



On Writing Nature, Culture, and the Sacred: A Woman Listens for Leadership

by Nina Simons

In *Nature, Culture, and the Sacred: A Woman Listens for Leadership*, Nina Simons offers practical guidance and inspiration for anyone who aspires to grow into their own unique form of leadership on behalf of positive change.

In nurturing this book over the past several years, I've learned that when I write about my own ahas, vulnerably and honestly, it often seems useful or resonant for others. In gathering many of those discoveries written over two decades – related to my emergent identities as a woman, a leader, a student of Indigenous wisdom and as a white ally committed to racial equity – *Nature, Culture & the Sacred: A Woman Listens for Leadership* has become an offering that's fitted to my path – one of weaving together disparate strands to remember wholeness.

I co-founded a nonprofit in 1990 called Bioneers, which has afforded me exceptional opportunities for learning. In that capacity, I've co-curated an annual conference that's featured over a hundred innovative leaders each year – people from all walks of life with visionary and practical solutions for transforming our societies toward right relationship with our selves, each other and the Earth. There, I've been able to witness and study leaders across a wide spectrum of disciplines, ages and backgrounds.

This book offers my gleanings as I cultivated myself toward becoming as free, creative and purposeful a leader as I yearned to be. Each year, in preparation for hosting Bioneers' annual conference, I wrote a personal piece to distill what I've learned in the past year. I've always felt a huge responsibility to offer something relevant and real, with humility about my own continuing learning curves and blind spots. They take many forms – some were written as poems, others as essays. Together, they encompass my inner evolution, and describe my own process of emergent agency, self-awareness and clarifying vision.

Each of the three sections addresses a different octave of my learning. The first is about how being a woman (and my internalized biases and what it's meant to me to shed them) has shaped my life. It also describes my discovery of how beautifully women can liberate, celebrate and strengthen each other. The second offers a global overview of women's leadership, summarizing its challenges and promise, and features narrative portraits of some of my favorite heroes. And third is my evolving learning and growing commitment to racial equity, indigeneity, and how to become a good ally and advocate for racial justice.

The first edition was an opportunity to review, edit, sort and sequence a collection of those writings over a long arc of intentional focus. But when it was published, my mother entered her end of life. We were close, and the urgency for me to be by her side was clear, so I had no time to promote or share word of the book's birth.

Naturally, when the book won two awards from Nautilus, I was elated – a gold in the category of women, and silver for social and racial justice. Two professors said that they were using the book in their college-level courses. And two women's circles reached out, one in the US and another in Europe, who were enjoying using the book to strengthen their collective learning.

After my mother's death and as the pandemic began, I was invited by a beloved friend to consider how I most wished to advance my work in the coming year. My heart leapt at the prospect of updating and improving the initial manuscript.

Motivated by a deep commitment to strengthening women's leadership, I'd spent over twenty years convening diverse groups of women to cultivate their own flourishing. In the process, I had learned in embodied ways practices and prompts that could add depth and practical utility to the book. So Anneke and I added discussion guides – opportunities for deepening reflection – along with embodied practices.

The new edition integrated two streams of my life that had previously (at least within myself) felt separate. The part of me that curated, hosted and helped to midwife the organization I'd co-founded, with the facilitator of deep immersive retreats for women leaders who were diverse in every way. Integrating both octaves of myself seemed to deepen the utility of the book, adding new dimensions to it. My hope is that women may find both aspects of it useful – for their own reflective leadership cultivation, and for facilitating others in circles or educational spaces.

Our first book was *Moonrise: The Power of Women Leading from the Heart*, which sought to share stories of how we are redefining what motivates and qualifies as leadership, and what it looks, feels and behaves like. After all, if what nature (and our human societies) need the most is people making courageous and creative stands for everything we care about most deeply, how might our culturally-inherited mental models of leadership be inhibiting our progress? And if they are, how may we be transforming leadership itself into something quite different? Together, we lifted up a spectrum of embodied stories of heart-centered leadership that we imagine we could all wholeheartedly aspire to.

For me, *Nature, Culture & the Sacred* is both an offering and a prayer. I believe that the uprising of the 'feminine' archetype in leadership of all kinds, and in women and men alike, is the single greatest chance we have to avert climate (and other) catastrophes and rebalance and heal our human-nature relationship.

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