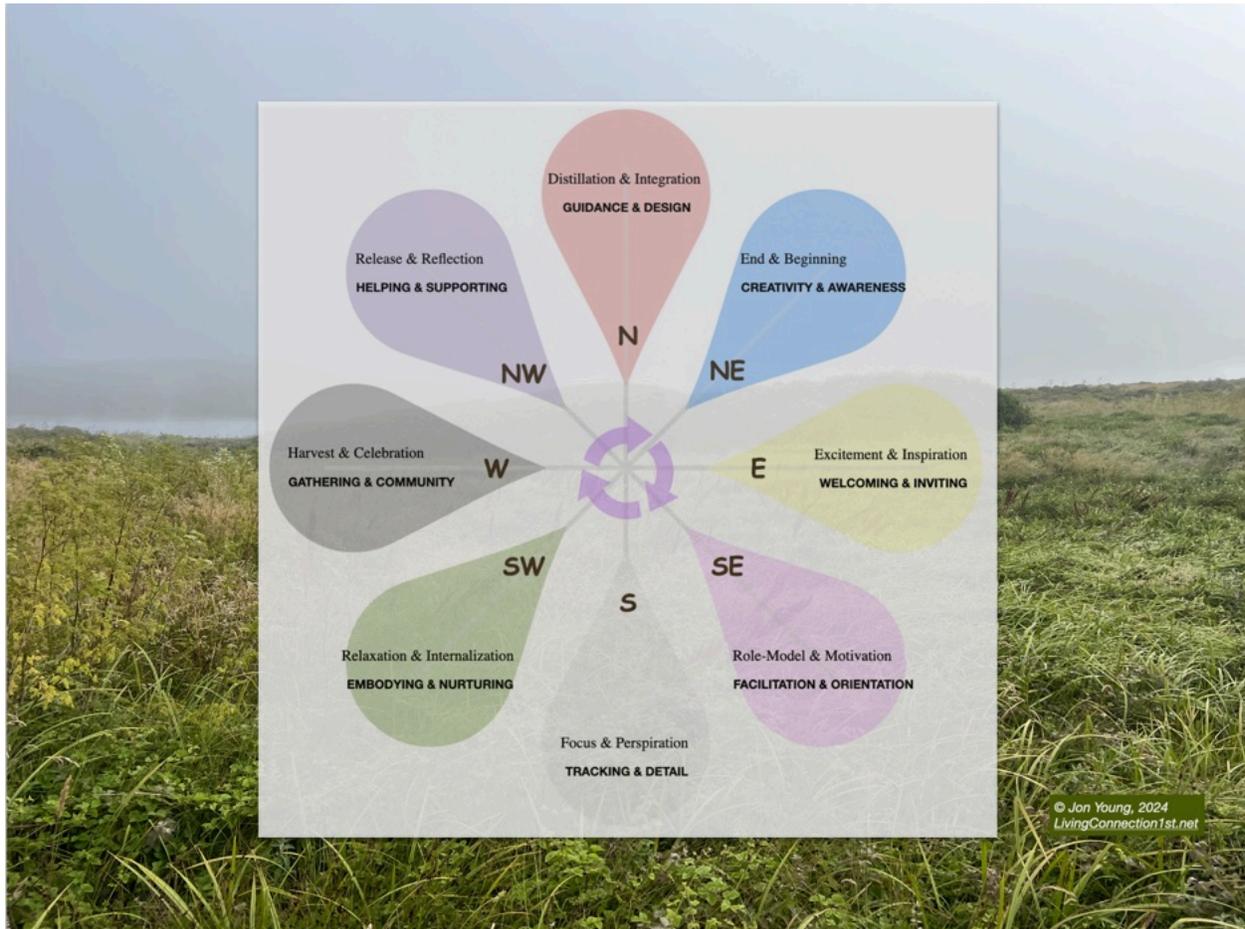
Life cycle of plants...

The next layer that is often taught at Art of Mentoring workshops represents a plant's life cycle. This cycle tracks closely with the seasons. Above is the life cycle of a Common Sunflower. The Northeast represents germination, the East the sprouts and seedlings, the Southeast is the time of rapid physical, external growth. The South is the flower at its peak. The Southwest is the profound internal development and strengthening as the solar energy is converted to wood fibers strengthening the stem to handle the winds of autumn and challenges of winter ahead. The West represents the fruiting period where the flower has become a source of nourishment for wildlife, thus helping to spread seeds. The Northwest is the time of decay and compost. When all falls away, what's left for the North is the seed—a potential for germination—that can rest and wait for many years before being activated to renew the cycle.



The life stages of humans is the next layer. Here, Birth is the East. The time of rapid external growth (like the plants) peaks in between East and South, and physical growth in terms of height ends in the South. The Southeast is the peak at 9 years of this growth and adventure stage. When the human life cycle reaches the South, this is Adolescence and sexual maturity—analogueous to the flower in the plant life cycle. Just like the plants, the Southwest side of the cycle is about inner maturation and inner strength. The West is the time of life where people “bear fruit” either in their vocations or through raising families. The Northwest is similar to the “empty nest” stage of life where children move off on their own life journeys. This is a time to prepare for the winter of life (where the snows settle on the head and turn the hair white). North is the time of Elderhood. Northeast is the time of late stage Elderhood and profound love and wisdom.

On this diagram, one can see that the Northeast “breaks” the cycle into a spiral. This is implied with the plant’s cycle as well. At the Northeast line, on the western side, is the end of life and the journey into the Mystery. On the eastern side of the Northeast line is the magic of conception.



The Archetypes (or essence) of each direction emerged, over time and many conversations with numerous people over several years. We asked the question,

- What is the feeling of each time of day?
- What is the feeling of the seasons?
- What do we feel from how the wildlife and plants respond to these times of day and year?

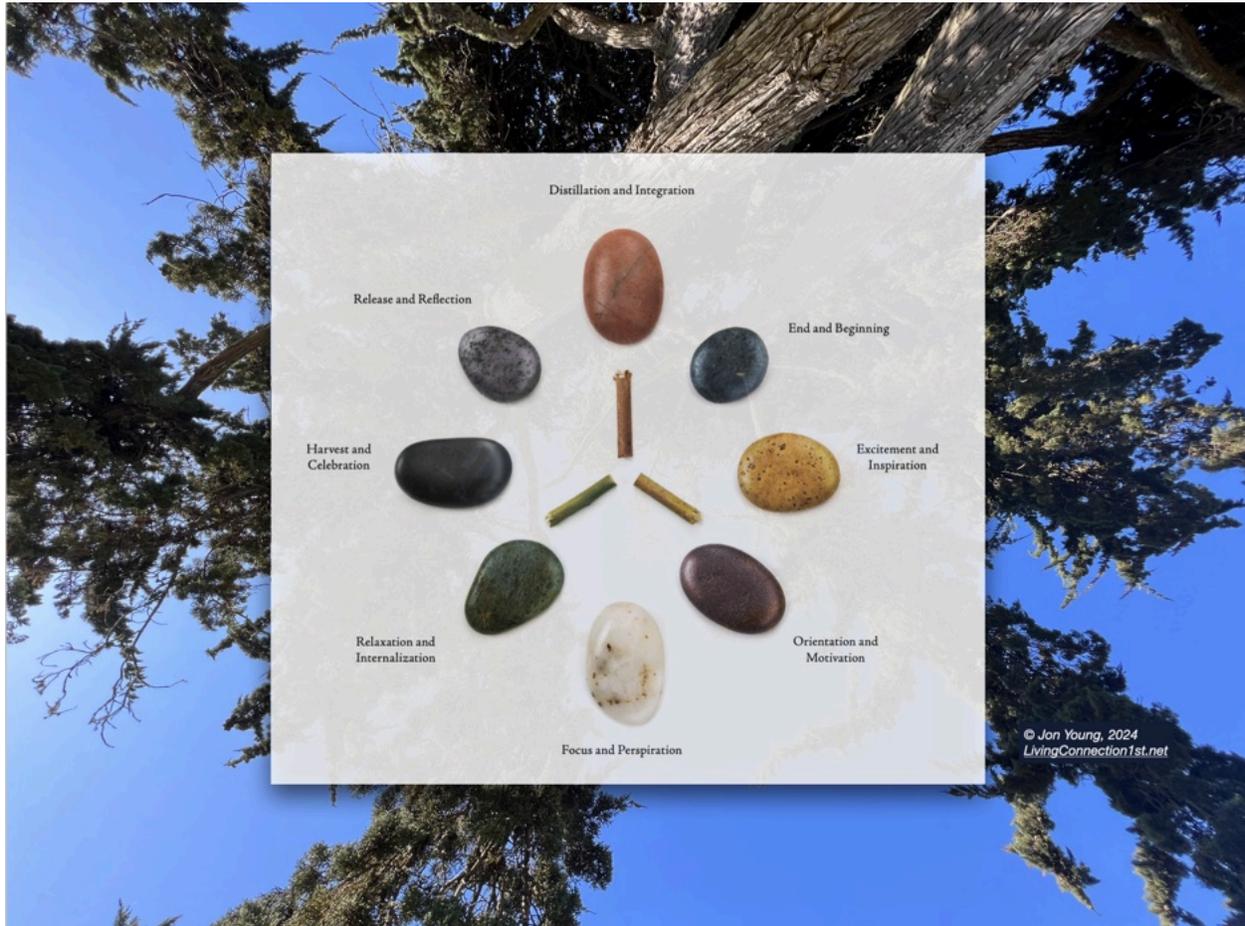
Our bodies are hard-wired to know these times and seasons. Our nervous system is synchronized with these expectations of flowing cycles.

For the Northern Hemisphere: this wheel moves in a clockwise direction. In the Southern Hemisphere, things move in a counterclockwise direction—yet, the Archetypes are in a consistent sequence in both locales.



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The above diagram represents a distillation of these Archetypes. Different aspects are brought out in different cultures, varying locations and other contexts. These different descriptions may be used in each context to reflect that. The many and varied 8 Shields practitioners worldwide have shown these variations again and again. This is not a static model, but a creative one that constantly evolves and changes depending on the context. This gives us hope and a sense of renewal.



The Natural Learning Cycle, as represented above from [Coyote's Guide to Connecting to Nature](#), tracks how we move from Inspiration in the East (ideas in our minds only) to Motivation in the Southeast where our bodies literally begin moving towards our goals and aspirations.

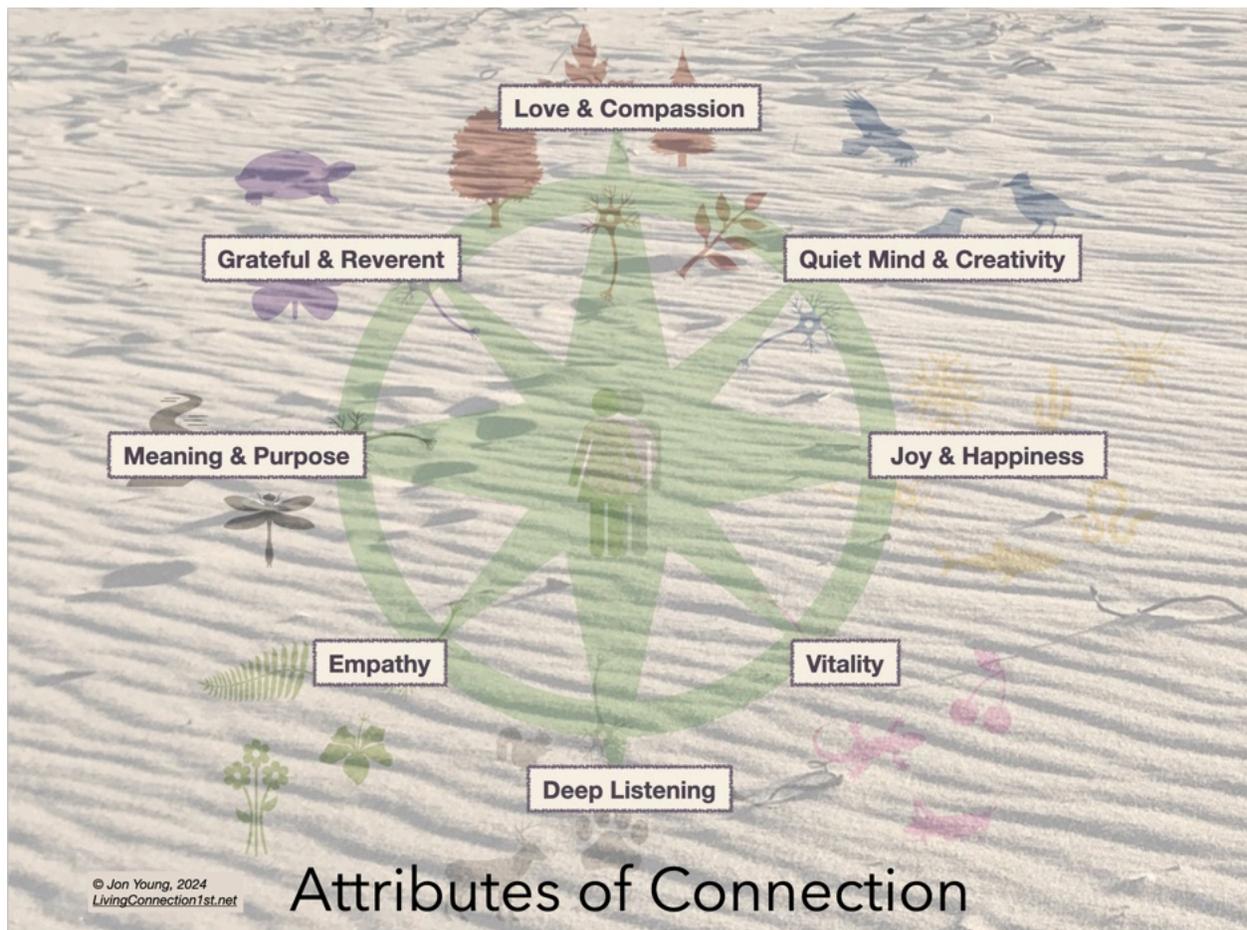
After embodying the adventure and exploration of new and exciting topics or paths that motivate us, we naturally begin to focus on the details in the South. We eventually and naturally exhaust ourselves from this focus, likely become humbled by the experience and end up letting go and relaxing into an embodied state on this path of learning, connection and experience.

The Southwest represents the pause, the break, the total surrender into the silence and relaxation of not needing to know, but to simply appreciate where we find ourselves. This is a place of true humility—where the root of this word represents our relationship with “humus” or the Earth. Connection and empathy arise in this stage.



The West is a place of arrival in the awareness of this gift of embodiment and calls for celebration of this place on the journey. The Northwest is a place to reflect more deeply, to study the heritage of the Elders of this wisdom, to track ourselves internally and prepare for integration. This is all preparation for the Elderhood stage and the distillation of the primary principles that underlay the true wisdom—Elderhood and principle-based Wisdom is the North part of this journey.

The Northeast is the liminal, the poetic and the ceremonial return to the senses and deep gratitude to clear our palette and ready ourselves with intention for the next round.



The Attributes of Connection are related to the Indicators of Awareness as represented in *Coyote's Guide*. What makes the Attributes of Connection different is in the level of embodiment. The Indicators of Awareness happen at weekend workshops, or in fleeting moments where the nervous system moves to this place of activation temporarily. The Attributes of Connection represent a deeper, more embodied and 'permanent' condition in our nervous system. To get to these Attributes is the "goal" of this journey.