

Permaculture: Two Views

An O'dham View

*From an interview with Daniel Preston
By Joni Keating*

On working with the land: To me, if you're going to do something with your land, you need to pray about it--ask God to help you to have the understanding to make a good decision. It's the *observation* in permaculture that is really good. You go sit out there and *really look* at what you're going to have to sacrifice if you make changes--some of the trees and other things that grow there. They didn't come to be there, you know, by somebody coming over and planting them. They grew there for a purpose. And if you go out there and start hacking away and moving dirt here and there, you know, it's disrespectful to God. To me, it would be better to go to God and ask Him if what you're going to do is the right thing....and if there is something that He doesn't agree with, He'll show you. And He'll give you an idea. The plants and animals will show you too, because they're all sacred. It's all the same.

On ownership of the land: We have all these allotted lands out here, and no one has ever said, "Well, I'm going to live on *my* land." The people have never understood how they could have boundaries and *own* land or water--how they could own something God had made.

On accounting for our actions: The land, the air, the wind, the rain, the sun--they're all really sacred to us. There is spirit in everything. And not only that, but we have our ancestors in the ground, and everything comes from the ground...We try to tell our children that whatever you do--however you treat nature--you're going to have to account for your actions.

On our responsibility to future generations: People look at the Reservation lands and wonder why we haven't done all the things that they see could be done to make money off the land. But we have the idea that what we do now has to consider the good of our children for seven generations into the future.

The Tao of Permaculture

By Joni Keating

Permaculture does not push rivers. It *flows* with them. It does not encourage us to force or interfere with things. It coaches us instead to observe how things work naturally--and to allow them to do just that.

Most commonly, we hear those ideas applied to working with a piece of land. We are encouraged, for example, to observe and work *with* the natural patterns of water flow, plant distribution, solar gain, movement of air, and the like. And where we wish to make changes to suit our own needs and desires, permaculture advises us to *imitate* what we see already working well in nature.

Little more than common sense and patience are required. Yet the rewards are immense. We create a lifestyle characterized by the same balance and harmony found in nature--that is, one which is nonpolluting and sustainable, and which allows us to co-exist peacefully with other life on the planet. And we create a lifestyle which is self-reliant and requires minimal effort.

Balance, harmony, self-reliance, minimal effort--to anyone engaged consciously in the process of spiritual growth, those words will sound intimately familiar. And it is, in fact, true that the ideas of permaculture can be applied even to the spiritual dimensions of our lives.

Ancient paths of personal growth, for example, remind us of the reality that Things Are As They Are. And they teach us that inner peace--i.e., balance and harmony--is, in part, attained by working with Things As They Are. In other words, these teachings--just as permaculture does--would have us cease our endless effort to put square pegs in round holes. Common sense.

Similarly, if we recognize and accept our own Inner Nature, with its unique set of strengths and weaknesses, then we can work with it effectively, and thus be in control of our own lives. In other words we can know the Way of Self-Reliance. And finally, we are taught that as we get in tune with the Way Things Work naturally--again, a cornerstone concept of permaculture--then we begin to find that life can be remarkably easy.

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