

Listening to a Tree

By **Donald P. St. John**

“Did you know that trees talk? Well they do. They talk to each other, and they’ll talk to you if you listen. Trouble is, white people don’t listen. They never listen to the Indians so I don’t suppose they’ll listen to other voices in nature. But I have learned a lot from trees: sometimes about the weather, sometimes about animals, sometimes about the Great Spirit.”

Tatangi Mani (Walking Buffalo)

How do you listen to a tree?
Not with your ears, only –
But with your whole being.

A tree is a presence to whom you open,
A friend with whom you sit,
A sage from whom you learn.

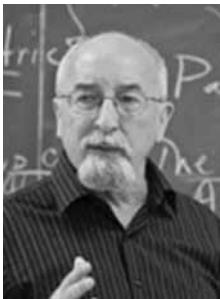
To listen to a tree
Is to return
To original simplicity,
Basic sanity –
Old Lao Tzu’s “uncarved block.”

How do you listen to a tree?

With hushed expectancy –
As when a mother, awake in the dark,
Listens for the infant’s cry.

With soaring harmony –
As when a singer, losing self,
Becomes the song.

Losing self,
Become the tree.



Donald P. St. John

Donald P. St. John, Emeritus Professor of Religion at Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA, holds a Ph.D. in Theology from Fordham University. His articles and reviews on Thomas Merton have appeared in *The Merton Annual*, *The Merton Seasonal* and *Merton & Taoism*. He received a 2004 Catholic Press Association Award for *Teilhard in the Twenty-First Century: Spirit of the Earth*, co-edited with Arthur Fabel. He has served on the Board of Directors of several organizations including the American Teilhard Association, where he was also editor of *Teilhard Studies* from 1994-2007. He is completing a major work on Merton as a radical ecologist and a book tentatively titled *Crazy Wisdom for Elders*, which draws heavily on Taoist (Daoist) philosophy including selections from Merton’s “rendering” of Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi).