



One Earth Sangha

Becoming a Gift to Life

A Guided Meditation with Lyla June

Dacher Keltner: We know from [research](#) that our time outdoors, especially in biodiverse areas, has a restorative effect upon us, reducing stress and rejuvenating both our minds and bodies.

So for today's Happiness Break, we're contemplating how we can also be more of service to the natural world. We'll be guided by indigenous activist, artist, and scholar Dr Lyla June Johnston [lie-la].

So head somewhere outdoors if you can, you may need to pause this for a moment to get there. Or if you can't get outside right now, you might just visualize a place you care about, and join in this meditation in your mind's eye.

... When you're ready, here's Lyla June.

Lyla June: Greetings, my kin and my people. Before we begin this meditation, I invite you to sit and just take four deep breaths to honor the four sacred directions.

My name is Lyla June. I'm from the Naaneesht'ezhi Taach'iinii clan of the Diné Nation. We're also incorrectly known as Navajo, and I want to guide you through a little walking meditation today. Around your home, around your apartment, around your farm, around your dorm room, around wherever you find yourself sitting today.

Most of our daily life and our infrastructure around us is designed for humans by humans. But in my research looking at Indigenous regenerative ecosystem design,



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I've noticed how many native nations was designed specifically to support other life forms. For example, human beings crafted beautiful, gigantic ancient clam gardens by building intertidal rock walls around the coastlines of the Pacific Northwest. You also see extraordinary food systems unfurling in the Bolivian floodplains, where they would create these earthen berms that would capture the flood waters into reservoirs and pools and canals and ditches, and they would create raised fields and fruit trees and fish ponds that would create a year-round supply of food, not just for humans, but for the entire ecosystem.

And so these are sort of the ways in which we can rethink, like, “Hmm, maybe we're not the center of the universe. Maybe it's not all about homosapiens. Maybe homosapiens is all about creating life and creating a home for life.”

Take a moment to pick up your phone or whatever it is you're listening to this podcast on or maybe you're in a car, you know, maybe stop and step outside and see the different things that life flourishes from.

Maybe it's the flowers that provide pollen for the bees. Maybe there are trees that provide shade for squirrels or a home for woodpeckers.

And so just start to think about how can I give a small gift to life?

Maybe it's a bird bath that provides a safe place for the birds to drink and to bathe. Maybe it's a bird feeder that gives birds a little oasis of nourishment before they continue on, on their migration.



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And just think about ways in which maybe you could capture the water that runs around you. If you live on a slant, maybe instead of letting all the water run off into nowhere, you could create a little pool, a little reservoir. You could plant different plants like cattail, which filters the water, or you can even plant gardens in there, corn, beans, squash, which can then not only feed you, but even feed the animals around you. It might sound crazy to plant a garden for animals, but that's what Indigenous Peoples did for tens of thousands of years.

Maybe all you can do right now is a bird bath, but I would suggest doing at least that.

And after you do this meditation, think about ways that you can actually make this a reality. You could order a bird bath from your local feed store. You could create a bird bath on your own. One from local materials that you have.

But what is a bird bath? Think of the metaphor of the bird bath. A bird bath is a human creation. And it's a gift to birds. It doesn't benefit us at all. Maybe a little bit of bird watching, but it truly is just a gift to a species outside of our own. And I think this is truly what human beings we're born to do. We were born to be givers. We were born to be stewards. We were born to reach out beyond our own species and care for the Earth.

Human beings, we're put on this land, specific lands, you know, to take care of that specific land. And so wherever you are from a native perspective, you are put there to take care of the land around you. That is your divine duty.



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I truly believe that when we offer our heart to the birds, to the microbes, to the megafauna, even, you know, like horses or buffalo or sheep or goats or what have you, when we offer our heart out to a species not our own, our spirits are elevated, our spirits grow because we're doing what would be the kind thing to do as homosapiens.

We're not doing the extractive thing and we're being cognizant of the fact that we are not alone on this Earth. We're being cognizant of the fact that we do not live in a vacuum. We live in a community of life. And even though the city is so good at creating this artificial reality where it doesn't seem like there's anything but human life and that that's all that matters, that's ultimately not true. Even the city exists within a community of life and the city is made less sustainable when it forgets that, and more fragile and more precarious. So it's incredibly important to embed yourself within life and become a gift to life as well.