

## Falling in Love With the Earth by Kristi Nelson

The natural world is one of the most resplendent and consistent sources of generosity in our lives — whether we experience it directly moment-to-moment or not. When we allow ourselves to tune in and pay attention, our Earth is perpetually nourishing and providing for us, sustaining life and offering its abundant gifts with a breathtaking and consistent flourish. We are fed, literally and figuratively, by the Earth's offerings every day. All manner of things born of the Earth can awaken us to perspective. All manner of moments in Nature can offer us gratitude for life's preciousness and remind us of our fragile and powerful bonds of connection. Amidst oceans, fields, rain, trees, flowers, plants, animals, sky, birds, sun - and so much more - we can immediately experience our own relative stature amidst and against the grandeur of the landscape. Feeling inextricably connected yet small in relationship with the natural world can lead us swiftly to a sense of the sacred. Surrendered to awe and wonder, we experience the gifts of life more readily and deeply.

Yet, we are living in times when the sources of our greatest gifts of the natural world are more and more removed from us, virtually inaccessible to many, and imperiled and threatened by humanity's legacy of choices and the choices we continue to make today. The offerings of the Earth are woven into our clothing, our bodies, what we eat...but they are belied within the synthetic ingredients, packaging, buildings, and methods of transportation that carry them. Our gaze is more often directed into a computer monitor, television screen, or cell phone than directed at the ground or at the sky. As we surrender more and more to technological advances, our individual lives can become cut off from the thread of connection that helps us to know our true and necessary place in the exquisitely resilient, fragile, reciprocal web of life. In many ways it can require more effort than ever to connect with the gifts that nature holds for us, and in so many ways it has never been more important.

Gratefulness supports the cultivation of intentional remembering and honoring of our relationship with "Mother Nature." Grateful, we open ourselves to experience more fully the privilege of her offerings and to listen for both the small and loud cries for our companionship and stewardship. Deepening a sense of belonging to the natural world can deliver a level of presence that arouses not only a more sacred and reverential engagement with the Earth, but can also inform and fortify the ways that we relate to ourselves as essential creatures of nature.

When we allow ourselves to fall in love with the Earth in all her splendor, we strengthen our bonds of connection. We allow ourselves to experience the great fullness of our emotions at how inextricable we are from the Earth's perpetual flow of gifts, recognize how much and how often we take them for granted, and grieve the losses our Earth and all her creatures are suffering daily at the hands of our civilization. Gratefulness invites us to heal our disconnection, live in greater celebration, and strengthen our place in the

rightful relationship of reciprocity with the natural world.

Grateful Living beckons us to actively engage in ways that more deeply respect and also preserve that which we treasure most. To generate a sense of possibility for our natural world will require that we “feel into” our connection and interdependence with our whole hearts. We are inspired to sustain that which sustains us, through remembering more deeply the ways that we are inextricably bound to the world around us. As we come into union with the generosity of nature, we learn to be more humble and gracious. As the poet Hafiz says, “After all these years of shining, the sun does not say to the earth, ‘you owe me’...Imagine how a love like that can light up the whole world.”