

## **Key Lessons from these Native American Writings**

### **Comments from their donor, Alycia Longrivers Davis**

The lessons within the Native books I've passed on to Unitarian Barnstable, are subtle, woven into the stories and histories written. A couple, 'Black Elk Speaks' and the 'Hopi Prophecies' were written in the early 1900's, so they contain some aspects of traditional Native culture that had not been destroyed yet. Native tribes are like most groups now, have been split by two sides since European incursion: the Traditionals, who tried to hold onto traditional language, culture, ceremonies, but have been shrinking and aging out, and the Progressives, which in this case, represents those who are more interested in financial progress than maintaining cultural ways (seeking casinos, ways to take-over the leasing control of tribal lands to outsiders for mining, lumber, oil/gas, etc., from the U.S. Interior Dept.-Bureau of Indian Affairs. Under tribal traditions, the whole tribe must agree through consensus for any major decisions. Through the Progressives, Tribal Councils can move forward more easily.

The essence of traditional Native culture is all life revolves in a circle, the galaxy, the solar system, the year's seasons, our lives, all through the connectivity of all. The tenet that 'what happens there, affects what happens here'. No major decisions were made without consideration of 'their effect on the next seven generations' (where the U.S. government doesn't think beyond the now). For every ceremony, the Lakota (Sioux) have a term, *Mitakuye Oyasin*. It means 'for all my relations'. It is said to express what we do or about to do, is on behalf of all things (humans, creatures, earth) as all is related. In one of my teaching poems, "On and On", it is the idea of a cloud becoming the rain, the rain becoming the plant, the plant becoming the caterpillar, the caterpillar becomes the spider, the spider the grasshopper, the grasshopper the frog, the frog the pond, the pond the cloud, the cloud the rain...on and on...all related, all part of each other.

It is the reverence of the traditional held for Mother Earth and the gifts she provides all to live, to respect those gifts and not abuse or use those gifts recklessly. It is that all hold a place equally and all have a voice. Among the Iroquois Federation (5 tribes in upstate NY area that formed an alliance hundreds of years before European arrival), it was the women, the Clan Mothers, who decided which men would be chief of this or that, since they knew each man for who he was, his strong and weak points, and if he did poorly, they had the power to remove him. Among the Hopi, the Lakota, and others, family names passed through the mother's side, not the father's, and she held title to the property

(lodging, items). Women held titles in many tribes. Women's power was taken by the Europeans who came, as they would only deal with men, as they did in Europe where women held no power, no voice.

Warriors were not valued by who or how many killed. Warriors highest respect came from how much they gave to the weakest (the sick, the widows, the elders) and went without for themselves. In European/American culture, it was/is who grabbed the most, is most admired. Battles were not about killing...the greatest courage was 'counting coup' (riding in, touching a foe with something) or stealing horses, or taking captives (the purpose was to spread bloodlines, avoiding becoming 'too related' within the tribes keeping to themselves).

Spirituality was the beauty of everyday life. The 'church' was where a person stood and moved with the person, the sky the ceiling, the earth the floor, the horizons the walls. All around would be creation if one looked, and one would know all is connected.

These are the essences of traditional Native culture, much of which is lost now. I was blessed to meet, be with, learn from some of the last traditional spiritual elders. They knew they were dying out but they hoped the 'new young people' (as we are seeing with the youth of today believing in the respect of the environment, the inclusion of all people, etc.) would carry on the best of their traditions. They saw people like me and many others, part Native, as bridges to share the teachings.

*Alycia longriver Davis, November 2, 2020*