10 Rules of Honorable Harvest: Teachings of Grass

Mary Rooker, *Shamanic Spring*
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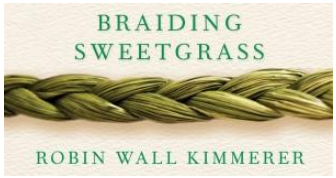

NB: American Indian and other indigenous traditions vary greatly, may even contradict each other at times. There is no one "indigenous spirituality" or "Earth relationship." The views expressed here are but one indigenous worldview, albeit a commonly heard one. I know of none that have a word for "nature" as that which exists outside humans.

1. Never take the first one, so you'll never take the last.
2. Ask permission. Introduce yourself, what you've come for. If you take a life, you have to be accountable for it.
3. Listen for the answer. Pragmatically—look around, do those plants have enough to share. Taking without permission is stealing.
4. Take only what you need.
5. Minimize harm. Don't use a shovel when a digging stick will do.
6. Use everything that you take.
7. Be grateful. Gratitude for all that is given makes you feel rich, reminds us we're just one member in the democracy of species, that the earth does not belong to us.
8. Share what you've taken.
9. Reciprocate the gift. Give back with a spiritual or material gift—weeding, fertilizer, etc.
10. Take only that which is given to you.

"The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time. They are kneeling with hands clasped that we might act with restraint, that we might leave room for the life that is destined to come. To protect what is wild is to protect what is gentle. Perhaps the wilderness we fear is the pause between our own heartbeats, the silent space that says we live only by grace. Wilderness lives by this same grace. Wild mercy is in our hands." -- Terry Tempest Williams

"I could hand you a braid of sweetgrass, as thick and shining as the plait that hung down my grandmother's back. But it is not mine to give, nor yours to take. *Wiingaashk* belongs to herself. "

So I offer, in its place, a braid of stories meant to heal our relationship to the world.

About Robin Wall Kimmerer

Robin Wall Kimmerer is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. She is the author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* and *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses.* She lives in Syracuse, New York, where she is a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology, and the founder and director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment.

Worldviews: Animist vs Western

	ANIMIST: Kin-Centric & Warrior/Protector/Defender	**WESTERN: Mainstream & Steward**
View of "Nature"	• "Nature" is a living, spiritual being • Matter and spirit are one; the "physical" is sacred • All other beings are teachers, know more than we do, as we're the youngest species	• "Nature" is an object, a "natural resource", a utilitarian means to an end; • Matter and spirit are separate, and the physical is not sacred • Humans know best how to manage the web of life
Role/Place of Humans	• Integrated into a divine whole with their own evolutionary path; • Humans exist to serve the whole and the evolution of the whole; • Humans are part of 4 billion years of evolution, a small part of a much larger unfolding	• Humans are the center of the universe • Humans are the apex of evolutionary "progress"; • Earth exists to serve humans
View of the Problem	• A wounded relationship to earth and to all our (more than human) kin • "Selfishness, greed, and apathy"; we humans take more than we need • Animals should not be domesticated; humans have no right to own another being or species • Land, like animals, cannot be owned, is not property	• Climate crisis and mass extinctions • Socio-economic "progress" is good as long as it's "green" (-washed) • Domesticated animals (property) need to be managed to reduce damage • Land is property that needs to be properly managed
Desired Goal	• Planet and lifestyle that sustains all life • Humans adapt to fit into Earth's ecosystems	• "Green progress", human comfort and convenience • Humans adapt Earth's ecosystems to fit humans

Resources

Rights of Nature Groups

- Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights (CDER)
- Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF)

Great Turning Chants

1. We Shall Be Known, by MaMuse
2. Finding My Way Back Home – Oh River, by Karisha Longaker of MaMuse
3. Love Song to the Earth, Paul McCartney

Videos – Top Choices

Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass, Robin Kimmerer, Bioneers, Nov. 24, 2014 (21 mins.)

Consider This with Robin Wall Kimmerer (63mins.), by Oregon Humanities, March 10, 2022. An online conversation with Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of Braiding Sweetgrass and Gathering Moss. Kimmerer is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.

Tales of Sweetgrass & Trees: Robin Wall Kimmerer & Richard Powers with Terry Tempest Williams (82 mins.), Harvard University, April 11, 2019

Three innovative storytellers address how we can heal our relationship to the rest of the living world, to "Earth." Features Robin Wall Kimmerer (Braiding Sweetgrass), Richard Powers (The Overstory), and Terry Tempest Williams (Refuge; Erosion; and Finding Beauty in a Broken World). Key concepts:

- Species loneliness
- World of Belonging versus Belongings
- We need a "re-storyation" of our relationship to Earth as well as physical restoration

Crime [against the rest of Nature is] still underway, a crime caused by anger and pain, that hasn't been acknowledged or named. That's why naming it has to happen first before there can be any healing [or forgiveness]. (Richard Powers)

Conversations Around the Green Fire (32 mins.), with Robin Wall Kimmerer, Center for Humans and Nature, Jan. 27, 2015.

What Plants Can Teach Us (87 mins.) - A Talk with Robin Wall Kimmerer, New York Botanical Garden, Dec. 5, 2017.

Videos – Other Good Resources

Joanna Macy on the Great Turning, 2005 (5 mins.)

Changing Everything: The Global Movement for the Rights of Nature, Mari Margil and Thomas Linzey, Bioneers 2020 (17 mins.)

"Words Spoken Before All Others," the Ohenten Kariwatekwen or Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian

Actions for a Healthy Planet, United Nations

Aligning Human Law with Natural Law, Casey Camp-Horinek, Bioneers, (30 mins.); 2016 Grizzly Bear Treaty - Lee Juan Tyler of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes concluded at the treaty signing: "The grizzly bear is sacred. The grizzly needs more habitat and so let's give him some."

Terry Tempest Williams - Erosion, Bioneers, Nov 11, 2019 (23 mins.); Terry reports that research at Castleton Tower in Utah shows that the earth has a pulse, one that scientists have heard and measured.

7 Things We Must Do to Advance the Rights of Mother Earth, Daniel Wildcat, Bioneers National Conference, 2012 (23 mins.) Main points:

1. Cheyenne elder Dr. Henrietta Mann: We are born spiritual beings; our struggle is to become competent human beings. What does it mean to be competent human beings?
2. The most important delusion we need to let go of is the notion that culture and nature are separate. The land and nature shape the culture. The biological and ecological diversity of the planet gave rise to these unique cultures. No one-size-fits-all technological solution exists.
3. We're just one small part of nature and need to assume a position of humility.
4. Replace "progress" with "systems of life enhancement"; progress as an ethnocentric benchmark
5. All relationships are symbiotic – surrounded by and dependent upon diversity.
6. He calls learning from nature "indigenous realism" and calls it a Kin-centric systems of knowledge. Science is an anthropocentric system of knowledge.
7. We need to learn from the Age of the Anthropocene to quit thinking that "we're gonna fix it." Technology can't operate separately from the balance of nature.