



# Sacred Earth

## Email to Participants

**Dear Friends,**

Spiritual deepening need not be an individual pursuit. Together, we can deepen our connections with the earth and explore the interconnectedness between ourselves and nature. We will find awe and wonder as we explore the beauty and simplicity of nature and we will learn to explore and care for our spirits to sustain us in climate justice work.

“Sacred Earth” is from the series “UU Wellspring Reads.” It spans six 90-minute sessions. Before each session, you will receive an email with reading, reflecting, and practicing guidelines to complete prior to the session. Please prioritize these activities, as well as your participation in the sessions, to allow the entire group to share the wisdom we all experience as we prepare.

During these six sessions, we hope that you will find time to enjoy and pay attention to your

local areas of beauty, and especially those areas that feel less tamed. Perhaps you’ll discover a pond, a pasture, forest, park, or waterfront where you might encounter wildlife or plants growing wild. Find time to notice, to be surrounded by, and to fully appreciate our interconnectedness with the earth and all living beings. Find a plant that you can watch throughout the six sessions of this program. Notice and appreciate it as often as you can.

Our first session is on [date and time] [online or in person links or room details]. Between now and then, please purchase or borrow the two required books:

- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *The Sustainable Soul: Reflections and Practices* by Rebecca James Hecking

*Braiding Sweetgrass* provides deep understandings of how we are connected to the earth and *The Sustainable Soul* provides spiritual practices and reflections that will deepen that connection.

## Organization

There are six sessions that correlate with the chapters of *Braiding Sweetgrass*. The first session is an introduction, covenant-building time, and opportunity for our first shared spiritual practice.

Session 1: Grounding Ourselves

Session 2: Planting Sweetgrass

Session 3: Tending Sweetgrass

Session 4: Picking Sweetgrass

Session 5: Braiding Sweetgrass

Session 6: Burning Sweetgrass

## Cultural (Mis)Appropriation

Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley writes “Our first task in approaching another people, another culture is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy.” (From [Cornrows, Kwanzaa and Confusion](#): The Dilemma of Cultural Racism and Misappropriation.)

These important resources will help guide you in avoiding misappropriation in discussion and spiritual practices.

“In Unitarian Universalist (UU) worship and ceremony, is the the integration of rituals, symbols, and ideas of other traditions affecting those whose traditions are being “borrowed”? To learn more read [Reckless Borrowing or Appropriate Cultural Sharing?](#)” (UUA “**Looking at Racism In Social and Cultural Constructs.**)

“Cultural (Mis) Appropriation resources from the UUA”.  
(<https://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/introduction/misappropriation>).

**Before our first session, please immerse yourself in the following:**

- First, please read the Preface of *Braiding Sweetgrass* and the first chapter, “Skywoman Falling.” You are welcome to read the entire book in advance and return to reread the sections we will be discussing if you feel that is helpful, if you will also reread the assigned pages before each session.
- Then read “How to Use this Book” and Chapter 8 in *The Sustainable Soul*.
- Review the Cultural (Mis)Appropriation” readings listed above. What questions do these resources bring up for you? How might you use these resources as issues of cultural misappropriation arise in the group’s sharing of spiritual practices?.

### “What Matters Most” Reflections

- One of our Unitarian Universalist Sources: “Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves” has its roots deep in the faiths that find their origins in the story of Adam and Eve. Reflect on how Skywoman and Eve remain in dialogue or in tension in your life. If your religious roots include a different creation story, please reflect on the synchronicities or tension between your story and Skywoman.
- Choose to do the “Melting into the Earth” experiential activity or the “Earth as Mother” journaling activity from Chapter 8 in *the Sustainable Soul*.
  - If you experienced “Melting Into the Earth,” what came up for you?
  - If you were able to journal “Earth as Mother,” what surprised you?
- What guidelines will you use to avoid misappropriation?

### Optional Journal Reflections

1. *Hierochloe odorata*, meaning the fragrant, holy grass. In our language it is called *wiingaashk*, the sweet-smelling hair of Mother Earth. Breathe it in and you start to remember things you didn’t know you’d forgotten.” (p. ix of *Braiding Sweetgrass*) What in your life has helped you connect with your past or remember things you didn’t know you’d forgotten?
2. “. . . the sweetest way to braid is to have someone hold the end so that you pull gently against each other, all the while leaning in, head to head, chatting and laughing, watching each other’s hands, one holding steady while the other shifts the slim bundles over one another, each in its turn.” What does this image bring up for you? How does our UU faith call you to be in this kind of relationship?

It will be good to be together.

Blessings,

Your name and contact information.

# Session 1 Plan

## Intro and Covenant

### Notes to Facilitators are in Grey:

Music to enter by: [Relaxing Drum Music](#). Note: Cue up music in advance that is found on YouTube or other free streaming sites to avoid ads playing. This piece is an hour long, so fade the music when you are ready to light the chalice by dragging the volume button slowly to the left. Suggestion is one to three minutes.

## Chalice Lighting and Silence

### Words that facilitator(s) read or paraphrase to the group are in Green:

We gather mindfully, knowing that the ground we are on is the ancestral land of the [name the people who inhabited this land]. Our chalice lighting words are written by Rev. Christine Robinson, Emeritus Minister, First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque and used by permission.

We gather this hour as people of faith  
With joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.  
We light this beacon of hope, sign of our quest  
for truth and meaning, in celebration of the life we share together.  
Let us honor the space we inhabit with three cleansing breaths taken together.

## Introductions/Check-in

Please share your name and pronouns before briefly responding to the question:  
“What plant have you chosen to watch over the course of this program?”

## Covenant

Provide the following covenant in the chat and ask everyone to spend some time on it before the next session. Tell them it will also be printed in the email you will send to them following this session.

Note that the covenant encourages inclusivity and allows for anyone in the group to pause the group if harm is felt.

## UU Wellspring Reads Covenant Draft

1. “No fixing, no advising, no setting each other straight” as stated by author Parker Palmer.
2. We will pause when harm occurs to examine the situation, and to hold the space for learning to occur.
3. We commit to reading, reflecting and practicing as much as we are able before each session.

4. We will keep the confidence of the group, sharing only our own stories and the general process of the program.

Ask participants to consider what is missing. What needs rewording for them to trust this group and this process?

Then ask if we can proceed with this covenant today, knowing we can adjust it in future sessions.

## **What Matters Most: Introduction of Journaling**

*Braiding Sweetgrass* is about the braiding of science, spirit, and story in service to what matters most. As we read through this book together, start a journal about “what matters most” to include stories of your own that you will bring to our gatherings. Several questions will be posed before each session and a choice of practices for you to consider in preparation for the gathering.

We may not get to every question in our time together, so please make the time to write an answer of your own to each question and respond to the practices in preparation for sharing as much as time allows. This will both deepen your experience of *Braiding Sweetgrass* and enrich our time together.

Optional journal prompts will also be proposed to deepen your journey. Although we will not focus on these questions, your reflections may expand your experience. For today, we will respond to only one of the questions you responded to in your journal.

## **“What Matters Most” Reflections**

For this session, invite reflection:

- One of our Unitarian Universalist Sources: Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves – has its roots deep in the faiths that find their origins in the story of Adam and Eve. Reflect on how Skywoman and Eve remain in dialogue or in tension in your life. If your religious roots include a different creation story, please reflect on the synchronicities or tension between your story and Skywoman.
- Remark on the “Melting into the Earth” experiential activity or the “Earth as Mother” journaling activity from Chapter 8 in *the Sustainable Soul*.
  - If you experienced “Melting Into the Earth,” what came up for you?
  - If you were able to journal “Earth as Mother,” what surprised you?

## **Shared Practice: Altar Creation**

Rebecca Hecking writes about the benefits of creating an altar. You may have already done this, but if not, take a moment to share some of the things you might place on your altar in the spirit of sharing ideas.

Provide time for people to write ideas in the chat, share photos, and talk about their altars.

Now jot down what you want to feel when you are near your altar.

Give participants a few minutes to reflect and write in their journals about their items and how they might engage with their altar.  
Invite them to spend time adding objects that will bring these feelings to your altar over the next several days.

## **What Next?**

We will close by asking Hecking's question found at the end of chapter two: "If the Earth itself could speak to us, what would it say?"

## **Gratitude Moment**

We will take a moment each session to give gratitude and appreciation for Mother Earth. Find a position that feels connected to the earth in this moment of silence.

## **Closing**

We turn to Parker Palmer's "A Hidden Wholeness." He writes these words about circles of trust:

"The journey toward inner truth is too taxing to be made solo: lacking support, the solitary traveler soon becomes weary or fearful and is likely to quit the road. The path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company: finding our way involves clues that are subtle and sometimes misleading, requiring the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue. The destination is too daunting to be achieved alone: we need community to find the courage to venture into alien lands to which the inner teacher may call us."

We go forward, together.

Wave hands/Adjourn