



## 19. SEE GLASS ( NEW FOOD )



To the **Q'ero** people of Peru, the most important principle in life is what they call "**Ayni**" — the understanding that everything in the universe is interconnected, and that a respectful balance must be carefully maintained through cycles of reciprocal giving. Similar notions of **reciprocity** abound in traditional cultures worldwide.

In modern American culture, our mythology is "survival of the fittest," "winner take all," "every man for himself," and "he who dies with the most toys wins" — encoding the brittle doctrine of selfishness into the very fabric of our society. Even our modern environmental movement is grounded in a fundamentally economic view of reality, speaking in terms of "natural resources," "carbon counting, taxes, and credits," and other ideas that seek to collapse the living world into a series of quantifiable spreadsheets — as if nature were something "out there" to be objectively studied and managed.

When we forget that *we are nature*, that nature reflects us, that it's all a vast and mysterious hall of mirrors, we can start to lose faith in the exquisite gift of human life.

In his classic book, *The Gift*, **Lewis Hyde** advises:

*Out of bad faith comes a longing for control, for the law and the police. Bad faith suspects that the gift will not come back, that things won't work out, that there is a scarcity so great in the world that it will devour whatever gifts appear. In bad faith the circle is broken.*

**Walt Whitman** offers a similar perspective:

*The song is to the singer, and comes back most to him;  
The theft is to the thief, and comes back most to him;  
The love is to the lover, and comes back most to him;  
The gift is to the giver, and comes back most to him—  
it cannot fail;*

In this ritual, the cycle of *In Fragments* approaches completion — by making an offering to **Lake Champlain**, which has witnessed each step in the journey up until now.

I visit a friend's **pine** and **spruce** forest in the nearby town of Charlotte, searching for **resin** — the sticky "scar tissue" produced by coniferous trees to heal the "wounds" of broken branches. I make an offering of three old pieces of sea glass from **High Acres Farm**, and use my childhood Bowie knife to harvest a few handfuls of resin. I thank the tree as I leave.

My grandfather's 125-year-old **birchbark canoe** stands by the High Acres Farm stables, awaiting repair.

At a small wooden table, I unload the harvested resin into a skillet, and set it to boil on the butane stove that I used in *Give Up The Ghost*. I pour the melted liquid through a strainer to separate the chunks of wood and bark. In a second skillet, I fry a stack of bacon and pour its grease into the monogrammed "**JJH**" silver bowl that I received as a gift for my 1980 christening. I mix the bacon grease with the harvested resin in a heavy iron melting pot, and set the concoction to boil until it foams over onto the table, placing the hot mixture on an old "**Flower of Life**" trivet where it can cool.

I carry the warm solution to the canoe, and use my great-grandmother's monogrammed "**EHW**" silver spoon to spread the gummy resin over the splits and rips of the bark, gradually mending the "wounds" of her son's "vessel".

With the canoe repair complete, I enter the barn and climb the ladder into the hayloft, returning to the mosaic of mirrors that I placed there six years before, now covered with layers of cobwebs, disintegrating wasp nests, and many seasons of dust. I open four old hay doors, one on each side of the building, as a way of opening up "**the four directions**".



I use my mother's silver scissors to cut the "**red thread**" that's been bounding the mosaic of mirrors. I walk its perimeter, wrapping the string around my hand, and then use the scissors again to release the container entirely.

The red thread is replaced by a single shaft of sunlight streaming through a hay door, reaching to the back of the space. I sweep the mirrors into a pile, and load them into two steel buckets and a pail, which stand by an open window with a view to Lake Champlain.

The next morning, I load the buckets into the mended canoe, preparing to take them out onto the water. After paddling away from the shore, I select a piece of broken mirror and toss it into the lake. Two birds appear on the horizon, flying towards the boat. I take a second piece of broken mirror and toss it in as well. Just as the second mirror enters the water, the birds pass directly over the boat, as if emerging from my hand by grace.

I continue feeding the broken mirrors into the water, seeding the lake with what will eventually be "sea glass" for future generations to discover — this time made not from the bottles of booze, but from the "fragments" of an ancestor's story.

A bird's eye view reveals the iconic shape of the mended vessel on the vastness of the lake — it is an **open eye** gazing up from this glassy plane of perception; it is an **official passageway** into this motherlike body of water; it is a **vesica pisces portal** to another zone of reality; it stands at the threshold of above and below, plumbing the space where we end and begin.

A flame appears, exploring a spiraling collection of sea glass. The offering is somehow acknowledged.

*Performed in 2021 — Duration 8:27*

