

## Vision for the Earth-Sky Garden, Taraloka @ 35

My first impression of the landscape around Taraloka, like most people I suspect, was one of mild disappointment - so flat! But before long, I had been completely won over by the awesome skies - so much sky! Vast open views. Glorious sunrises and sunsets. Extraordinary cloudscapes. I love this spaciousness, this sense of easy movement, of freedom. And over time the soft and subtle curves of the land started to seep into - and through me too, so that I now no longer consider the land to be flat.

In particular, I love the mound that rises beyond the shrine room windows. The "hill" that is visible from the shrine room, around which the sun rises each morning, and around which the moon rises too. "Cornhill" as it was named, and after which Cornhill Farm (now Taraloka) was named. I am fascinated by that gentle belly of earth, indicating some potential currently hidden beneath the surface. It is so close, I feel I could just reach out and touch it, run my hand over that belly, that promise. Sometimes I can imagine that gentle hill as the top of the world - like the top of a giant globe - so close! And it strikes me that the meeting of earth and sky is particularly tangible around us here, the horizon is nearly always visible.

From that mound, that belly, the curve of the top of the world, the horizon sweeps down towards the canal and the line of trees which marks its route, past the end of the shrine room, dipping into gentle hollows which remember the river that once ran there. Hollows which often hold and anchor the early morning mists, and where the rounded cobblestones deposited by the retreating ice still sit patiently under the earth. Behind and through it all the sun rises, radiating warmth and colour. So many women (thousands?) have walked to the boundary fence before or after morning meditations to soak this up, to witness and take their place in this magic, to cast their own shadow on the land. And we have our own mound, a foreground hummock which rises above those mists, a mound on which the old elder grows.

Inside our boundary the elder and rowan grow, beyond are the singular oaks, standing in the open fields, bridging that threshold of earth and sky. Rooted in the earth and reaching far and wide into the sky, creating an exchange, a transitional space, a connecting force - each one unique. We too stitch the earth and the sky together as we stand and walk upright on the earth, as we blur the boundary between them, and each of us unique too. For me, this opportunity to root energetically into the earth and to reach up into the sky is something I can feel very tangibly here at Taraloka. Something too that we are familiar with practising during our walking meditation and body work outside the shrine room, as well as our sitting practise in the shrine room.

The shrine room itself, even with one whole wall open to this landscape, feels grounded, safe and solid. Peaceful, yet full of energy from the practice of countless women over three and a half decades. And behind us, the main retreat centre itself, cradled within the beauty of the gardens, with all the main rooms opening out directly onto the landscape, anchors the space and all of us within it.

These are the inspirations, born of the landscape, for the Earth Sky Garden :  
Energy from the cosmos coming to earth at the high point of Cornhill  
The near skyline, flowing from the raised belly of the earth down into the ancient riverbed.

The foreground hummock, our own elevated mound.  
The trees embracing both earth and sky, and our own activity of exchange as we practice.  
The shrine room and outdoor space, connecting our practice both inside and outside.  
The open buildings of the retreat centre anchoring this space in an intimate pocket of beauty.

Imagine a huge spiral from the cosmos being received by the earth as Cornhill reaches up to meet the sky. Imagine the spiral continuing down on the land, following the sweep of the horizon towards the canal, curving round through the shrine room, tightening back and coming to rest at the foot of our mound, beneath the elder. Sitting in the shrine room we might imagine the spiral sweeping us up into itself as it comes to rest in front of us, burying itself at the foot of the mound, focusing us at it's heart. Here we can go just a bit deeper into the earth, root just a little further. Stepping outside from the shrine room, we might be drawn into the heart of the spiral nestled in the earth, or we might be drawn onto the top of the mound to gaze over the hidden and ancient riverbed towards the sun. Here we can reach out just a little higher into the sky, spread just a little wider.

In the centre of the spiral sits a fire bowl, transformation is possible. The central whorl is spacious enough for body work and walking meditation, whilst the spiral wall offers us a place to sit and rest. A dry stone wall to the side of the retreat centre supports warm rusty steel panels enclosing the space. Whilst catching the warmth of the sun, this wall shields the space from the humdrum of the retreat centre kitchen as well as from the prevailing winds. Niches in the wall hold candles, objects from nature, and rupas; plants and flowers grow out of the crevices. Details of colour, texture and form surround, intrigue and delight us.

At any time we can turn inwards, rest deeper in the earth, warm our backs in the sun, rejoice in the beauty around us and the companionship of others. At any time we can travel out with the spiral over the land into the world, perhaps to walk taller and broader and deeper.

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