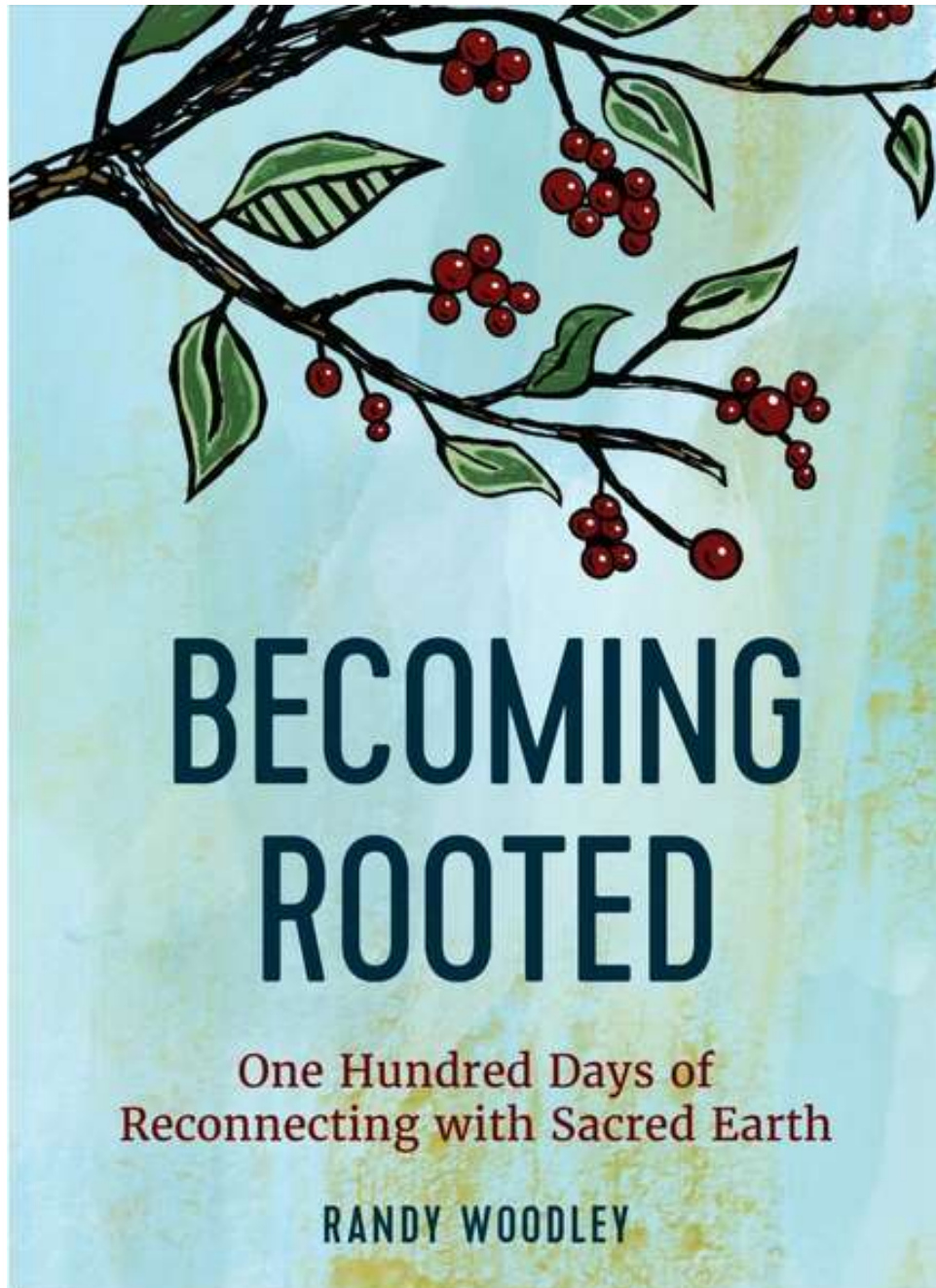


These meditations are taken from the following book and are used with permission from the author. Here is a link to his website: <https://www.randywoodley.com/>

The Climate Action Committee encourages you to purchase Rev. Dr. Randy Woodley's book for a deeper dive into our relationship with our earth, our spirit, each other and the sacred connections which link all together.

It will also help support a local author.



Monday, Meditation 9: To All My Relatives

A translation of mitakuye oyasin would better read: “For all the above me and below me and around me things.” That is, for all my relations . . . it is this understanding of inter-relatedness, of balance and mutual respect of the different species in the world, that characterizes what we might call Indian people’s greatest gift to Amer-Europeans and to the Amer-European understanding of creation at this time of world ecological crisis. —Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker

In Lakota, mitakuye oyasin means something like “for all the above me and below me and around me things.” In Cherokee, it is hi-da-da-tse-li. Once I asked a Navajo friend, “What is Sá’ąh Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón?” His reply: “I don’t know; it’s just our life, the way we live in harmony and beauty.”

I think most Indigenous peoples have some word for or understanding of this way of being—a way that sees us as living in deep relationship with other humans and all species. I suspect all human beings desire to live according to what I sometimes call “the original instructions.” Perhaps it’s similar to what some call “the common good.” Indigenous people understand this way of living as not a future utopia but simply the way to be now.

By giving credence to the idea that all people are related to each other, we open ourselves to the possibility of once again becoming family with all humanity. By realizing the connectedness of humankind to all animal life and life in every form, we become aware of new possibilities for learning and becoming active in species preservation. By studying humanity’s dependence upon creation, we learn how to sustain our planet, and we learn fresh prospects for developing food, water, and renewable energy.

What if we are all related? What if the Lakota prayer—for all that is above me, and all that is below me, and everything that is around me—is a prayer said on behalf of our relatives? Most important of all, every human creature could realize the fact that peace is attainable if we are all willing to say, “We are all related.”

Stand outside and look around you. Name some of the relatives you have neglected.

Tuesday, Meditation 17: Water, Sacred to Us All

When the well's dry, we know the worth of water. —Benjamin Franklin

For several years, we packed up our kids and a few belongings in an old van and traveled from one Indian reservation to another as we served Indigenous people in a variety of ways. On our trips, we learned in new ways the way that water is sacred to America's Indigenous people. Water is sacred to us all.

One year, we were honored to be present for a blessing ceremony on the Big Grassy Reserve in Ontario, Canada. In the early spring, the Ojibwe community blesses the lake. They say prayers, sing songs, and speak words to reestablish any lost connection in that great circle of life, which includes the people and the fish and the lake.

Across Turtle Island is Hopiland. In the Bean Dance, as with most ceremonies among the peoples of the Southwest, the Hopi nation prays for rain. And I think that's about all the Hopi would like said about that. With deep gratitude to the Hopi, we were their guests for the Bean Dance.

Traditionally, Cherokee people do a going-to-water ceremony, during which songs are sung in the morning to greet the day at the creek or river's edge or next to a spring. These ceremonies continue to this day. I am among those who continue to practice the Cherokee water ceremony, if even in a small way.

Among the Pacific Northwest nations of Indigenous peoples, borders disappear during their annual Canoe Journey. Canoe Journey is a chance for those various tribal peoples to reestablish themselves once again. The Pacific Ocean, with its bays and inlets and beaches, has provided so much for the people over millennia.

You have a daily relationship with water. Perhaps we all can agree on a few simple truths:

- Our aquifers are being overpumped well beyond their recharge rates.
- Rising temperatures are boosting evaporation rates.
- Rainfall patterns are now severely altered, and inadequate snowmelts are not properly feeding rivers and streams in the dry season.
- Water tables are falling, with whole lakes now disappearing.
- Glaciers are melting at alarming rates. The tundra is melting.
- Water shortages translate to food shortages.
- Global water consumption doubles about every twenty years. The UN expects demand to outstrip supply by 30 percent in 2040.
- Global corporate opportunists, who see the absolute devastation coming, are attempting to buy up the world's water supplies for profit.

Water is sacred. No one can live without water.

Savor water enough to save it for everyone. Today, try to use less water as you wash, cook, or clean. Become active politically on behalf of water.

Wednesday, Meditation 24: The Circle

We inter-breathe with the rain forests, we drink from the oceans. They are part of our own body.
—Thich Nhat Hanh

One model of understanding our relationship to everything is a simple symbol used among Native Americans: the circle. The harmony way of living is often referred to symbolically as a circle or a hoop. Among Native Americans, the harmony way is less like a philosophy and more like a whole way of being and doing life.

To European and Western people, a philosophy is something that one can adopt at any point in life. A philosophy can simply be believed or espoused. But the harmony way is a way of living and being, with very tangible expressions. Living out the harmony way requires not just a belief but also actions that align with and participate in the local ecosystem and the whole universe. The circle is the tangible symbol that represents this understanding.

Perhaps you remember when you were a child and an adult said something like “OK, kids, gather around,” or “Let’s get in a circle,” or simply, “Circle up.” Circles are found in nature; perhaps that’s why we are so comfortable imitating the pattern. A circle seems like the natural way to gather together, each person able to see the eyes of everyone else. Each hand clasped to the person next to themselves. Each body, creating an impenetrable ring of protection. A circle is a very natural and comfortable way to come together.

The circle has no beginning and no end, so one can enter at any place or stage. The circle can explain stages of life, values, and different people groups. Circles can explain the seasons, how they all continue on to create harmony and balance.

Life is a sacred circle. When we gather in a circle, the praying has already begun. When we gather in a circle, we communicate with each other and with Great Mystery, even without a word being spoken.

When do you gather in a circle with other people, and what do you notice about how it feels? What circles—with other people or creatures or living things—might you realize today?

Thursday, Meditation 41: Living with Nature

We cannot know the whole truth, which belongs to God alone, but our task nevertheless is to seek to know what is true. And if we offend gravely enough against what we know to be true, as by failing badly enough to deal affectionately and responsibly with our land and our neighbors, truth will retaliate with ugliness, poverty, and disease. —Wendell Berry

As settlers began to move in, Native people's crucial food supplies became more and more scarce. These food sources had been available to them for millennia and had kept them in a symbiotic balance with the land. Indigenous hunters had to travel farther distances, which sometimes resulted in competition among themselves and other tribes. This competition often led to conflicts and sometimes even resulted in wars.

The very land itself meant something quite different to the newcomer than it did to the host people. Something was missing. The difficulty, as the Natives saw it, was with the settlers themselves and their failure to tread lightly, with humility and respect, on the land. The settlers wanted to live on the land, but the host people lived with the land. Living on the land means objectifying the land and natural resources and being shortsighted concerning the future. Living with the land means respecting the natural balance.

To Indigenous peoples, the problems of a Western worldview are obvious. The way of life demonstrated by Western peoples leads to alienation from the Earth, from others, and from all of creation. This lifestyle creates a false bubble called "Western civilization," which people of the West think will protect them from future calamity. This false hope is detached from all experience and reality.

The problem is that the Western system itself is what brings the calamity. There is little doubt that much of what we are experiencing today as so-called natural disasters have their origin in human carelessness.

How do we avoid the impending disaster brought on by a settler lifestyle of living on the land and against nature? The answer is simple: we learn to live with nature.

What areas in your daily life cause calamity in nature? Choose at least one and make a change so that you begin to live with the land, not just on it.

Friday, Meditation 58: Plastic Spirit

I am just a human being trying to make it in a world that is rapidly losing its understanding of being human. —John Trudell, Dakota

A few years ago, I attended a Native American men's retreat in the land of the Nooksack people. The more familiar way to describe its location is to say that it was near the border of Washington state and British Columbia. That pays homage to a mythical nation-state border, however, and centers both George Washington and Christopher Columbus. I prefer saying I was in the land of the Nooksack people, with a view of their sacred mountain in sight.

A Nooksack elder came and spoke to us on the first night. The elder told us he had just come from a meeting of Nooksack elders who were all also Nooksack language speakers. In many tribes, fluent tribal language speakers come together in an effort to preserve the language. Sometimes they compose words in their own language to express English words—terms for things or concepts for which the Indigenous language had no words.

The elder addressing us had just come from such a meeting, where they were discussing the word and concept of plastic. The elder told us that this group of Nooksack speakers had suggested that plastic might be the only thing on Earth that they understood to have no spirit or life force.

So many plastic bags and bottles have been thrown out to sea that now there exists, in the Pacific Ocean, a whole floating continent made of plastic. Eventually, the plastic breaks down and finds its way into the creatures of the water. In the great cycle of reciprocity, animals and humans eat the seafood, now full of microplastics. As a result of our consumption, they, and we, are full of microplastics.

The small particles of plastic also find their way into the hydrological cycle becoming rain. Now, even in the most remote areas of Earth, the rain that falls spreads microplastics everywhere: into the soil, into the waters, into all creation.

I wonder if the eventual fulfillment of the Western industrialized worldview is to create a world full of plastic beings. Will that include us—plastic humans who are without spirit or life force?

Wean yourself off plastic. Until you do, reduce your use of it, and recycle what you do use.

Saturday, Meditation 61: Harmony Way

I am because of you. —Desmond Tutu, Xhosa and Tswana

Our Cherokee people have a construct—a way of being—we call Eloheh. This lifeway includes our history, culture, law, and all aspects of life. One could say it means “the harmony way,” but it is so much more. Eloheh means the ground producing in abundance, the way it should. It means there is no fighting among each other and that everyone is acting as a good relative. Eloheh is knowing the world is in balance, and every being is doing their part. Sometimes it is described also as Duyukti: the right road or good path of balance. Eloheh is knowing the importance of community above oneself and your role in it.

Other North American tribes have similar understandings of the harmony way. From my own years of experience among various tribal peoples and my doctoral research, I learned that other tribes also hold a harmony-way concept as a foundation for living. Each tribe has a word or several words in their language that represents living in harmony and balance. In English, some tribes talk about harmony as a way of balance. Some say “beauty way”; others talk of a “good way” or a “good road.”

It is safe to assume that other Indigenous peoples around the world have similar understandings of the harmony way. I have known Indigenous people from all around the world who very much relate to this lifeway. This similarity allows some common ground among Indigenous peoples everywhere.

We are all indigenous from somewhere. So what happened? How did the individual become more important than the community? When did competition overtake cooperation? At what point did some civilizations trade knowledge through lived experience and replace its importance with theory?

The answers to these and other important questions are complex. Suffice it to say for now, the way back is through the harmony way of living and being. The way back is through one’s relationship with the Earth and the whole community of creation.

Go outside today and hold the soil in your hands. Imagine yourself as just one of the billions of life-forms around you, none more important than the other but each doing its part to maintain harmony and balance.

Sunday, Meditation 76: Healthy Soil, Healthy Earth

Once we have action, hope is everywhere. —Greta Thunberg

The world is in a mess. With so much going wrong, it is difficult to find hope for our future.

People put more than ninety million tons of toxic pesticides and fertilizers on American lawns each year. Most of what Americans call weeds are actually food or medicine. Most of those pesky insects are actually beneficial to our immediate environment. Nature has sent us helpers . . . and we kill them.

The faster, bigger, cheaper approach to our food systems is also draining the Earth's resources dry and destroying our health. The Earth's soil is being depleted at thirteen times the rate it can be replaced.

In the last century, we have lost 75 percent of our crop varieties. Over the past decade, we've dumped one hundred million tons of herbicides onto our crops, polluting our soil and streams. Genetically engineered crops are completely altering the composition of soil bacteria in the fields where such crops are grown. We have lost our relationship with food and food workers.

These are just a few of the facts haunting us every day. Here are some practical suggestions for reversing those trends:

- Grow food in your yard. Or simply rewild your space by just letting your lawn grow naturally into a meadow.
- Shop as much as possible in ways that support local, farm-direct, in-season growing. Look for produce grown from seeds that are open-pollinated and non-GMO and that has not been sprayed with insecticides or herbicides.
- Grow your own vegetables from open-pollinated, non-GMO seeds. Save your seeds.
- Learn how to compost to build up the soil. You can use red worms too!
- Shop at farmers' markets, or join a CSA group (Community Supported Agriculture) or farmer's coop.
- Learn how to preserve your own food (freeze, can, smoke, dry).
- Stay away from most packaged food—in other words, anything your great-grandparents wouldn't recognize.
- Save water, don't waste it. As much as possible, catch it, store it, and drip it.
- Attract pollinators—bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies—with wildflowers.
- Soak, scrub, and wash nonorganic fruits and vegetables.

Promote biodiversity everywhere. When we take action on behalf of sacred Earth, hope is not far from any one of us!

Healthy soil means a healthy Earth and healthy creatures—and hope! What ideas from the list above sound doable in your life?