

Intimacy, Relationship, Identity

Eco contemplative liturgy, 27 April 2025, led by Deborah



Living things form marvellous, creative, flourishing associations and identities. We can think of our own gut microbes and skin microbes as members of an ecosystem to which we also belong. Mycorrhizal fungi can live completely surrounding plant roots or even inside the root cells, in mutual, growth-ful relationship across species.

But the fungus and alga that together make a lichen are even more intimate – they have become a single organism which can live in places that neither partner could on its own. The two (sometimes three) partners have been utterly transformed, they cannot go back to their individual lives. Lichens can grow on rock, enabling non-living minerals to pass directly across membranes into living creatures and nourish them.

What do lichens tell us about identity and relationship? What is an individual? Is there a clear line between living and non-living?

Readings

'Kathleen Jamie has talked of serious noticing – the idea of attention as a form of resistance. The more one pays serious attention to lichen, the more compelling and unknowable it becomes, vivid with what Vahni Capildeo has called the 'lovely alterity' of the non-human'

Sarah Westcott

Marriage of fungi and algae,
chemists of air,
changers of nitrogen-unusable into nitrogen-usable.

Like those nameless ones
who kept painting, shaping, engraving,
unseen, unread, unremembered.
Not caring if they were no good, if they were past it.

Rock wools, water fans, earth scale, mouse ears, dust,
ash-of-the-woods.
Transformers unvalued, uncounted.
Cell by cell, word by word, making a world they could live in.

Excerpt from 'For the Lobaria, Usnea, Witches Hair, Map Lichen, Beard Lichen, Ground Lichen, Shield Lichen'
By Jane Hirschfeld

We take a moment to consider the multi-faceted nature of intimacy and relationship and identity.

Individual contemplative time (15 minutes)

We have an opportunity for mutual encounter with another being or beings in the garden, especially with the lichens who live here. There are micro-specs available if you would like to use them.

If you are online, you are invited to an encounter with a plant, a view from the window, or perhaps something from the natural world held in your hand.

Regathering.

If you would like to, please do share any response you may have.

Reading

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and love and wings: and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any-lifted from the no
of all nothing-human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

e e cummings



Magnified cross-section of fungal threads (white) living inside root cells and also connected to the surrounding soil.



Root hairs completely surrounded by fungal filaments, living symbiotically with their plant partner