

Or Shalom Tikkun Olam Book Club - Braiding Sweetgrass - May 9 2021

Themes for Discussion

1. The Honorable Harvest

A practice both ancient and urgent, the Honorable Harvest applies to every exchange between people and the Earth. It is a covenant of reciprocity between humans and the land.

Here are the steps of this unwritten protocol:

Ask permission of the ones whose lives you seek. Abide by the answer.

Never take the first. Never take the last.

Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.

Take only what you need and leave some for others.

Use everything that you take.

Take only that which is given to you.

Share it, as the Earth has shared with you.

Be grateful.

Reciprocate the gift.

Sustain the ones who sustain you, and the Earth will last forever.

In what ways could you make “honorable harvests” a part of your life?

2. Animacy – The Language of Intimacy

A World where everything is alive, water, land and even a day – pulsing through all things – all are beings that have spirit and our interactions with them must therefore be seen as relationships, not simply as resources to be used and exploited.

*“‘To be a bay’ holds the wonder that for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers ... **To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive.**”*

In a similar idea, Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi has suggested that God-ing is a mutually interactive verb, one which entails an interdependency between two subjects, each being the object for the other.

3. Gratitude – The Thanksgiving Address

The Thanksgiving Address, by its very nature of greetings to all who sustain us, is long.

In the act of joining the gifts of creation, this becomes a statement of sovereignty, a political structure, a social contract, a way of being – all in one piece. But first and foremost, it is the credo for a culture of gratitude.

Modah Ani Lifanecha (“I am thankful before You” are the first words we say when we arrive in our Tradition)

In what ways might we show gratitude to our living earth by giving back?

4. Culture of Reciprocity

“All flourishing is mutual” echoes the Hebrew idea of *shefa*, the continuous flow of bounty.

Each living thing, human or not, is bound to every other in a reciprocal relationship. Reciprocity helps resolve the moral tension of taking a life by giving in return something of value that sustains the ones who sustain us.

Kimmerer believes we are called to go beyond cultures of gratitude, to once again become cultures of reciprocity.

What are some examples of human flourishing in tandem with nature’s flourishing?

5. Love

“What do you suppose would happen if people believed this crazy notion that the earth loved them back?”

Food, plants and people all act as selective forces on each other’s evolution - the thriving of one in the best interest of the other. This sounds a bit like love.

If you are a person who loves nature, do you feel that nature loves you back? If not, are there circumstances under which you can imagine nature loving you?

6. Relationships

We don’t have to figure everything out by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own, teachers all around us.

Plants embody the knowledge of relationship. Alone they are what they are. When standing together, a whole emerges which transcends the individual. The gifts of each are more fully expressed when cultivated and nurtured together than alone.

“When we really depend on other lives, there is an urgency to protect these lives.”

How are we different when we bathe in relationship rather than when we are rugged individualists?