

## Part Five Relationships

Animists believe that we can enter into relationships with both other human persons, and other-than-human persons, to help ensure we can eat, and use, and not be eaten, or used. Or if we are eaten or used, that we know the rules of the relationship.

Graham Harvey, in his *An Animist Manifesto*, says, “Reasons are best worked out in relationship – especially if you are looking for reasons to eat someone – or if you are looking for reasons not to be eaten.” Respectful persons try to work out these details as equals; they establish a relationship and maintain it.

Frankly, the way WEIRD culture carries out its relationships with its preferred food and other resources is not respectful: we take, we do not give in return. We don’t ask what, if we were in the position of the food or resource, what we might want, how we might prefer to be treated. We should probably think about that.

“Respect means being cautious and constructive,” Harvey says. This means as animists, we need to show respect. How? I suggest several ways:

By giving deference to.

By giving consideration to.

By giving gifts to.

By leaving alone.

By speaking/singing the praises of.

By asking permission, and not imposing if the answer is no.

By seriously considering the request, and giving a thoughtful response.

By working together to solve a common problem that is mutually acceptable, not trying to cheat or impose on the others.

Harvey goes on to say, “You don’t have to hug every tree to show them respect but you might have to let trees grow where they will—you might have to move your telephone lines or greenhouse; You might have to build that road away from that rock or that tree. Hugging trees that you don’t know may be rude – try introducing yourself first”

Is hugging a human person without permission an okay behavior? Definitely not. Hugging other beings, or doing other things that YOU might think is an acceptable way to express respect, is poor etiquette. That is, is it not respectful, and it does not show humility. Yes, you should respect, and plan on avoiding imposing on others—and if you have to, ask for permission. Period.

So, carefully plan your road, the route for your power or phone lines, your contact with other persons. And if you must, then and only then ask if you may impose. Maybe if you make a gift, if you can have permission; and then behave in accordance with the response. Discussed that earlier in the section on respect.

But that isn’t how the WEIRD people work: if it has no mind, or no voice that we can recognize, it has no rights and deserves to be treated as separate “things.” ‘They’ are not persons, not people: ‘they’ are soulless automatons, or even inanimate matter, and we humans can do with them as we like. ‘They’ are property, if that.

I did mention humility earlier, didn't I? We need to have and practice humility, and practice respect, and at least try to create a relationship with those persons we must interact with and depend on.

Harvey also focuses on an important aspect of animism, that life is not understood by many in Western culture. "Just because the world and the cosmos is full of life does not make it a nice and easy place to live. Lots of persons are quite unfriendly to others." I discussed this some in the section on respect, and it underlies the section on humility as well.

This truth that life is hard (as in the biology and ecology of life, not the sociology of our society) is something that WEIRD people do need to learn, because many of them have no actual experience with nature and have no idea how it actually works. The environment is tough, and life is tough, and bad things happen sometimes. (Yes, WEIRD society is hard, too, for most humans, but that is a different discussion...although it does have to do with respect and humility, as well.)

At the same time, life is amazing and beautiful and good things happen sometimes. The goodness of the good things are made sharper by the bad, and vice versa.

Life is a conflict of needs, which means that some persons get eaten and others get to do the eating...and no one really gets off scot-free. Everyone dies eventually, and even if you as an individual get through without being eaten to old age, you will eventually die, and you know others of your kind will become food for other kinds of persons.

Life is always tough, but WEIRD people have pretty much managed to disconnect themselves from nature and way of life—we've isolated ourselves, think we're above, better, separated, or whatever. WEIRD people need to be educated about how life is for other persons, whether non-WEIRD humans or other-than-human persons.

Another WEIRD idea, reflected by Harvey, is that persons don't like those they eat. Frankly, the reality is that predators like their prey, want them to be fat, happy, and plentiful. They generally do not wish to cause distress when they take the prey's life, but it is inevitable that there will be some pain and discomfort. That's why these persons enter into relationships, so that the reciprocal nature can be acknowledged and reinforced.

Yes, lot of persons don't like/are unfriendly toward others, but indifference is by far the most common sort of relationship, and dislike and like are rare states, for those in probably the closest relationships. But again, it's about respect, and humility, and interdependence. It is not about likes and dislikes.