

TRANSCRIPTION

Duncan Williamson talks about “The Night of Peace” and conversing with animals

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[This recording was made at a rented house in Auchtermuchty, Fife, in July 1986. Present were Duncan Williamson, John Niles, and a half dozen members of Niles’s research team. The audio excerpt begins just after the words that are set between square brackets.]

[DW: This is a wonderful story called “The Night of Peace.”]

All the animals got together an they said, “Luik, this is a night when we must have a night of peace.” The old wolf crawled from his den, hungry. So did the fox. And he felt so peaceful. He was hungry, but he didn’t want to hunt, he didn’t want to eat. And along come a hare. And the hare stopped right beside them. He stood terrified. And the fox said, the wolf said: “Luik, don’t be terrified of us, luttle friend. Tonight is a night of peace. Let’s all get together an celebrate the comin of the Christ child. This is the night of peace.”

So this is what the Travellers believed in. This is a night of peace for everyone to have a nice peaceful hour together. You’ve heard of the five-minute silence in the world? Well, let’s have one hour of peace together! No grievances, no arguments, no nothing. Just think about it for your own self and your own mind to have, if the whole world could have one hour of peace where no one would fight, no one would steal, no one did nothing, just one hour of peace. So, that’s what the Travellers held.

But we have that hour of peace even suppose we were miles from each other. My daughter and my son could be in England. I could be in Inverness. Some of ma cousins could be away down in the Borders. But at twelve o’clock they’ll know we’ll have that night of peace. They’ll do the same thing as I’m doing. I’ll just sit there and say, “This is when you have one quiet hour at nighttime.” Have a cup of tea and a rest, and have no noise, no music, no nothing, just a nice quiet night of peace. They’re celebratin the same thing maybe a hundred an fifty miles away.

SL: So are they — are you thinking of each other during that hour?

DW: Course we will be thinking of each other! They’ll know that I’ll be doing it, and Ah’ll know they’ll be doing it. So it’s just as if we’re close together. Say you were in California, an your wife was in Dundee. You say to yourself, “I know that this is the night An if she knew what you were thinkin, it would probably be prearranged because you probably did this as a child, even though you’re miles apart. You don’t need to be together to have the night of peace. You can be miles away providin that you celebrate this one single hour. So that makes it so wonderful. That’s what it was all about.

HT: Duncan, a lot of settled people have the belief that the animals talk at midnight on Christmas Eve.

DW Yeah, a lot of people say that animals talk. So does the Travellers too. I mean, talkin animals was a great thing among the travelling people. In most o my stories, animals all talk.

HT: But just at that hour, or anytime?

DW: No, they believe that animals can talk always, if ye can get to understand them, if you can believe and understand them. Any animals talk. I mean, a cock crows, ye know? An a sheep baas, and a dog barks, and a cat mews. You should be able to communicate with them. They're talkin their own language, ye see what I mean? A shepherd can teach a dog to do anything. So is the dog lairnin your language, or are you learnin his?

All: [*Laughter all around.*]

DW: Tell the truth, which is which? You say, "Stand up! Beg! Sit down! Lie down!" Or a farmer will say, "Way behind him! Bring him here, bring him here!" Who knows, if he's bringin in some sheep, is the dog sayin, "Of course, he knows what I'm doin. He's talkin to me. I'm not talkin to him."

See, this is the same with every animal. A cock will crow in the morning, go "*a cockle-doodle-do!*" You will say, "That cock's crowing." You hear the cock crowin. You say, "It's nice to hear a cock crowing." So therefore you understand what the cock is saying. He's saying, "Get up! It's time to get up in the morning. It's five o'clock." Now, that cock knows you're to him. So who knows who's talkin to each other, you or him?

See, it's the same thing with a rabbit or a wheasel or anything else. You put your foot on a rabbit an it'll squeak bloody blue blazes because it knows you're hurtin it. It's tryin to tell you to get off, and you'll naturally lift your foot off. He's gettin through to you, tellin, "Get your foot off me, you're hurtin me!" You don't lift your foot because you feel sorry for him. You lift your foot because you hear him squeakin. Or a rabbit. Or you tramp on a dog's tail; you lift your foot off. So that animal is communicatin with you. So it means that — you or him, who's the one that's hearin the talk?

HT: The more you communicate with any animal, o

DW: So this is the idea of talkin animals. Anyone can talk to an animal.

JY I have long conversations with my cats. The only trouble is they seem to know what they're saying and what I'm saying, but I don't know.

DW Well, you see.

DW = Duncan Williamson

SL = Susan Luntz

HT = Holly Tannen
JY = Jeppy Yarensky