

PASS ALONG THE GIFT

September 2020

In her book "Braiding Sweetgrass," Robin Wall Kimmerer writes: "We are showered every day with gifts, but they are not meant for us to keep. Their life is in their movement, the inhale and the exhale of our shared breath. Our work and our joy is to pass along the gift and to trust that what we put out into the universe will always come back."

"The inhale and the exhale of our shared breath!" What a rich insight! And ironic! We are months into the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. The wise among us are wearing masks, and will for some time, lest our breath infect someone, or theirs affect us. Some resist. I understand that. It can be inconvenient. But we are all in this together. For better or for worse, our behavior affects someone else. If we try to live as though that were not true, we're kidding ourselves. Which brings us back to our understanding of gifts.

Every gift is relational. To see and receive a gift is to acknowledge and become aware of and the worth of not only the gift, but also the person and circumstance through which it came. That requires an attitude of gratitude. A sense of entitlement poisons the gift and takes the life from it. To use what has been a gift wisely [and what has not been, in some sense, a gift] requires appreciation and a sense of stewardship. Even in the midst of a pandemic there is much beauty to be seen, much experience to be understood, much wisdom to be learned. Until very recently, it never once occurred to me that both of my parents, as did most of their friends, lived through two world wars, the great depression, and the flu pandemic of 1918-19. It never once dawned on me that my parents shared with me, unspoken, the gift of their experience. And it has served me well.

I am writing from the backyard deck of our home. There are birds at the feeders, the sky is clear and blue, leaves of many shades of green share their beauty, a soft breeze stirs - all are a gift to me in an unsettled time. And I breathe in with gratitude the life they give. Do they know? The birds? The sky? The leaves? The breeze? Of the gift they give? Or are they just being who they are? Would what they do be a gift if there was no one there to receive it?

The life of the gift is in the inhale and the exhale of our shared breath. Gift and gratitude are a better pair than gift and receiver. A gift is more than an object - it is a sharing, a linkage that is enhanced by gratitude, and made enduring as the gift in some way is shared. There is no greater joy than to pass a gift along - telling the story of how it came into your life - sharing the place it has in your sacred memory, who will have it when you pass it along.

If we really pay attention, we begin to become aware that we have been blessed repeatedly with gifts. Kimmerer reminds us that: "Our work and our joy is to pass along the gift and to trust that what we put out into the universe will always come back." The universe is generous to those who receive gifts with gratitude. It honors with life those who share their gifts. It blesses those who trust that their gifts will endure. The truth is that only way that a gift will endure is to give it away! We owe it to the generations that will follow us, our children and grandchildren, to pass along the gift.