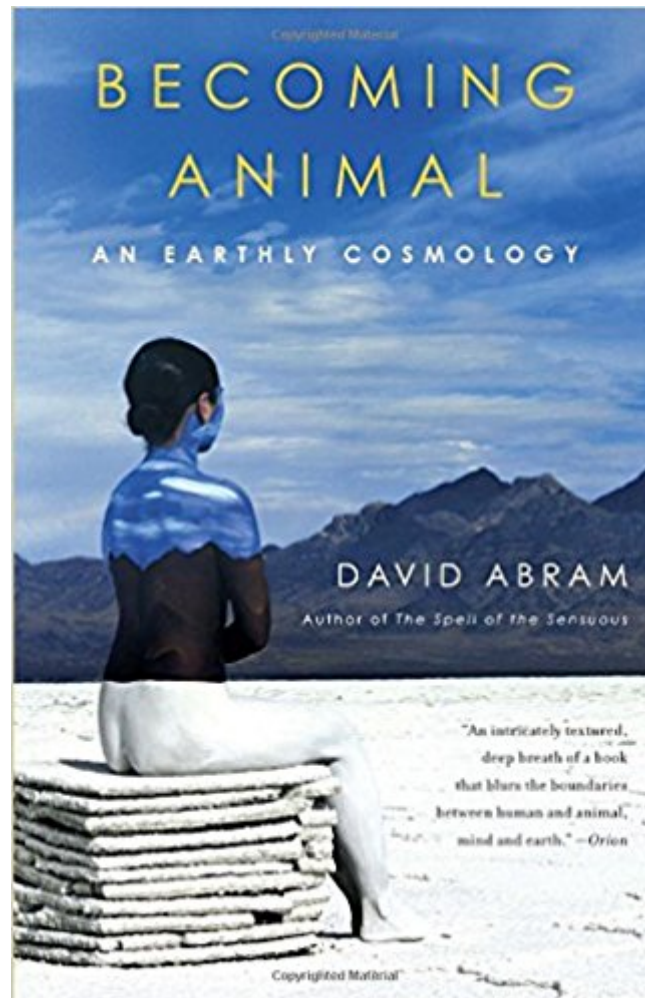




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Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology



Synopsis

David Abram's first book, *The Spell of the Sensuous* has become a classic of environmental literature. Now he returns with a startling exploration of our human entanglement with the rest of nature. As the climate veers toward catastrophe, the innumerable losses cascading through the biosphere make vividly evident the need for a metamorphosis in our relation to the living land. For too long we've ignored the wild intelligence of our bodies, taking our primary truths from technologies that hold the living world at a distance. Abram's writing subverts this distance, drawing readers ever closer to their animal senses in order to explore, from within, the elemental kinship between the human body and the breathing Earth. The shape-shifting of ravens, the erotic nature of gravity, the eloquence of thunder, the pleasures of being edible: all have their place in this book.

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Customer Reviews

Richard Louv Reviews *Becoming Animal* Richard Louv is the author of seven books, including *Last Child in the Woods*. He is the chairman of the Children & Nature Network, and has served as adviser to the Ford Foundation's Leadership for a Changing World award program and the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. Read his review of *Becoming Animal*: David Abram is unique among interpreters of the wild voice within us. His first book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, has become a touchstone for a needed shift in our thinking about the place of humans in the world. As the poet Gary Snyder remarked, that book helped map us back into the world. In his new book, *Becoming Animal*, Abram offers a startling new exploration of our entanglement with the rest of

nature. This time, his focus is the intimate but sadly forgotten relationship between our bodies and the earth. By excavating the most ordinary and familiar of our experiences--the perception of shadow, the recognition of depth, the transience of mood--he re-opens for us the knowing that our bodies are intertwined with the flesh of the earth. I cannot imagine another book that so gently and so persuasively alters how we look at ourselves, and reminds us that sentience was never our private possession, that our very awareness is a means of participating in a more than human world. At no other time in Western history have we needed to listen to the wild voice within us, and to Dave Abram's, as much as we do today. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Starred Review How did our curious, inventive species go from worshiping nature to destroying it? A creative and visionary ecologist and philosopher, Abram addressed this complex and urgent question in his influential first book, *Spell of the Sensuous* (1996). In his second provocative, boldly recalibrating blend of stories, reflections, and discoveries, he offers perception-heightening insights into the causes of our disparagement of "sensuous reality," or "embodied existence," and the disastrous consequences of our increasing detachment from the living world as we funnel our attention to the cyber realm. As Abram identifies underappreciated aspects of our minds and bodies that evolved to enable us to respond with exquisite sensitivity to our surroundings, he tells extraordinary tales of his encounters with wildlife from whales to ravens, illuminates the planet's myriad forms of sentient life, and elucidates the significance of oral culture. In addition to writing with poetic precision about sensory experience "his analysis of shadows and life's reciprocity are phenomenal feats of observation and eloquence" he also draws on his adventures as an itinerant sleight-of-hand magician and apprentice to indigenous shamans to forge an inspired physics of being. We can "re-store" nature, Abram writes, without "re-storying" life, hence his prodigious, transfixing, and rectifying "earthly cosmology." --Donna Seaman --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

I have given away many, many copies of this book. Abram is a prophet for our times. His prose reads like poetry and is filled with insights that feed the mind and rejuvenate the spirit. Abram's writing is so delectable that I prefer to read only a paragraph or two each day so I can just savor them and let their wisdom percolate through my consciousness. If you were to purchase this book and only have time to read one or two lines of it, you would still find that you are a better person for having done so. His writing is that inspired.

Just now reading David Abram's essay, *Earth in Eclipse*, part of an article that was originally published in 2003, I am struck by how fluidly his new book, *Becoming Animal*, flows from his earlier thesis. The skill with which he is able to articulate his thoughts on our "navigation" between so many worlds of technology and nature are as if one long continuous conversation through his years as a writer, philosopher, magician and ecologist. Dr. Abram is a man of the world, a brilliant author who is a necessary voice of reason in our earthly landscape, bringing us the wisdom to bridge the gap between the sciences and our physical senses. *Becoming Animal* has through the magic of his words pulled me out of my preverbal-rabbit hole, lost like Alice back to my senses where the sensual begins and the contact with earthly delights brings awakening. I recommend this book to young and old souls interested in our beautiful "undulating Earth that we inhabit with our animal bodies," to savor, to taste, to smell, to hold close.

A spectacular book, as good or better than his 1st book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*. A sensuous ethnography of the biosphere, but actually of the whole earth (rocks, too). If you have read Bateson's *Mind in Nature*, Lovelock and the debate about Gaia, either of the Tedlocks or ethnographies of shamanism, LaChapelle on sacred earth rituals, or books on deep ecology or Buddhist ecology (like *Dharma Rain* or *Seeing God Everywhere*), then you should read Abram. In *Becoming Animal*, he presents a coherent, unifying thesis that I believe ties the ideas from many of these books together in one worldview, including beauty, aesthetics, and the sacred. From his field experiences living with magicians in several cultures, he puts certain "animistic" aspects of their perceptive strategy and worldview at the center of understanding our humanness. Very Buddhist, and yet literate and philosophical. Presents an interesting intellectual or cognitive history of science, the Copernican revolution, and literate v. oral cultures. He hopes to heal "Descartes Error." For me, Abram's book integrated themes in my most favorite authors and thinkers, Bucky Fuller and Bateson, and the book by Barbara Tedlock, *The Woman in the Shaman's Body: Reclaiming the Feminine in Religion and Medicine*. Bucky often said "Unity is plural and at minimum two." Bateson said that all living things participate in "mind," and many of his ideas are found in Abram's long chapter, *Mind*. Bateson argued that the essence of meaning and of explaining our lives was relationships and communication about relationships between two persons or a creature and its environment. Pathology was very often broken relationships. All of those ideas fit in perfectly with Abram's ideas about learning to reconnect with animals and our own animal nature. His chapter, *The Real in its Wonder*, is completely relevant to anthropology, describing the only way ethnography can be pursued whole-heartedly today, I think. He perhaps oversimplifies the complex interplay between

old and new, natives and anthropologists and others, that is transforming, reshaping, and using for new purposes the old oral traditions in many places. But he made me think with this exhortation: "the rejuvenation of oral culture is an ecological imperative." So go out and talk, sing, and tell stories with your neighbors to save the earth!! Wendell Berry has been preaching and writing novels about this for decades. The only slightly critical comment I would make about the book is, I think he underestimates the distinctive character and power of language in his enthusiasm to rebalance it with other means of communication with non-human beings. I have long believed that language is the fundamental and distinctive characteristic of our species. Not because it makes us smarter, better, or favored, but because of what we do with it: play, write poetry, eventually do science and understand the world, develop and continually create culture in all its complex, divine glory. So he undervalues what Homer and Shakespeare and Pushkin have done, and he undervalues the way storytellers and poets play with words and in stories in spectacular, moving, ironic, inspiring, joyful ways. Actually, Abram tries to keep his argument in balance, giving credit to writing, books, and even the new digital society that appears to be global and not local, not grounded in the way he and Berry believe is critical to our species and to the earth's survival. The whole point, the core challenge today, is how to rebalance the new with the traditional, how to decide what to preserve and what to change or leave go to make way for the new. So, as you can see, I loved the book. Good medicine, good food for thought, maybe even soul food.

Amazingly, this book by David Abram's surpasses his *Spell Of The Sensuous*, his previous work. It combines the personal story of his family's journey to where they are now, ecologically, and gives a flowing, lyrical, beautifully descriptive narration which conveys a man's deep connection to the planet we all depend upon, and warns of the dangers of continuing on our path towards destruction of this friendly place which some seem to take for granted. If animals could read, this book would be on their best-seller list. I hope he continues writing along this line and that more will read his work and take action.

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