



The Practice of Nourishing Nature

Meaning Making Project April 2026

Meeting this Moment with Love & Justice

WELCOME

As Unitarian Universalists our interdependence calls us to love and justice. We begin from the knowledge that we belong to the earth, a truth both profound and mundane. Yet we often feel estranged from nature, disconnected from the connected web of creation.

Don MacKenzie, A United Church of Christ minister suggests this estrangement grates on us on some deep level, unsettles us. He says his grandfather, when feeling off, would say “If I could just walk across a newly ploughed field in my bare feet, and feel the dirt coming up between my toes, I’d know where I was.”

<https://orionmagazine.org/article/climate-and-creation/>

I think we need the healing that comes from connecting with nature and I know the earth needs our help to heal and adapt to the climate crisis.

Spiritual resilience can arise in part through a visceral experience of the interdependent web of life, not just in our minds, but in our bodies and hearts. To find sanctuary in this blue green earth that is our home. This sense of love and connection can sustain us in the hard times, and these feel like hard times on so many levels.

My own spiritual practice to connect is simple – I go outside and sit under a tree – or I go outside and walk – or I just look out my window at the trees that I am so lucky to have around my home. I feel such gratitude to have all this green life just beyond my door, and every year I learn a little more about the trees and plants and birds and animals that share this land with me. I am beginning to know where I am.

I encourage all of you to find spiritual practices that connect you to the earth, from sketching a flower to singing a song outside to growing basil on the windowsill to hiking a mountain. Whatever lets you feel the way Mary Oliver feels in this excerpt from a poem:

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

Find the way nature nourishes your spirit and find ways to nourish nature. It is these gifts of connectedness that help us all.

Many Blessings,

Fiona

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The Practice of Nourishing Nature

- Where do you feel most nourished in nature? How does nature nourish you?
- In what ways do you nourish or give back to the natural world?
- How do you live in alignment with the rhythms of the earth? How do you know you are in (or out of) alignment with the earth's rhythms?
- Describe one of your favourite natural places? How do you feel when you are there?
- How does your identity or social location impact your ability to access the natural world?
- Do you feel that the recent extreme climate events impact your relationship to the natural world? In what way?
- Has nature been a source of danger or fear for you, and how does this impact your relationship with the natural world?
- How does where you grew up (town, city, rural/farm, wilderness) influence your relationship with the natural world?
- What has your family and culture taught you about nature?
- How has your relationship to the natural world changed over your life?
- What sort of connection do you have to the land on which you live? To the land or lands of your ancestors?
- How does being an immigrant, settler, or Indigenous person impact your relationship to land and nature?
- What have you learned from the land/nature and the more-than-human world?



QUOTES

In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.

Margaret Atwood

All Flourishing is Mutual

Robin Wall Kimmerer

The more I can connect with species other than my own, the more human (in the best possible sense) I become. Loving the natural world, seeing it and trying to protect its diversity and difference, expand my heart and soul.

Lorna Crozier

Any control we exert is illusory and brief. Eventually, the pine forest builds up enough fuel and fire is far bigger than it would've been if we had allowed natural fire; the levee gives out in a hurricane, the plutonium builds up in someone's bones, the bacteria outsmart the antibiotics, and the soil becomes exhausted. Even the science of conservation, in its efforts to "manage" land, operates under an assumption that people control nature.

Trevor Herriot, Grass, Sky, Song: Promise and Peril in the World of Grassland Birds

The plants within my paintings have become metaphors to parallel our own lives. The roots show that all life needs nurturing from the earth to survive, and represent the idea that there is more to life than what is seen on the surface. It also is to represent the great influence our heritage has over our lives. The lines which connect the plants symbolize our own interconnectedness with each other and all living things within Creation. The flowers and leaves reach upwards as we seek out our individual spirituality and look to our uncertain future.

Christi Belcourt

Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.

Robin Wall Kimmerer

Our survival as a species may depend on our ability to learn (or re-learn) how to find our way home, in the deepest and yet most natural of ways.

Rev. Lynn Harrison

QUOTES - 2

The web of life is not just a metaphor, it is complex network of exchanges. I may look at the forest and see individual trees but the forest behaves differently. I may assume that one needs a brain to think but ours is not the only kind of mind on this planet.

Rev. Karen Fraser Gitlitz

Nature reminds me that all things pass, all things transform. Winter turns to spring to summer and on and on. The earth has a very, very, very, long history. There is something sacred about all this life that just keeps on going, changing and resurrecting and returning. I take comfort in this truth, right now.

Rev. Fiona Heath

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

Mary Oliver, “Wild Geese”

For me the door to the woods is the door to the temple.

Mary Oliver, Upstream

Each one of us matters, has a role to play, and makes a difference. Each one of us must take responsibility for our own lives, and above all, show respect and love for living things around us, especially each other.

Jane Goodall, Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey

The chaos in which we are plunged now, on the heels of the ongoing war in Ukraine, is the devastating vengeance-fueled violence against civilians in Palestine and Israel. The ongoing war against truth in US politics, our collective traumatizing of the earth, the rise of fascism and normalization of racism and hatred – it all feels like we are on the brink of a new world DIS-order.

How different might it be if we took our cues and cures from the natural world, engaged in emergent strategy that prioritized listening to one another, moving with one another in cooperation rather than competition. To be starlings.

The Starling’s murmuration, bees moving in a swarm, a shoal of fish flashing this way then that by some signal invisible to us. Could we feel the pull of others if we tried? By what effort did we unlearn this instinctual pull of community ?

By what means might we reclaim our nature of reflexive collectiveness? And... how much more impactful if we extended our connection to any living thing and coordinated the direction of our lives in accordance with them – with animals, with plants, with trees, with the soil, with the air.

Can we learn to become 'naturalists', in the fullest sense of that word?

Rev. Jessica Rodela

MEDITATION

Awe & Preservation

Late,
before dawn rises,
an owl hoots outside the window,
a soft call,
a reminder of a presence
that may never be seen.

Safe, hidden,
in night shadows
of spring foliage,
it waits to swoop across the
forest,
calling to its mate.

This is peace,
something holy,
the stillness
of being awestruck
by something
that can't be seen,
something as elusive
as the end to human selfishness,
a calling from a most beautiful
creature,
a voice that whispers:
you can do this,
you can find this,
you can hear the answers,
if you stop to listen.

The desire for peace lives
in more minds than it evades,
the love of this earth
fills more hearts than is denied.

Smoke from fires,
skies thick with haze,
human caused
and nature fuelled,
all life disrupted,
an owl in the night calls out
its warning,
calls out its invitation.

Undo what you have done.

In the majesty of soft silent
wings,
comfort comes,
a resting place in the fading
night,
until it is replaced
by the chorus of birds
who greet the day.

May our reverence
for all that must be
preserved,
for all that must be saved,
call us to respond.

Rev. Diane Rollert



SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Spirit Walk

A Spirit Walk is a mindful, slow paced intentional walk that is intended to tune your mind and your senses to the present moment, to encourage attentiveness to the world around you. Mindful walking opens your senses while soothing the spirit. Walking moves the body while quieting the mind, allowing our busy minds to slow down and let go of the usual worries. It isn't about emptying the mind, but allowing it to refresh and focus on the present moment.

In a Spirit Walk the emphasis is on experiencing being in the world, the here and now, letting your attention linger on whatever catches your eye. A SpiritWalk can be done alone or in a group, but is walked in silence. Begin with some quiet breathing if you can.

Take anywhere from ten to thirty minutes, walking, moving slowly, stopping to examine what catches your eye. You won't get very far! Take a camera and take pictures if that helps you notice things. It can feel like a luxury of time, to simply wander slowly and pause, like a toddler, whenever your fancy takes you. Walk slowly, glance around you, up above, down below. If something catches your eye, stop and examine it. Look at the sky. Notice the clouds, or the stars, or the colour of the sky.

Look at the ground. Notice the sidewalk, the cracks in the concrete. Notice any green life that is growing. Take your time to see all that is around you. Pay attention.

After the walk, sit in reflection for about fifteen minutes. You might write in a journal, draw a picture, review the photos, or simply sit and consider what you have seen.

This is a great activity to do with children as they often notice interesting objects adults miss. Choose a shorter route and stay on quieter streets or try a park, where the kids can move more freely.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES - 2

Nature Sketching

Choose a subject from the outside world, such as a tree or plant (or even a houseplant) and draw or paint it while observing it with loving attention. Allow yourself to notice the details of the leaf, stem or blossom, taking your eyes off of it as little as possible and releasing yourself of any expectations. Work gently and slowly, allowing nature to “draw you” rather than the other way around.

Movements to Connect Body and Earth

Dancer and teacher Andrea Olsen has developed a series of exercises that help non-dancers and dancers alike connect with the earth through their bodies. She shares seven of these “somatic excursions” on her website, body-earth.org. This series of short films offers resources for ease in the body by restoring inherent flow, our birthright. They are for anyone with curiosity about living more consciously.



We are part of a living planet. Nature is our life support system and biodiversity is the immune system of the Earth. Seeing our intrinsic interrelatedness to everything around us is a critical first step to protecting the last wild spaces on earth. ...Change is the biggest solution. True change in the way we are living right now. Not cosmetic changes but life changes. Especially those of us who can afford the choices and make the change.

Connect to nature, let the wild enter your heart. If we care about our common future and the common future of our descendants, we should all in part be naturalists.

Craig Foster, *My Octopus Teacher*

IN COMMUNITY

Meditation on a landscape that is dear to you **by Rev. Fran Dearman**

Invitation to Meditation

Take 3 - 5 minutes in silence. Use a bell or singing bowl to begin and end the silence.

I invite you into a time of quiet, for reflection, prayer, or meditation.
I invite you to recall some landscape that is precious to you,
a landscape that has fed you in some way.

Perhaps, in your mind's eye,
you look down from an airplane over a prairie patchwork,
or across a pasture with horses in it, or a field with baled hay,
or into the living waters of some stream,
clean and secure within its shaded banks.

Perhaps you see some forest primeval,
or a shell midden by a coastline,
metres deep, ten thousand years in the making.

Perhaps you recall the lush foliage of a commercial greenhouse,
or an allotment garden, or a simple window box.

Perhaps you trace the historic paths of colonial Victoria
past the mossy orchards of the Sisters of Saint Ann,
or over ancient streams buried deep beneath pavement,
flowing to the sea in secret culverts.

Me, I'll be remembering the rail way up island, years ago,
past Shawnigan and Cowichan Station,
through flood plains wet with swans, like the fields below us here in winter.

I'll be remembering a sloping field carved out of the bush,
stone by stone, root by root,
and some shaggy red highland cattle who used to graze there,
who would canter down to the fenced track to greet the train.
I invite you to call to mind some landscape that is dear to your heart.

IN COMMUNITY - 2

Forest Bathing

Shinrin Yoku is a Japanese term which means “taking in the forest atmosphere.” It has become known as forest bathing, or here in North America as forest therapy. The Japanese Forestry Agency began promoting Shinrin-yoku as an antidote to urban life, encouraging people to reconnect with the country’s ancient forests. Shirin Yoku is considered a gentle and restorative way to preserve a sacred connection between people and nature.

This is a growing practice around the world, walking with a group through a forest in a gentle and intentional way. Time is spent becoming aware of the sounds, scents and sensations of life in the forest. Attention is paid to experiencing the small details - touching bark, listening to birds, noticing how light filters through the leaves. Most walks end with a tea ritual.

Research suggests the health benefits of time among the trees includes reduced stress, lower blood pressure, boosted immune system, and improved sleep. Trees release aromatic compounds called phytoncides - plant oils that protect them from disease and pests - and when we breathe these natural compounds in, they help us too! Phytoncides are strongest in evergreen trees like cedar, pine and fir (you can smell them in the air in warm weather), and are one of the reasons why spending time in a forest is beneficial to people.

For your first forest bathing experience, it can be helpful to find an event with a licenced guide as this practice is different from hiking or walking with a naturalist. When you go with a guide, you learn a deeply nourishing process that you can then use to go out on your own to experience the woods.

Learn more at <https://natureforesttherapycanada.org/>

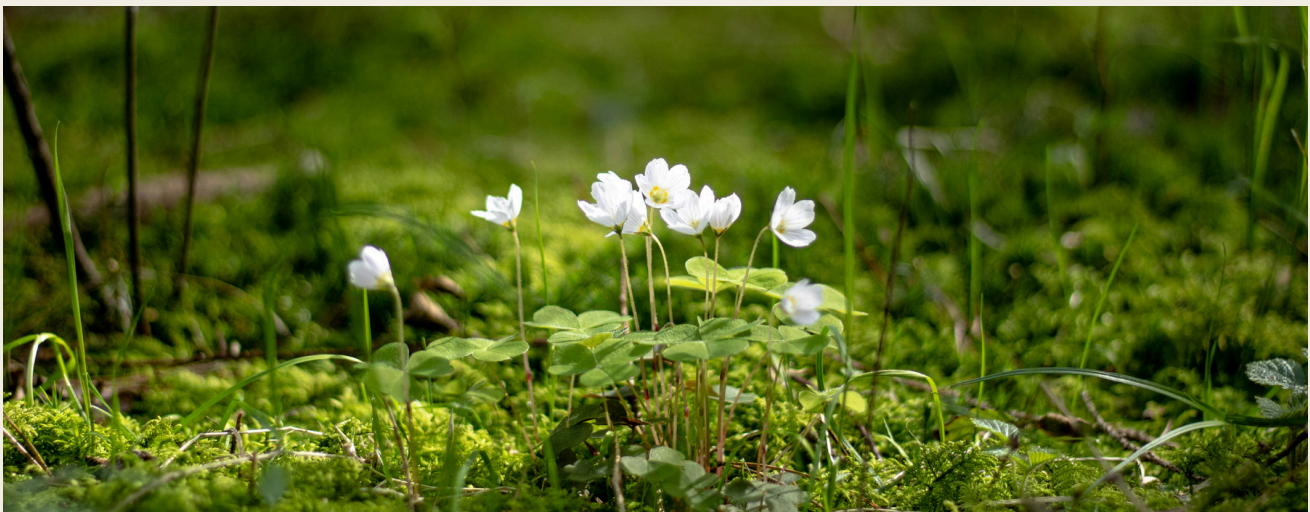


Photo: Nina Plobner/Unsplash

IN COMMUNITY - 3

Mirror Walk

From *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to The Work That Reconnects*,
Joanna Macy & Molly Brown, (p. 98-99)

In an outdoor setting with growing things, walk in pairs, in silence. One person keeps eyes closed, while the other person guides them to various sensory experiences such as a flower or leaf to smell, tree bark to touch, or the sound of children playing. Every so often, the guide adjusts the person's head, as if adjusting a camera toward its subject, and says "open your eyes and look in the mirror." The person being guided takes several moments in silence to take in what they witness. The process is repeated until a time when the roles switch (a loud bell can be used to direct a group).

When both people in all pairs have had a chance to "look in the mirror," people are brought together in groups of four (or the entire group), to share their experience, answering questions such as "what did you notice?" or "what feelings did you experience," or "what surprised you?"



**For the survival of our democracy and our planet, understanding
that interconnectedness, that capacity to relate and the
abundance, joy, love that spring from it, are no longer abstract
topics but an urgent political matter.**

Rebecca Solnit

IN FOCUS

The Salmon and the Coastal Nations

Scientists stand on the shoulders of others. The way science works is that we advance the ideas, and we do one little piece at a time. So that's part of my recognition, but most important is that our aboriginal people were highly scientific. Their science is thousands of years of observations of the cycles of nature, the variability in nature, and working with that variability: for example, creating healthy salmon populations. So, for example, Dr. Teresa Ryan—who started out as a postdoc student with me and is now a research associate—is a salmon fisheries scientist and is studying, along the coastline, how the salmon and the coastal nations are one together. The trees, the salmon—they all are interdependent. And the way that the Heiltsuk, the Haida, the Tsimshian, and the Tlingit worked with the salmon by using tidal stone traps, these huge walls that they would build below the tide line on the major rivers where the salmon would migrate to spawn. And when the tide came in, the salmon would be passively trapped behind these stone walls. And they would throw them back on the high tide; they wouldn't collect those salmon. But on the low tide, they would go in and passively catch the fish, and that was their harvest. And they always threw back the big Mother Fish. In so doing, their genetic stock created more large salmon. The population of salmon actually grew and grew, and in that way, they could look after their people.

The salmon and the people were one, together. As the salmon migrated upstream, the bears and the wolves would feed on them and carry them into the forest; and basically, the mycorrhizal networks picked up those salmon nutrients as the remains decayed, and they ended up in the trees. So the salmon nitrogen is in the trees: it's like a fertilizer. And these trees grew bigger and would shade the streams, lowering the temperature of the water and making it more hospitable for the salmon to migrate into. And so, in that way, everything was connected.

Suzanne Simard

in an interview with [Emergence Magazine](#)
(Oct 26, 2022)



Photo: Line Knipst/Pexels

THE BOOKSHELF

The Lost Words by Robert MacFarlane and Jackie Morris (2017)

This gorgeous oversized book of poetry and illustrations lifts up nature words – like dandelion and otter – that were removed from the British Oxford Junior Dictionary.

Rooted: Life at the Crossroads of Nature, Science and Spirit

by Lyanda Lynn Haupt (2021) This personal reflection is an “invitation to live with the earth in both simple and profound ways —from walking barefoot in the woods... to examining the very language we use to describe and think about nature.”

Sound of a Wild Snail Eating by Elisabeth Tova Bailey (2010)

This memoir is a story of relationship and healing, a transformative physical & spiritual experience of sharing life with a snail.

The World Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry

selected by Paul Kingsnorth (2017)

A good place to start with the thoughtful American ecologist, poet, and author Wendell Berry.

Greenwood by Michael Christie (2019) A Canadian novel of past and future forests, it’s “a rain-soaked and sun-dappled story of the bonds and breaking points of money and love, wood and blood—and the hopeful, impossible task of growing toward the light.”

The Overstory by Richard Powers (2018) This powerful novel is “a sweeping, impassioned work of activism and resistance that is also a stunning evocation of – and paean to – the natural world.”

The Economy of Sparrows by Trevor Herriot (2023) “This debut novel by Trevor Herriot, one of Canada’s foremost writer-naturalists, is the richly observed story of Nell Rowan, who has inherited her family’s prairie farmstead and returned there to live after many decades away.”

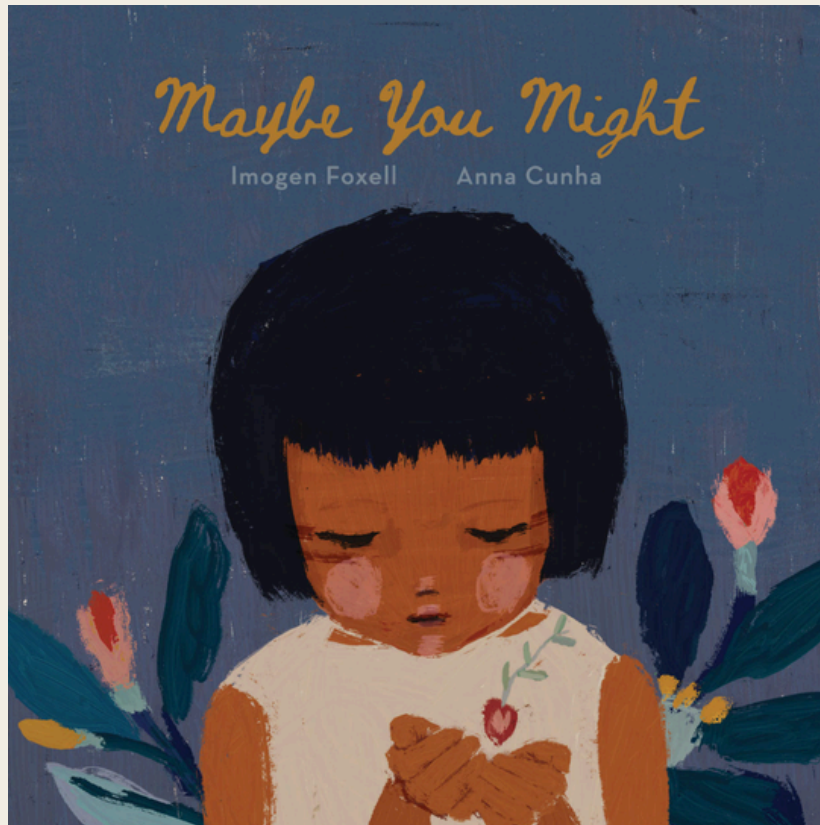
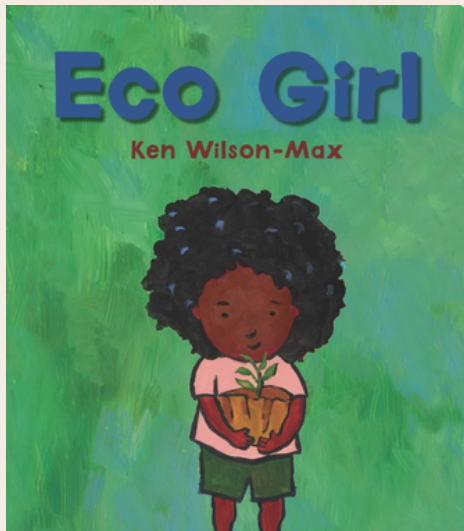
WITH CHILDREN

Spring After Spring: How Rachel Carson Inspired the Environmental Movement by Stephanie Roth Sisson (2018)

Eco-Girl by Ken Wilson-Max (2023) Thoughtful text and intimate illustrations this book introduces the concept of land stewardship and the joys of giving back.

Maybe You Might Imogen Foxell and Anna Cunha (2022) This inspiring poem - bursting with hope for a greener world - is a love letter to our ailing planet.

The Child and Nature Alliance is a Canadian indigenous organization working to strengthen connection to the land that offers many resources to parents and educators.



ONLINE RESOURCES

Canadian UU Community minister Rev. Wendy Luella Perkins, leader of Soulful Singing, has a rich inventory of uplifting songs on tiktok. Search for nature based songs such as Anew, In the Sanctuary, Blessed.

Songs for the Great Turning, inspired by the work of the late Joanna Macy. Includes songs that are great for congregational singing, such as “Turning of the World” by Ruth Pelham.

On Being interview with the great biologist and advocate Jane Goodall
<https://onbeing.org/programs/jane-goodall-what-it-means-to-be-human/>

Saskatoon artist Monique Martin speaking about her exhibition “Continuous”
https://youtu.be/FVQMbcLZG_4?si=GLc6XAlmJsCsAqxr

Robin Wall Kimmerer’s website offers information about her life and books (the highly recommended *The Serviceberry* and *Braiding Sweetgrass*) as well as videos and more.

Looking to take action?

- Join My Climate Plan – one of the founders is Canadian UU Reilly Yeo. Their weekly email has great tips for families.
- Go to the David Suzuki Foundation or the Canadian arm of the climate justice organization 350.org.
- Try this podcast, The Hopeful Environmentalist, Taylor Ganis, speaks with experts on finding hope in this time of climate change.



Photo: The Glory/Unsplash

Discussion Guide

Welcome

Greet everyone. If this is a drop-in group or if there are newer folks present, do a go round of names. Give a brief overview of the session, including time expectations.

Today we are exploring the practices of nourishing nature while being nourished by the natural world: How do we live in alignment with the rhythms of the earth?

Chalice Lighting

We come together in this moment,
seeking compassion, love, and understanding,
seeking a binding to other human beings,
and to the interdependent web of all living things.

We come together to renew our faith in the goodness of life.
To reaffirm the way of the open mind and the full heart;
and to reclaim the vision of an earth where all belong.

Come, let us celebrate together.

Rev David Usher (adapted)

Check In

Offer a choice of these questions or one of your own:

- How goes it with your spirit?
- What's in your mind and heart today?

Covenant

If your group has become familiar with their covenant, you could ask each member to name the line that is speaking to them today.

- Speak as personally and deeply as we wish--or not. It is always okay to pass.
- Speak kindly about ourselves and others.
- Speak from our own experiences.
- Hold confidentiality. Share your experience of the conversation, not other people's stories.
- Listen respectfully. Avoid giving advice or asking probing questions about others' lives.
- Be aware of power differentials. Consider our own and others' identities and how these identities shape the impact of our contributions.
- (Include any agreements added by your group)

Discussion Guide - 2

Conversation

This month we are exploring our interdependence with nature, how we are nourished by nature and reciprocate by nourishing nature in return.

Invite participants to respond to a reflection question or share their experience with a practice. You may choose to begin with a go-round or simply let the conversation flow, making sure everyone has a chance to share. If there is a lull, let the silence sit for a time, then offer up a question to continue the conversation.

What has your family and culture taught you about nature? How has your understanding developed over the years?

How do you live in alignment with the rhythms of the earth? How do you know you are in (or out of) alignment with the earth's rhythms?

Optional Activity

This practice is known as *Open Sentences on Gratitude* and it comes from the body of work known as *The Work That Reconnects* begun by Joanna Macy. You can learn more about the *Work That Reconnects* at www.workthatreconnects.org and in the book *Coming Back to Life* by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown.

It requires the facilitator to sit outside the pairs to guide the session.

Open Sentences is a structure for spontaneous expression. It helps people listen with rare receptivity as well as speak their thoughts and feelings frankly. People sit in pairs, face to face and close enough to attend to each other fully. They refrain from speaking until the practice begins.

One is Partner A, the other Partner B — this can be determined quickly by asking them to tap each other on the knee; the one who tapped first is A. When guide speaks each unfinished sentence, A repeats it, completes it in his own words, addressing Partner B, and keeps on talking spontaneously for the time allotted. The partners can switch roles after each open sentence or at the end of the series. The listening partner — and this is to be emphasized — keeps silent, saying absolutely nothing and hearing as attentively and supportively as possible.

For the completion of each open sentence allow a couple of minutes or so. Give a brief warning each time before it is time to move on, saying “take a minute to finish up,” or “thank you.”

A small bell can then bring people to silence, where they rest a few seconds before the next open sentence.

Discussion Guide - 3

Optional Activity, continued

This is an adapted version with only 3 questions - it should take about 15 minutes.

1. Some things I love about being alive in Earth are ...
2. A place that was magical (or wonderful) to me as a child was ...
3. Some things I enjoy doing in nature are...

<https://workthatreconnects.org/resources/open-sentences-on-gratitude/>

Sharing Silence

Before closing the session with the check out and chalice extinguishing, offer a minute of silence to give people a moment to process all that has been said and to share a time of quiet respite.

Leaving

What is staying with you, in your heart, mind or spirit, from today's conversation?


Closing Words

Go forth with hope, nourished by nature, nourished by this time together.
Go with gratitude for the interdependent web of all life.

Extinguish the chalice



Photo: Karen Fraser Gitlitz



**The earth is
what we all have
in common**

Wendell Berry

Meaning Making Packets are created by a team of Canadian UU ministers:
Arran Morton, Fiona Heath, Karen Fraser Gitlitz, & Lynn Harrison, with
administrative support from Crystal Ironside.
www.MeaningMakingProject.com.