

The Circle of Life: The Heart's Journey Through the Seasons

Joyce Rupp & Macrina Wiederkehr

Seasons of the year. Seasons of the heart. Seasons always mean change and growth, a natural pattern of death and rebirth, holistic, balanced, unending. Even in a season so obviously full of light and growth like summer, there is darkness (night) and oppression (heat). Storms can arise in any season, whether internal or external, posing challenges to each of us; here we are taught to seek beauty to heal. We are taught to listen to the Earth. ***The Circle of Life*** is a rich resource showing our connection to nature through the seasons, both external and internal.

“When we connect our story to the Earth’s story we gain insight, strength, and courage to live our own evolving and growth-filled journey around the sun.”

Creative spirituality allows us to see the abundant connections that surround us and empowers us to live more fully as co-creators with God. Using such creative spirituality Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr enable us to draw closer to creation through the seasons of the year, all the while revealing our inner strength shown through our inner seasons. These masters of prayer know how to draw on ordinary objects and experiences to come into contact with the divine. They understand our need for meaningful ritual and they encourage us to be creative as the seasons are creative.

The seasons can teach us, if we will but listen. Powerful meditation poems for each season entitled “I Am Listening” help us do just that. For each season the authors include prayers, reflections, guided meditations and appropriate Gospel readings, all chosen to help us listen to the seasons of the Earth and to our inner self. Spring is for our growing moments; summer for abundance, autumn for surrender, winter for embracing the stillness. Many of the chapters include questions for reflection, some to be shared and others to be kept private. Following the reflections are Integration actions. Nothing is ever set apart on its own. We are all connected to each other and to nature; Rupp and Wiederkehr helps us to integrate those sometimes seemingly separate parts into a holistic circle.

In so doing, they draw on the rich tradition of Teilhard de Chardin, who found the divine in the concrete things of this world. This is not a light New Age book, for there are no easy answers to be found here. There is no one path to God. Rather, we can revisit the unbroken circle of the seasons to find the strength to continue with our journey.

More tools for this journey include the joy of song and dance. Beautiful rituals for each season of the year based on the four directions of the earth draw on an ancient custom and bring it to new life. And, of course, beautiful prose and poetry

abound. Speaking of her childhood, Macrina Wiederkehr writes, “Those were the days when I prayed summer without knowing it was a prayer.”

In these hurried times, their reminders are crucial: that we are all connected; that we must connect to our inner child to experience the fullness of summer; that we must surrender to stillness; that we must rest before the new growth of spring can come. We cannot reap a continual harvest without rest, as the authors say. Once again, take the time to journey deeper.

Suggestions for use / adaptation

Use the ***Circle of Life*** in a spiral fashion, delving deeper into a season each time you visit it. Begin your journey with the Introduction, which sets the stage for the rest of book, and the first section on The Four Seasons, which serves to acquaint us with the unique qualities of each season. Then choose the current external season of the one that most closely matches your internal season.

This is an excellent resource for small faith sharing groups, parish women’s retreats or communities of any kind. Pick parts to use with your prayer group. Consider using parts of it with your family or with your spiritual director. Set your creative force free as the authors have. Journal, write poetry, sketch, dance, sing in whatever way the prayers and the seasons touch you.

Questions to ponder

- What images do you associate with each of the four seasons (see the poem “I Arise Today”)?
- Where is God calling you to grow and what does that growth entail leaving behind?
- In “Childhood Memories of Spring,” Joyce Rupp recalls spring on the farm of her youth. What memories do you have of spring from the springtime of your life, and how do those memories speak to you today?
- What are you challenged to surrender and accept?