



Week One: The Gift of Life — *How Do I See?*

We begin with a fundamental question: What kind of world do we believe we are living in?

Across spiritual traditions, a common truth emerges: Life is a gift. Life is something we receive, something we belong to, and something in which we participate.

“In God/Divine Life, we live and move and have our being.” – Acts 17:28

From *The Serviceberry*, p. 22

“To name the world as gift is to feel your membership in the web of reciprocity. It makes you happy—and it makes you accountable. Conceiving of something as a gift changes your relationship to it in a profound way, even though the physical makeup of the thing has not changed.

A wooly knit hat that you purchased at the store will keep you warm regardless of its origin, but if it was hand knit by your favorite auntie, then you are in relationship to that thing in a very different way. You are responsible for it, and your gratitude has motive force in the world. You’re likely to take much better care of the gift hat than the commodity hat because the gift hat is knit of relationship. That is the power of gift thinking. I imagine if we acknowledged that everything we consume is the gift of Mother Earth, we would take better care of what we were given.”

Imagine what would change if we truly understood life itself as gift.

Our bodies. Our lives. The Earth beneath us.

Water. Food. Air. Time.

The people who have loved us.

The wisdom handed down to us.

The abilities we carry.

The knowledge others freely share.

What if we actively saw ourselves not primarily as “owners” or “consumers” or as “having”, but as recipients and participants in an ongoing gift and circulation of Life?

1. GIFT CHANGES RELATIONSHIP

Kimmerer uses a wool hat to make a simple but profound observation. A hat is a hat. But if someone you love made it for you, you relate to it differently.

She invites us to consider that our experience (and thereby *our reality*) is shaped not only by *what something is*, but by *how we understand ourselves in relationship to it*.

A forest can be timber, or it can be a community of life. Water can be a commodity, or it can be something without which no creature lives. Food can be a product. Or it can be sunlight, soil, rain, seed, farmer, pollinator, labor, and Earth giving of itself to nourish us.

Commodity thinking asks: “What is this worth?” Gift thinking asks: “What made this possible?” the “thing” may be exactly the same. But, how we see... it changes how we treat it.

Discuss

- **Think of something that became more precious because you knew its story or who it came from. What was it? How does your connection to “it” change how you relate to it?**
 - **Where in your life do you tend to think like an owner or consumer? What might change if you saw yourself instead as a recipient of a gift?**
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2. LIFE BEGINS WITH RECEIVING

We are radically dependent creatures. Our existence depends upon things we did not create and cannot create for ourselves.

We cannot manufacture our breath. We did not create sunlight, water, or Earth. Even the language with which we say, “*I did this myself*,” was given to us by someone else.

Our culture celebrates independence and self-sufficiency. But life tells another story: Everything lives through relationship. Instead of only considering: “What have I acquired or accomplished?” Practice asking: “What has made my life possible?”

Discuss

- **Who are you because someone else shared their gift?**
- **What skill, wisdom, healing, or opportunity do you carry because someone chose to share theirs?**

3. YOU ARE ALSO PART OF THE GIFT

We often talk about everything we receive as gift. But what if you are also part of what Life is giving?

Your experience. Your humor. Your listening. Your creativity. Your compassion. Your presence. Your ability to cook, teach, repair, organize, garden, sing, comfort, lead, encourage... or simply show up. What we have received becomes part of what we have to give and participate.

Discuss

- **What comes naturally to you that you may underestimate because it comes naturally? Can you see it as a gift?**
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4. CLOSING ACTIVITY

We often think of a gift as something added to life: A birthday present. A kindness. A favor.

Kimmerer invites us to consider something more radical: What if gift is not an occasional event within life? What if gift is *the nature of life itself*?

Then perhaps the spiritual question becomes, “How well can I participate in what has been given?”

Around the Circle: Take a moment to reflect. Then, let each person choose one statement below and complete the sentence (without commentary). Hold the space for each other. Make as many rounds as time allows.

- Something I have received that I could never repay is...
- Something ordinary I want to begin seeing as gift is...
- One gift I possess that I want to put more fully into circulation is...
- If I truly understood my life as gift, I would...



Practice for the Week: NOTICE THE GIFT

Once each day, choose one ordinary thing... a meal, running water, a cup of coffee, a conversation, a tree, a capability or skill you possess.

- Ask: *What made this possible?*

Notice the people, Earth, resources, and relationships behind it.

- Then ask: *What does truly receiving this awaken in me?*

Deep Pondering

- Where in your life might a shift from “commodity” to “gift” change the way you perceive, relate or act?