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# MOTIVATED

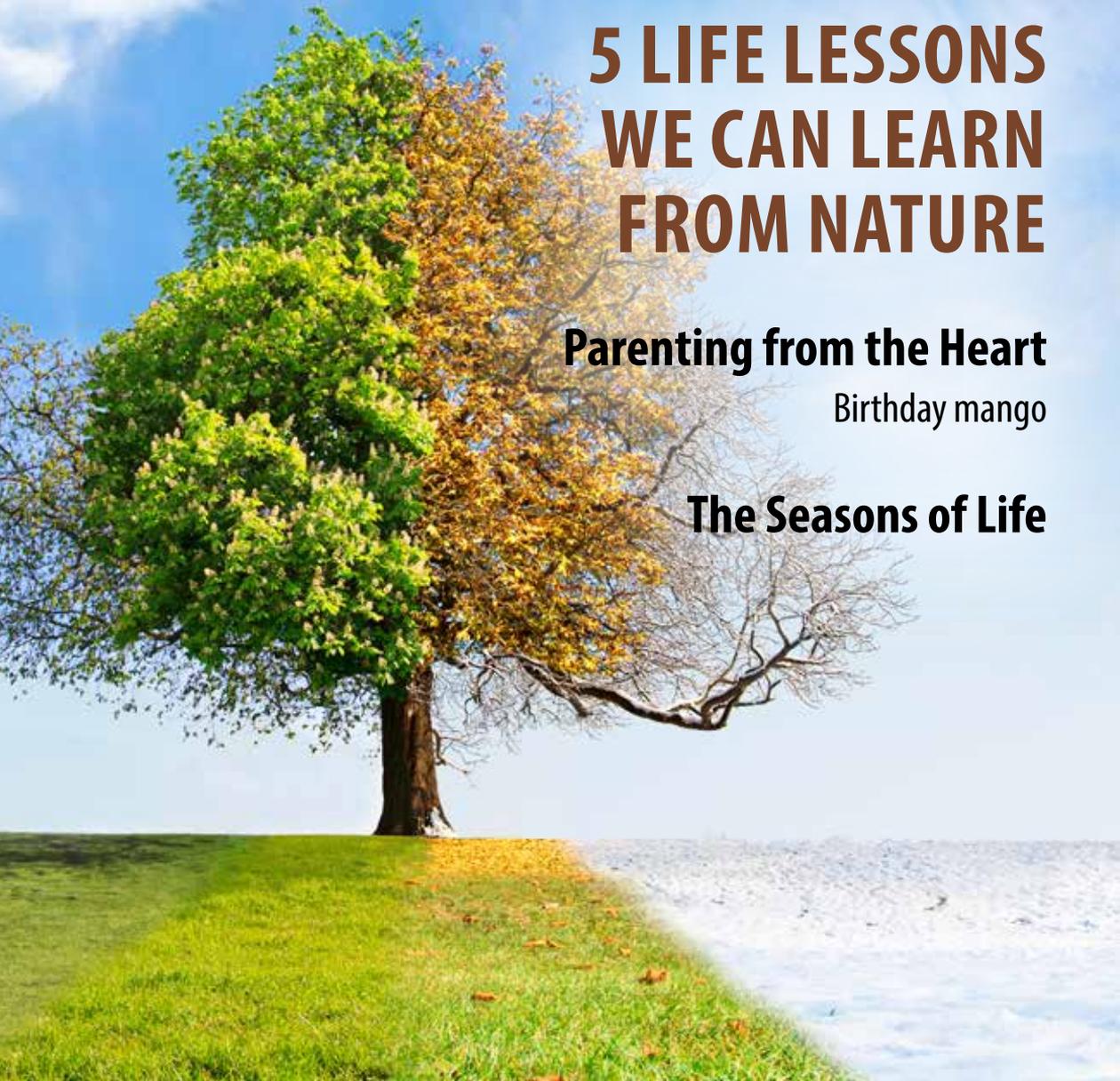
THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

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We can learn a lot from nature. From watching the sun rise and set, the changing of the seasons, the marvelous beauty of flowers, the fruit of the vine, to weathered trees on a hillside, nature can teach and inspire us.

Take a fruit-bearing tree, for example. When I see the beautiful black olives growing on the tree off my front patio, I can't help but marvel at the foliage and the abundant fruit that appears only a short while after the bareness of the winter months. It reminds me that even after the lean months in life, seasons of success and bearing fruit are bound to follow.

Or take a farmer's fruitful cornfield. We would love to be as "fruitful" and successful as that cornfield, too, but sometimes we forget that even a field that yielded a large crop one year may need a time of rest before a new crop can be sown and harvested.

It's wise to learn from nature, and to take time to meditate on its lessons. It can calm us, rekindle hope for a better future, and help us to accept the times of "pruning" we may be going through.

I hope you will enjoy reading the articles in this issue of *Motivated*, and that it will inspire you to take some time to reflect on the lessons of nature in our beautiful world, too. I am sure it will refresh you, and brighten your outlook, as it did for me.

Christina Lane  
For *Motivated*

# The Vine



By Joyce Suttin, adapted

One of my most pleasant childhood memories is lying on the bench beneath Grandma's grape arbor on a hot summer day, and munching on fresh grapes. Years later, when I was moving to a vineyard in Italy, I envisioned many comfy benches to lie on. To my shock, we arrived to what looked like barren fields. Only the tiniest stubbly heads appeared above the roots. It was explained to me that the vines were cut back to the ground each year after the harvest to increase their yield. It wasn't a pretty sight, but it was a fruitful field.

When the growing season began, I was amazed at how quickly the roots gave birth to new vines beneath the warm Tuscan sun. Their tendrils reached out quickly through the fields, and where there had been barren earth, suddenly there was lush new growth that would produce juicy green grapes.

I am a very poor gardener because I hate to prune my plants. I let my rose bushes

grow to ungainly heights. I shoo away every tree trimmer who comes to the door wanting to trim our trees. I let my perennials grow wild. I like the runaway growth of living things and don't like to be the judge of what to cut.

But it is pretty clear that in order to bear fruit, trimming is needed. The same is true in our lives. Sometimes we need some cutting or pruning too, to continue to be productive.

There are times the rug gets ripped out from under us. The unexpected knocks us for a loop; tragedy, illness, betrayal or failure give us a sucker punch, and we feel all of those beautiful leafy branches being ripped away, until all that is left is a stubbly, chopped-up root in some seemingly barren ground.

But then, the time is right. The sun shines down. Rain falls. And the miracle of new life and growth begins again. ■



# 5 Life Lessons We Can Learn From Nature

By Hridayinee Williams, adapted

Everybody loves to get out into Nature. In New Zealand, where I live, we are fortunate to have much beauty and splendor of Mother Nature all around us. Have you ever contemplated what lessons Nature is trying to teach us? Here are a few I have discovered.

## Divine timing

Nature teaches us that for everything there is a season, and the right timing. Sometimes we want certain things to happen right now. It is hard to wait for the fruits of our actions, and we expect results immediately. This is especially ingrained in us now with the fast results of the Internet, where you can look up questions and get instant answers. But the really good things in life—self-discovery, meditation, contemplation, self-transcendence—are not like instant coffee. They take time, practice and effort.

In Mother Nature's natural cycles of weather and seasons, there is an all-

important flow—the bitter cold of winter is followed by the blossoming beauty of spring. Then follows the warmth and light of summer, followed by the colorful changes of autumn. For everything there is a season and a reason. If we did not have cold winter, the wheat would not be able to grow strong. Seeds planted beneath the soil lie waiting to flourish. New birth occurs in spring in the flora and fauna around us. Try to follow the example of Mother Nature's divine timing to increase your own capacity for patience. All good things come with time. There really is the right and special time in your own life for every event and achievement, both inner and outer.

## Humility

Nature teaches us to be humble. There is a quiet strength in humility. It is not a passive quality. Humility is needed in our everyday lives in the many encounters we have with others. Where most can we see this divine quality in

Nature? Just take a good look at the green grass beneath your feet. Grass portrays humility, as countless pairs of feet walk all over it every day. It doesn't complain or wither away. In fact it usually springs back up, unharmed each time. How wonderful is it to walk barefoot on soft green grass? This is something that can be very healing to do and it "earths" you—giving a feeling of replenishment and grounding in your being. Try it, and contemplate the humility of the grass. Oh, if only we could all increase this quality in our own nature, the world would be a more peaceful place to coexist.

### **Self-offering**

In our own life, the quality of self-offering is most important. When you look at a mature tree, it stands straight and erect, with its countless leaves providing shelter for anyone who pauses beneath its branches—whether the homeless beggar or children playing. Then when the divine timing is right, and the tree becomes laden with fruit, the branches bend down to offer this fruit to all. A tree embodies the quality of self-offering. It provides homes and shelter for animals, birds, and insects, as well as offering shade and fruit to us humans. Next time you walk through a park, breathe in the beauty of the trees, and perhaps offer a moment of gratitude to them for teaching us the divine art of self-offering.

To be self-giving, and to offer things, services, smiles to others unconditionally will make you happy.

### **Beauty in simplicity**

This is perhaps the most obvious thing we receive from Nature. As long as you

are receptive to it, and don't just walk on by with your head down and your crowded thoughts in the puzzling world of the mind. Everywhere around us the beauty of nature resounds! When you take a walk, practice quieting the mind, focusing on your breath, and really pausing to smell the roses. There is so much beauty all around us. Take time out to be in nature and experience the vastness and depth of the blue-green ocean. Enjoy the beauty in the simple and natural things in our environment. Make time to catch the sunrise or glorious sunset! Walk or run through a forest of trees and magical ferns! Gaze at the vastness and uplifting beauty of the blue sky! The possibilities are endless.

### **Renewal and Restorative Powers**

Finally, search for healing in the natural powers around you. Nature teaches us much about how to renew and restore energy in ourselves. Take a healing walk, and take time to sit in a green forest. Plunge into the refreshing coolness of the salty ocean—so restorative for aching muscles. Breathe in the beauty and splendor of the sunset and contemplate the subtle colors of God's great paintings across the sky. Above all, remember to take time in your life to renew and restore yourself—by replenishing your energy stores from Mother Nature herself.

Meditate in nature. Be happy. You are cradled in the strong embrace of nature all around you, and its Supreme Power is flowing through your life, taking care of every concern, and flooding you with grace and light. ■

# AVOCADO



By Jessie Richards

I absolutely love avocado! Along with being delightfully delicious, it is a versatile fruit. Not to mention that it's outstandingly healthy—one of the best sources of natural oils and many vitamins.

In Chile, where I spent many of my growing-up years, avocados—called “palta” there—are abundant and are included in many local dishes, including a variety of salads, sandwiches, and even hot dogs. It always impressed me how adding a few slices of avocado to a salad, or a layer of guacamole to a burger

or sandwich, could totally transform it—essentially turning “normal food” into something glorious. That’s how I feel about it anyway. Avocado is one of the staples of my diet, and I find that it pairs well with almost everything. It’s even great on its own as a snack or small meal—slice in half, sprinkle on some salt and pepper, a squeeze of lemon, and perfection.

I think that the accomplishment of the avocado, as it were, insofar as its transforming power, is in a way

representative of what active kindness and compassion add to our lives. There are a lot of things that we do in the course of our work or caring for our family or just being concerned citizens, that are good things, nice things, caring things, necessary things, but also things that become somewhat the “default.”

You know how when you see a sign all the time, it starts to feel like wallpaper and you don't really see it any more? Sometimes, the things we do for those around us become like

**In 1906, Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto noted that 80% of Italy's land was owned by 20% of the people, then that 80% of the peas in his garden came from 20% of his pea plants. The Pareto Principle—that in general 80% of consequences stem from 20% of causes—has been observed and studied in sales and marketing, management, technology, economics, and other fields.**

that. We aren't particularly mindful when we do them, and the recipients aren't particularly grateful for what we do. Or, sometimes it's the things others do for us that fail to be properly noticed and acknowledged. Either way, when we go the extra mile and add a little “avocado” in the form of, say, a few words of welcome or appreciation, it makes a big difference.

Recently, I traveled home by bus after a few days' visit in a nearby city. I'm an experienced traveler, and handle long trips pretty well, but naturally I always prefer when I end up with a free seat next to me rather than another person. I had settled into my seat, and the bus seemed nearly full, but nobody was beside me yet ... but, sure enough, a young man soon approached and asked if he could sit beside me. I said “Yes, please do,” and he smiled and replied, “Never in my life

has someone replied with a ‘please do.’ That's refreshing.” I try to make a point to be kind to strangers—strangers have been kind to me many a time—and it made me happy to have made a memory like that for someone.

He settled into the seat, we started chatting, and had a pleasant conversation for a while before we both sank back into

our devices and earbuds to relax. There was a “warm and fuzzy” feeling in the air—so much better than that prickly feeling when you and your fellow

passengers inevitably bump elbows on the tiny seat rest between the tiny seats. We didn't have any of that. The journey was smooth and creamy, like avocado.

You've probably heard of the “Pareto Principle.” Also known as the 80/20 principle. The concept is that about 80% of one's effectiveness is derived from about 20% of one's efforts. I was thinking about that in relation to guess what—avocados. I feel, and this is purely personal opinion, that while they're usually about 20% or less of the content of a meal, they are easily worth 80% of the deliciousness. Bringing the thread back around to mindful and active kindness, I think it's fair to say that when doing a “routine” helpful deed, if you add a few words and a personal touch, then that 20% of the effort is easily going to end up as 80% of what the other person remembers about the exchange. ■

# BIRTHDAY MANGO

By Anna Perlini

PARENTING  
FROM THE HEART



**M**y son Jonathan was born in a small Indian village, during the time my husband and I were working there. Like many Indian kids, he grew up eating rice, dahl, chapattis, and the incredible, colorful variety of tropical fruit available at every street corner.

Although he wasn't yet five when we moved back to Europe, it took him a while to get adjusted to the new environment, and particularly the new foods. At first, he looked very suspiciously at and dissected every bit of pasta on his plate. He had always been a slow eater, but he surely took his time to embrace Italian cuisine! Eventually, his memories of India and Indian food did fade. In those days, globalization hadn't quite kicked in yet, and the only produce available in Italian supermarkets was seasonal Italian produce.

However, passing by a newly opened delicacies store one day, I spotted a mango! It was quite expensive, but Jonathan's 11th birthday was just around the corner, and I thought it would be such a great treat for him to get to savor one of his favorite early childhood fruits.

I bought and packaged the mango, and invited my preteen son for a walk. Then we stopped on a bench and I solemnly presented my gift, telling him it would bring back memories from the past. Jonathan slowly opened the package and held the colorful mango in his hands for what seemed like a long time. No reaction.



“Mom, I really can't remember. Sorry.”

I felt a bit disappointed. “Well, you should still try it. I promise you, you loved them when you were small.” With the same suspicious look he'd given his first Italian dishes years before, Jonathan took a small bite. Then another one, then more. Still, no reaction. Then ... the seed appeared, and Jonathan's eyes lit up.

“Mom, now I remember! I do! I remember how fun it was sucking on the seed!” And along with that memory, many more started rushing through this thinker of a boy. We talked and talked, reminiscing on other events and memories from the past.

From this episode with my son, I remember thinking how important it is to hold on just a bit longer when things don't seem to click or make sense. As a mother, it was another confirmation that whatever we sow in our children's youngest years will never be forgotten. It might seem like it is at times ... but wait till they get to the seed! ■

# THE SEASONS OF LIFE

By Mara Hodler, adapted



There is a time and season for everything.

This is a big life lesson. It is really good news ... and not such great news at the same time. Regardless of how you may feel at the moment, what season of life you are currently living through, you can probably expect a change at some point, because, as we know, seasons come and go.

When I was a teenager, I had so many plans and ideas of what I wanted my life to look like. Most of the ideas I had were good, or at least okay. I wasn't (only) dreaming of being a celebrity or millionaire. I also wanted to be able to rush to anywhere in the world that needed help. I wanted to help orphans and wipe out poverty. If and when I had kids, I wanted to raise them in an African village where we all worked together to help a community thrive. That's what I wanted. It really sounded like a good dream; it still does sometimes.

I'm still watching that plan develop, but I've learned enough to know that God's design is so much more far-reaching than anything I could fathom. There are both times of sowing and times of reaping. And something else I've come to realize is that both seasons are repeating.

A farmer plants his crops every spring and harvests them every fall. Each year. He doesn't get upset that he's planting again another year. He doesn't scream

out in frustration, I just did this last year! Why again? In the fall when it's time to gather in the crops, he doesn't tell himself, Yay! I'll never have to do that again! The farmer knows the cycle will repeat every year, and he's okay with that.

In that way, we should all make peace with the seasons in our lives. There is a time to laugh, and a time to cry, a time to sow, and a time to reap, a time to give, and a time to receive. It's all gonna happen.

In Texas, where I live, the weather is crazy. One day you're in shorts. The next day you're pulling out your winter gear because there's a cold front coming through. On the blistering hot days, of which today is one, it's hard to remember that it also gets cold around here—even freezing cold.

It's the same with the seasons of life. When the sad times come, it's hard to remember that there's also a lot of happiness. When things disappoint, it's easy to forget about all the things that have worked out smoothly.

One season isn't more precious than another. A great artist will use lovely, bright colors—reds, yellows, purples, and blues—to convey inspiration, but not without the contrasts of black, the muted grays, and the blurred whites.

Each of our lives is no exception to the high and low seasons. And neither is it an exception to the promise that it will be beautiful in God's time. ■

# IN THE ITALIAN ALPS, STRADIVARI'S TREES LIVE ON



Heard on Weekend Edition Saturday

**A**ntonio Stradivari, the master violin maker whose instruments sell for millions of dollars today, has been dead

for nearly three centuries. Only 650 of his instruments are estimated to have survived.

But the forest where the luthier got his lumber is alive and well. And thanks to the surprising teamwork of modern instrument makers and forest rangers, Stradivari's trees are doing better than ever.

These spruce trees have been growing for hundreds of years in the Fiemme Valley, the same corner of the Italian Alps where Renaissance luthiers such as Stradivari, Guarneri, and Amati hand-picked the trees that would be turned into some of the world's finest instruments. Thanks to a serendipitous combination of climate and altitude, these have come to be called "Il Bosco Che Suona"—The Musical Woods.

Marcello Mazzucchi, a retired forest ranger with an uncanny knack for spotting timber that's ideal for instruments, walks among the trees, tapping on their trunks.

Mazzucchi's skill has led some to call him "The Tree Whisperer," but he laughs off that nickname. "I'm really more of a tree listener," he says. "I observe, I touch them, sometimes I even hug them. Look carefully and they'll tell you their life story, their traumas, their joys, everything. Such humble creatures."

He goes from trunk to trunk, crossing flawed candidates off his list.

"This one over here was struck by lightning," he says. "Who knows what kind of sound its violin would make?"

Then he finds a contender: "It shoots up perfectly straight. It's very cylindrical. No branches at the bottom. If you ask me, there's a violin trapped inside."

Mazzucchi takes out a manual drill called a borer, and twists it like a corkscrew through the bark. He listens carefully to the knocking sound the borer

makes each time it hits a new tree ring.

Pulling out a core sample shaped like a pencil, he concludes the tree is an excellent specimen. A lumberjack chops down trees like this one and carts them to a lumberyard nearby, where the spruce is milled into sections.

Local instrument maker Cecilia Piazzì examines a piece of that milled wood, and declares it "magnificent."

"We use it for making the table—that's the beautiful part on the front of a violin or cello, with the sound holes on the surface," Piazzì says. "Yes, this piece is the right piece. I can tell just by flicking it."

It takes months to complete a single instrument, which can cost over \$10,000—a bargain, when you consider a Stradivarius that came from the same forest can go for over \$10 million.

But it's enough to keep this community humming. The Fiemme Valley is one of Italy's most prosperous areas, thanks in large part to these musical woods. And it's going to stay that way because people like The Tree Whisperer take care of it.

Before a tree hits the chopping block, Mazzucchi looks around to see if there are any tiny saplings struggling to grow nearby. If so, removing an adult tree will let more sun in and actually help the babies mature.

Bruno Cosignani, the head of the local forest service, explains that light is the limiting factor on tree growth.

"As soon as a tree falls down, those who were born and suffering in the shadows can start to grow more quickly," he says.

And centuries from now, those trees, too, might become musical instruments. ■

# Learning from nature

NOTABLE  
QUOTES



I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in.—**George Washington Carver**

Nature is man's teacher. She unfolds her treasures to his search, unseals his eye, illumines his mind, and purifies his heart; an influence breathes from all the sights and sounds of her existence.

—**Alfred Billings Street**

Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.—**Lao Tzu.**

Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.

—**John Muir**

I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright.

—**Henry David Thoreau**

Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair.—**Khalil Gibran**

Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.

—**Albert Einstein**

To sit in the shade on a fine day and look upon verdure is the most perfect refreshment.—**Jane Austen**

Happiness flutters in the air whilst we rest among the breaths of nature.

—**Kelly Sheaffer**

There is a way that nature speaks, that land speaks. Most of the time we are simply not patient enough, quiet enough to pay attention to the story.—**Linda Hogan**

If the sight of the blue skies fills you with joy, if a blade of grass springing up in the fields has power to move you, if the simple things of nature have a message that you understand, rejoice, for your soul is alive.—**Eleonora Duse**

