



GIFTS FOR THE EARTH

Giving back to the places that have given to us!



CONTENTS

CONTENTS	2
INTRODUCTION	3
SAFETY PRECAUTIONS	5
THE 5 SUGGESTED STEPS OF THE RADJOY PRACTICE	6
1. Go to a wounded place.	6
2. Sit awhile and share your stories.	8
3. Get to know the place as it is now.	9
4. Share what you discovered.	11
5. Make a gift of Guerrilla Beauty for the place.	12
PHOTO CREDITS	15

INTRODUCTION

"It was wonderful to know we were sharing our efforts with those of others all over the world. Seeing the pictures from everyone else was inspiring and uplifting."

—Phyllis C., East Suffolk, New York

All of us citizens of Planet Earth are now forced to cope with challenges few could have imagined a generation ago. Even as climate change disrupts the seasons and fractures the weather patterns we've grown up with, most of us also deal with other assaults on the places where we live and that we love, including pollution, deforestation, mining and fracking, and violence in our communities.



We also realize that, no matter where we live, we make our homes on lands that were violently taken from others. In the United States, all non-indigenous people live on territory stolen from First Nations people, most of whose descendants continue to remember and honor their land. The country is deeply scarred by the enslavement

of hundreds of thousands of people of African heritage.

There is no shortage of wounded places—anywhere. Many courageous people are working tirelessly to create a healthier, more equitable, more sustainable future. Yet how can we possibly build the world we want if we ignore the places and species among us that are broken, paved over, poisoned, extinct, or subjected to violence?

One thing we can do is the RadJoy Practice of making gifts for these wounded places. We can all do this practice regardless of age, race, religion, level of physical ability, or experience. A gift for the Earth requires no training, no supplies, and no money. It doesn't require advance preparation. You can do it alone, with a friend, or with a group. Making a gift for a place or a plant or animal species that is important to you empowers the individual, unites the community, and gives new life to hurt, neglected places.



In June of every year, people all over the world do this practice on the same day. That event is called the Global Earth Exchange. But you can do the RadJoy Practice whenever a loss on the land—or in the heart— grabs you and makes you want to respond!

These guidelines describe the five suggested steps of giving gifts to the Earth. Only the first and fifth steps are essential, as you'll discover. What matters is that you attend to your place in a way that is right for you, your community, the place, and what happened.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

No matter what you do or where you go, be sure to follow these important safety guidelines:






- Protect the safety and health of yourself and your group.
- Respect the community, including the non-human community that you visit.
- Avoid places where the land is unstable, such as the sites of explosions, earthquakes, or rock slides.
- Do not expose yourself and your group to toxic waste or pollution.

"Thanks for encouraging us all to honor those forgotten, exploited, used, left out, etc spaces. I think we are also doing it to our fellow people 'cause of our interconnectness with mother earth."

—Dumisani M., Johannesburg, South Africa

THE 5 SUGGESTED STEPS OF THE RADJOY PRACTICE

The 5 Suggested Steps of the Earth Exchange

-  1. Go, alone or with friends, to a wounded place.
-  2. Sit awhile and share your stories about what the place means to you.
-  3. Get to know the place as it is now.
-  4. Share with the others what you discovered.
-  5. Make a simple gift of beauty for the place.



1. Go to a wounded place.

The first step of the practice is to go to the wounded place. Being there in person is very important. It's fine to meditate on a hurt place from afar, but that's not the RadJoy Practice. Simply focusing on the place or species in your mind—or even in your heart—just maintains your separation from it.

So the point of this practice is to face the very thing you may have wished to avoid. You don't have to fix anything. You don't have to convert anyone. You're not there to heal either the place or the people. You go there to find out how it's doing and also to be discovering how *you're* doing.



Unfortunately, you probably won't have to look far to find a wounded place near you. Just about every place has challenges: forests damaged by beetles, polluted rivers, landfills, industrial sites, mountaintops flattened for mining. Wounded places are not just lands and waters either, but also places where animals, birds, and plants once thrived and now are missing. For example, an apple orchard

could be considered a wounded place, because so few honeybees are visiting it.

Making a gift for the Earth is powerful, because any person can do it at any time in any place. You can do it alone or with friends or family. You can plan weeks ahead or you do it on the spur of the moment.

2. Sit awhile and share your stories.

"We gathered to honor the Quebrada Chiniata. Many of our rivers are contaminated with chemical and solid wastes. Chiniata in our native language means 'where the water is born.' Our wish is that our prayer will sail through the river and dispense its hope to all the women and men in the farms along the way, who produce the food that we consume. "

—Ana-Maria M., Anolaima, Colombia

Taking a few minutes for everyone in the group to share their personal feelings and experiences about the place helps to strengthen the bond between people and place—and among the members of the group.

When your group has gathered at your place, sit or stand together in a circle. Each person now introduces themselves and shares briefly about their relationship to the place or the species you've come to spend time with, both before and after it came to be in its present condition. Even if someone has never been there before, they can talk about their first impressions.

Each person speaks from the heart, one at a time, without interruption or feedback. If the group is large and there isn't time for everyone to tell their story, one option is for everyone present to think of five words that describe their feelings about the place and speak those aloud.

3. Get to know the place as it is now.



This part of the process is a mindful deepening into the kind of dialogue with the world that we all carry on unconsciously every day. The world around us is constantly changing, as are we humans. As we perceive the world, our consciousness and even our choices shift in response. It is an ongoing, usually unconscious process. With the RadJoy Practice, we bring the whole thing into awareness.

Here are some suggestions for how to absorb and be absorbed by your place:

Allow yourself to be distracted—but only by what's around you. Turn off your phone. Let your attention roam and when it finds something to settle on, let it settle. When it wants to roam, let it roam.

Move around as if all features of this place are as curious about you as you are about them.

Give voice to your emotions. If you're angry, shout. If you're sad, weep. If you're unsure what you feel, try articulating that feeling by stammering, bleating, or gasping.

Express your emotions with your body. Use your body to express your feelings about being here. Sing, throw something, put hands in the soil or the water, hug a tree. Do a dance. Lie on the ground. Experiment. Your body knows exactly how to put emotions into movement.

Look for what's hurt. Look for what's beautiful. One way to practice balance in your attitude is to explore balance in the place. Look for something that disturbs you. Spend a minute or two with it. Then look for something that makes you happy or eases your tension. Spend a minute or two with it. Again find something that disturbs you, then something you are glad to see. Explore both the sad and the joyful, the beautiful and the not-beautiful, the disturbing and the comforting.



Look around with meditative expectation, as if something surprising could reveal itself at any minute. It will.

4. Share what you discovered.

It's a good idea to gather again in a circle, so everyone can share what they discovered during their time of getting reacquainted with the place.

Occasionally, people dismiss their experience. "Nothing happened," they say offhandedly.

Something always happens! When any person goes into any place, they bring their whole life experience, their desires, their fears, their fondness for certain colors and landscapes and their dislike of others. They also bring their current feelings about what they've been dealing with during that particular day. The place, meanwhile, meets each person with its own particular "selfness"—the details of what happened to it, the lay of the land, the weather, the presence of animals and other people, the actions of wind and sun and clouds. Together, person and place have an encounter—and something always happens.

Each story is unique and each is part of all the others. Moreover, each person's story is complete just as it is. It needs no embellishment, no corrections. Also, it requires no fact-checking. An experience is valid and meaningful, even if someone doesn't know the species of a certain tree or mistakes a cow skull for a deer skull. What's important is how the relationship deepens between person and place.

5. Make a gift of Guerrilla Beauty for the place.



The part of the RadJoy Practice that most profoundly alters people's feelings about a wounded place is the making of a gift of beauty for the place. Think of it this way: For a long time, the place has given abundantly of itself to many living creatures. Now, after such generosity, it can't give what it gave before.

This is your opportunity to give something back. Your gift is not expensive. It's not practical, like a clean-up or restoration. It is simply an expression of gratitude or consolation by one particular group of people at one particular moment in time to one particular place.

Why “Guerrilla” Beauty?

The Spanish word guerrilla refers to aggressive actions undertaken by small, independent groups of combatants in conflict with a large institutionalized military force. During the 1970s, for example, guerrilla forces of Sandinistas in Nicaragua harassed members of the wealthy, right-wing government, freed political prisoners, and launched ambushes against the army.

The guerrilla beauty of RadJoy shares the spontaneity, boldness, and anonymity of the original meaning. It strikes at what is wrong by using methods so unconventional that they attract the attention of other

citizens, the media, and even corporate and government officials. Guerrilla beauty differs from guerrilla war, however, because it is non confrontational and compassionate. It is always creative, never destructive.

Your gift might be solemn or playful. It might take you five minutes or five days to create. Whatever the gift, it is important that everyone present participate in the making, no matter their age, level of physical ability, or protests that someone isn't "*artistic*." The involvement of all affirms that everyone belongs to this place.



Make your gift out of materials the place itself offers: seashells, stones, the limbs of cut trees, trash, sand, your own bodies, or other "art supplies." By creating your gift with what is on hand, you remember that places, like people, already have all they need to become beautiful. Many people

make the RadJoy Bird as their gift of beauty. Every place in the world has birds, and they are universal symbols of transcendence and freedom. Also, like RadJoy people, birds keep on singing, even through the worst of times.

Here are few additional ways to make beauty for your place:

- dance
- sing
- feed the birds
- water a plant
- hug a tree
- say a prayer
- make an altar
- make an offering
- drum
- hold hands
- walk a boundary
- make art out of trash

- turn a cartwheel

The effect of making this gift is often very powerful. People comment that a place that seemed ugly and useless to them when they arrived now seems to be full of beauty and resilience. Many have remarked in amazement that they feel love for a place they may have been avoiding for months or even years.

Tell Others About Your Experience!

Finally, take a photo of your group with their gift of guerrilla beauty and send it to us at info@radicaljoy.org. We'll put it up on our website, where there are many other stories of remarkable gifts of guerrilla beauty for hurt places. You can also join our interactive RadJoy Community, where you can tell the story of your event, post photos and videos, and join discussion groups.



Thank you for making beauty for a place you care about!

"In the process of bringing joy to a forgotten place, I opened up a piece of my own self and allowed it to heal—if only in a small way."

—Baylen S., Santa Monica, California

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: Clearcut forest, West Magnolia, Colorado. Photo by Christi Strickland

p. 3: Meadow mowed for a development, Moscow, Pennsylvania. Photo by Frank Goryl

p. 4: Field of monoculture crops, Wiesbaden, Germany. Photo by Cat Beckers

p. 7: Dolomite loading dock, Lake Huron, Michigan. Photo by Mark Clymer

p. 9: Dry lake, Tamera, Reliquias, Portugal. Photo by Carsten Dolcini

p. 10: Gas processing plant, Erie, Colorado. Photo by Christi Strickland

p. 12: Oil drilling in the North Sea, Bersensiel, Germany. Photo by Reinhard DeWitt

p. 12: Santa Fe Mountain Detention Camp—Japanese internment camp during WWII, then a dump. Photo by David Bronstein

p. 13: Beach litter, Durban, South Africa. Photo by Janet Frangs

p. 14: For Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo by Oksana Muravskaya

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