



AKWESASNE NOTES

"WHERE THE PARTRIDGE DRUMS"

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— Kahonhies

Iroquois Snow Snake Game

"If Wounded Knee occupiers get convicted, then that means that every American Indian in this country has no treaty rights. If this happens, then the rest of America does not have constitutional rights. So if we get convicted, you all get convicted — and that's the truth."

— Russell Means
American Indian Movement

"We are of the whole Earth, spiritually plugged into her every process — we hear her every cry. If we lose our ability to hear, we cannot flow in harmony with her, and we will vanish with the invaders when she resolves this dissonance with a great convulsive shudder."

— Gayle High Pines, on the
Non-Progressive Great Spirit

"We have not yet projected sales for it, but 2,750 miles is a big project."

— Sidney D. John, Caterpillar Brasil
executive on plans to build a
highway in Brazil which will
exterminate native people.

"Watergate [won't] be a surprise to anybody in Indian Country. Instead, it will let the rest of the Americans understand what we've been going through in our many years of work with the Federal Government. Now they know the lack of advocacy. They know the lack of trust. They know what it's like to have crooked people working for you. We've all had that kind of experience."

— Leon Cook, NCAI president
at the annual meet in 1973

The non-progressive Great Spirit

"TRADITIONALISM IN THE MODERN WORLD"

It might seem that the Old Ways cannot provide means for spiritual survival in the viciously disharmonious white world. It might seem that the Old Ways have little defense against an attack in ways alien to the "natural world". Most of us seem to regard white cultural and spiritual assault as a diluting or polluting or weakening force — we seem to think that we must protect the Old Ways, rather than allowing the Old Ways to protect us.

It is true that the Old Ways were given us in a time which our ancestors could not have imagined. Yet, when totally trusted, the Old Ways make us invulnerable. Through them, we may not only survive in the white world, but understand it better than do the whites. We must not only develop the application of the Old Ways to the "modern world", but also understand the modern world in the context of the Old Ways. You know, we open ourselves like the air, and the world flows through us like the wind. The world is part of us as the wind is part of the air. We have no boundaries — we are all we experience, know, feel — all of which interacts with everything, making us of the entire earth. We need not seek to determine our form, but we can allow it to be determined by the particular rhythm of tribal consciousness which creates our perception — creates us.

As our bodies do not grow and unfold from choice and decision, neither do our minds. Disharmonious and destructive acts arise automatically from disharmonious conditions. Through the old ways, we are in harmony with all circumstances — the correct and harmonious course of action is always to be found in us if we are in touch with ourselves.

All of existence flows through us, and so we know the sacredness of all being. It is knowledge that cannot be articulated — that is what we are. It is sacredness that cannot be grasped or defined, absolute in itself, with no meaning beyond itself.

Everything is at the center of the universe. You are the center, the focus of the Earth who flows through you physically as well as spiritually: the air, the water, the living beings who feed you, unite in your existence. Everything is defined in relation to you.

The moon is itself in its own center, as are the pine, the rock, the elk, the thunder. They are not one another, or even another of the same kind. One pine has its own sacred patterns of needles, branches, bark. The sun, the water, the soil, the wind make the shape of all the pines. But the form of each pine is defined by neither its similarity to, nor its difference from, other pines. It is absolute. It is not a thing, but a process — like us.

The Great Spirit is neither inside nor outside us. The Old Ways are neither externally imposed, nor internally created, but are a particular tribal rhythm which keeps us of the flowing circles of life. Like the air moving from the wind one who follows the Old Ways has great power which he or she does not contain or originate.

Non-native Americans — as spiritually disharmonious as most of them are — also can only act within the laws of the Great Spirit. Even to pave our Mother or to make their buildings, they must adhere to the "laws of nature" in a certain manner — if they follow them in another manner, their buildings will follow these "laws" by falling.

No one can depart from the Great Spirit, but if one acts without reverence and awareness, one becomes a spiritual (and perhaps physical) casualty of the disharmony created — as walking off a high cliff does not violate the Way but may lead to death.

Most non-native Americans are caught up in processes they don't understand, cannot accommodate to, and which are destroying them spiritually and physically. They refuse to realize that it is only illusion to try to control what totally contains them. And, as members of our species, they serve to warn us that we are potentially like them.

Our entire existence is of reverence. Our rituals renew the sacred harmony within us. Our every act — eating, sleeping, breathing, making love — is a ceremony reaffirming our dependence on Mother Earth and our kinship with her every child. Unlike Christians, who dichotomize the spiritual and the physical, put religion in its compartment, and call the physical world evil and a mere preparation for a world to come, we recognize the "spiritual" and the "physical" as one — without Westerners' dichotomies between God and humankind, God and nature, nature and humankind, we are close and intimate and warm with Mother Earth and the Great Spirit. Unlike Christian belief, which claims that our species is both inherently evil and the divinely ordained ruler of Earth, we know that, being of our sacred Mother Earth, we are sacred.

To walk in the Old Ways is to live in the sacred manner, to stand upright, to walk straight, to respect our brothers and sisters of different Nations and different species. It is to open ourselves like air, like sky, in order to know the mountains, the waters, the wind, the lights of the sky, the plants, and the four-legged, six-legged, no-legged, and winged beings. It is to kill in the sacred manner, to know pain in the sacred manner, to know love, sorrow, anger, joy in the sacred manner, and to die in the sacred manner.

All that is given us of the Great Spirit is sacred — life, death, the wish to avoid death and the wish to receive it, pain, hunger, anger, growth. To live in harmony with the Earth and all life, one

does not use Western value judgments — isolating what might be labeled "good" (such as life, love, or pleasantness) and avoiding the "bad" or harsh (darkness, anger, discomfort, pain or death). To be in harmony with the death of a loved one, for example, is to know grief — not to suppress, deny, or escape from it, but to flow with it, grow with it, plunge into it, celebrate it.

The ways of each Nation provide channels for the "negative" so that one may constantly maintain balance and harmony. "It is a good day to die!" cried the Lakota in battle — to die at the height of life, to transcend conflict, to offer one's self up in a sort of ritual self-immolation, to unite life and death in an exquisite purity. As in the liberation and revelation of the self-torture of the Sun Dance, ecstasy is the explosive coming together of life and death, of pain and pleasure.

Death is part of all life, and all life is born of death. We kill in the sacred manner and die in the sacred manner. The animals and plants we kill to live are killed with reverence, respect, gratitude, and love — and with the knowledge that we repay them with our own bodies. Our bodies are not "ours" but of Mother Earth; she permits us to live thru her other children; she continuously passes through us as we receive her children into our bodies and give to them of our bodies. Upon our death, our bodies return to our Mother and her children, who lent us life; and our minds merge into the flow, like a wave returning to the body of a river. All living beings are part of one another because we are not separated beings, but processes, or steps in a process. There is no death — only transformation.

Much difference between Western and tribal values can be traced to time perception. Western time perception is linear and progressive — you move along

a line, with the past behind and the future ahead, and hopefully you're progressing, advancing. ("You're six years old — stop acting like a two-year-old!") ("Took us a million years to crawl out of the muck and now we've made it to the moon.") Each point in time is defined as a stage in relation to the others — usually ahead of the previous points, but not as good as what's coming up.

This time progression causes most non-native Americans to depart from the non-progressive Great Spirit and Mother Earth. It shows in the way their adults rationalize tyranny over their children (and remember, they call us "children" as a euphemism for "savages"), in the blind and frantic way they live their lives, in the way they persecute "inferior" species — and in the way they are trying to destroy tribal peoples.

The word "primitive" from a root meaning "first" signifies an "early stage" (as opposed to an "advanced" stage). Thus a tribal people is defined in relation to what Westerners think it should ultimately become — but it needs help, they sigh, chafing in impatience at the slowness of these backward creatures to accept necessary progress.

Despite references to "primitive" social and economic structures, the West defines "primitive" and "advanced" in terms of technology. And the use of "primitive" interchangeably with "tribal" creates the implicit assumption that as technology becomes more complex, tribal forms will die. With the West using that premise to rationalize colonial exploitation and cultural imperialism, that has become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Our time perception is spherical — there is no past or future, for they are one with the present. Each point in time is itself — the unique interaction of infinite happenings since the beginning of time — with infinite consequences. As every special point is the center of the universe, so is every point in time the center of time — the unique and precious instant the Earth has been preparing for since her beginning.

Nothing progresses, advances, or improves. Everything contains all it has been and will be. A tree three feet tall is neither superior nor inferior to one thirty feet tall. It is never superior or inferior to what it has been or will be. It must always be in harmony with itself. If the Europeans had just come upon is in a few hundred more millennia, they would have found more complex technology among us than they did — but we would not have been superior to what we were.

Technology is a very superficial form of growth. A tribal people, among whom the spiritual is the first consideration, constantly tests everything new and old against its spiritual and social harmony; at its own pace it absorbs into and discards from its spiritual rhythm.

All of this is NOT our cultures. This is the ground from which our cultures grow. We do not originate our Nations — nor are they given from outside us. They are shaped from the raw form of our ecstasy, which is to say, they are of the Great Spirit.

To be conscious of being is awesome and holy. Our consciousness reflects upon itself: we are given words. The word must be treated with respect, or its power may be uncontrolled and work for harm. Lying was unthinkable in the Old Ways, for to abuse words is to endanger the Nation. People who have no respect for words allow words to create worlds for them, and then move into those worlds permanently. This is how most non-native Americans manage to pretend that their species is the world and everything else subordinate



— The New Yorker
"I'm sorry, my son, but I'm afraid we WASPs have no tribal wisdom to pass on."

and unimportant. The word does not contain the existence of what it refers to — the word is like a glass which focuses. I point it to something and you look through it to see what I am pointing to.

But the scope of the word is limited, and so the song is given to us, born like a wave flowing through us, individually, or collectively, in a precious moment of unified consciousness. Through the song we resonate with the pulse of the earth. The song is forever but like a flat surface — so the ceremony is given us, given of the sacredness that surrounds us, extending forever on all sides. Through the ceremony, the sacredness is given shape. But the ceremony is not forever in time — for that we are given our individual consciousness, through which we experience and feel and know — and as individuals, we are of all earth and all time.

No matter how many milleniums old a Nation is, it is new, being created, growing. Language, myth, legend, song, ceremony, art are at once manifestations of tribal consciousness and instruments of its creation. In our myths and legends, the distinction between physical and spiritual history is not made because it is irrelevant.

If we create myths or traditions that, say, attribute life to a river, and act and feel accordingly, we are not going contrary to reality. It is as carving the form of a deer from a piece of wood is not imposing upon the wood an alien form — the interaction of the carver with the special characteristics of the wood produces a life that exists within mind — and is, indeed, real. No matter how "realistically" something may be viewed, the image exists only within the viewer — which makes it no less real and true! (Westerners strain to see things "realistically" and therefore confuse their perceptions with reality. Since, therefore, there is so little they see and less they understand, they managed to create the ridiculous concept of the "supernatural" — literally, above nature — and then had the temerity to apply that word to the religions of tribal peoples, who know that nature encompasses everything.)

By opening ourselves, surrendering ourselves, we may know the reality, or spirits, of many things — "the real world behind this one, and everything we see here, is like a shadow from that world," in Black Elk's words. As we bring ourselves in resonance with these spirits, align our own centers with them, they may talk to us, teach us, guide us, protect us, help us, and endow us with The Power as it is manifested in them.

A thing of power is given its power thru our recognition in it of the Power that flows through everything — it is given its holy power through the power of our consciousness, which is not ours, but of the Great Spirit. This is why none of our Nations has ever tried to impose its religion on another Nation, and why we have always respected variation of thought; we are too religious to think that religion can be externally imposed, or to confuse the symbols, rituals, and rules with the spiritual knowledge itself.

Our worlds are wonder and magic because we create them. A tribal culture is close to its people, meaning that it grows in harmony with them, absorbing what they feel to be in spiritual harmony with themselves. The richer the culture — the myths, songs, ceremonies, customs, etc. — the more life and consciousness is created, and the more joy and immersion in existence.

In this sense, Anglo-Americans have almost no culture. Their ideal of "rugged individualism" makes cultural molding seem to them to be in opposition to individual autonomy, or a form of brainwashing, or a symptom of weakness. So they simply ignore the ways they are molded, and consequently confuse their own standards, mores, myths, and customs with absolutes.

The main reason that there is so little anti-social behavior in a tribal society, and why a tribal society functions

without [repressive] government, is that anti-social behavior would threaten the fragile circle-bond that is the Nation — and since the Nation is its collective consciousness, and the consciousness is the individual, to threaten the unity of the Nation would put one's own existence into unimaginable jeopardy.

A tribal individual cannot exist apart from her or his tribespeople. If the Nation is shattered, the universe collapses. It is a tragedy beyond the comprehension even of those who experience it, and beyond description in English — which has no word for what is destroyed. The invaders cannot understand what they have been doing, for they have nothing comparable to what we stand to lose. So they blithely make their vicious remarks that our assimilation is inevitable or our cultures dying.



The dissolution of tribal identity into a single mush of "Indianness", as seems to be happening in the cities, is a trap. It is how the invaders can destroy our cultures even as we cling to our "Indian" identities. We know we need not relinquish individuality for tribal unity — neither must we sacrifice tribalism for intertribal solidarity. A bird cannot be simply a "bird" without being of a specific species — so "Indianness" consists of being of a specific culture.

Our union with Mother Earth and the Great Spirit, which binds us together, is NOT our culture. It is an absolute. For this reason, among individuals united with The Power — spiritual leaders, prophets, medicine men and women — tribal differences are irrelevant. Any culture (in the sense that tribal peoples know it) must be built upon this basic spiritual knowledge to have cohesion and continuity.

But the knowledge is not enough. Other peoples who had it have long since shed their tribalism, and cruel and socially oppressive forms developed. It is when we lose our tribalism that our social bonds are the first to go.

It is our own tribal cultures that give us the tools to use the knowledge, and the means to gain The Power. Our power will be lost if we lose our tribal bonds, for it must flow through us and flow through all the people and be shared throughout the Nation — only this way can we be linked to the Power throughout the Earth.

The sophisticated Westerners see us as children. They believe that now having seen the harsh reality of modern civilization, we have lost our innocence, like a little white child just told there's no Santa Claus. Now, see? — in the bright light of science there are no spirits, no magic. They think that like the disillusioned child, we can't return to the old magic world.

My People — we draw upon the Power through the power of our own consciousness — we give something power by recognizing its power. If we become ashamed in the light of Western "rationality" and lose the power of our own spirit and minds, our religions will be a bunch of quaint, pretty superstitions. And we will not survive, but be caught up in the whites' mainstream and die with them.

We are of the whole Earth, spiritually plugged in to her every process — we hear her every cry. If we lose our ability to hear, we cannot flow in harmony with her, and we will vanish with the invaders when she resolves this dissonance with a great convulsive shudder. If we shrink in fear of whiteness, we will indeed shrink and be swept away along with them — because we have been retreating from the Earth and the Way of life.

So long as we retain our tribal consciousness as a structure, everything the whites teach us about their "science" can only increase our Power and our union with Mother Earth.

What we are now enduring demands far greater spiritual participation than ever before. It is painful. We hear our Mother's screams of sorrow for exterminated species and her shrieks of agony as her heart is torn by strip-mining. Our ordeal is not just ours, but of our Mother and all her children, including the white two-legs, and what is now demanded is not inter-tribal but interspecies solidarity. We cannot protect the Old Ways by cringing and huddling and retreating into our Indianness. The Old Ways cannot even be delineated — the outward forms of our religion are merely instruments. The Old Ways are simply the means of total union with the Earth — and we cannot desert her now.

Our oppression is spiritual. To respond in harmony with our present physical conditions is to offer certain forms of physical resistance. We must reclaim our hearts, minds, and spirits, and to do that is to refuse to submit to the means of oppression — the material deprivation, the bureaucratic tyranny, the degradation, the theft of us from our Mother Earth.

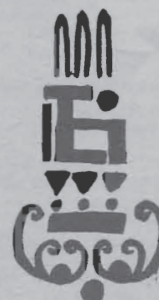
But to rebuild the Nations takes much more than resisting those means. Only those people who remain true to the Old Ways — who understand that they are growth, and who understand that the "new ways" are also of the Great Spirit, and so are contained in the Old Ways — and who thus neither automatically accept nor fear the "new" ways — will survive as Nations.

Each of us must know our own Nation's language, myths, history, ceremonies and customs, for the life of the Nation. The old religions and tribal ways are the structures which enable us to absorb the new. It is of ourselves that we produce the prophets and spiritual leaders who will guide each Nation to fulfill its own path to these new circumstances.

My people — there is no "modern" world. There is not even a white world — there is the world of the Great Spirit and the world of Mother Earth. It is through the old sacred ways that we know this always, and only through these old ways can we survive as a people and as Nations.

My people — in the city I hear these voices. It is spoken not only by the rain, not only by the small cracks that break through the concrete. It is also spoken by the cracks in the cement that take the shape of winter trees, and by the rainbows on the puddles of oil on the street. I have spoken.

— Gayle High Pine



Foreign arrival on this continent didn't have to be disastrous. In fact, we were receiving visitors from the Orient at least a thousand years before we discovered an Italian slave-trader here. The visitors from the Orient did not try to harm us or dispossess us. Cultural contact, both among our own Nations and people from other lands, is inherently good — even necessary. A Nation cannot be frozen at any point. The Nations have always been changing, merging and dividing, borrowing, discarding, learning, growing. Before the Europeans began active efforts to exterminate us, much of what they had brought — the horse, the sheep, beads, metal tools — had been absorbed into many cultures. Regardless of origin, these things became Indian. Everything we absorb becomes Indian.

My people — there is no growth without pain; neither is their pain without growth! We do not hide from pain and death and life. Westerners turn their faces from it: they get meat in bloodless, sanitized packages; they try to prevent their bodies at death from being reclaimed by the Earth who owns them — they try to deny the sacredness of the life they take when they kill a mosquito.

It is because we do not hide from even the smallest cry of pain that we will survive. Our ancient conception of cowardice is not the limited physical cowardice defined by the West. It is to retreat from actual real life with all its conflict and risk and pain.