

THE OLD IS NOW: CREATING A SHIFT TOWARD WHOLENESS THROUGH DIALOGUE

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You were born into a culture that was already in existence when you came in, but you came in order so that you could meet the challenges of that time in your history with your people. And you brought with you certain gifts....and those gifts specifically were given to you by Mother Earth, Father Sky....I have a responsibility to say this to you. Ceremony will never be lost, can never be lost; it was never lost; it belongs to you; it was given to you. At any point if there is any danger that it may be lost, someone will be born into your tribe who will have the gift, who will have the answers, and you will know what to do. I believe this, also at the global level, that there are people perhaps who are waiting to come over who already know what needs to happen. They're coming with those gifts. I think all of you in this room are here because you are supposed to be here today. You bring with you certain gifts that the planet needs now, not 200 years from now or 200 years back. You are all carrying something that we can only do together, because it's a combination of all of us on the Earth at this time that is going to make a significant difference. Otherwise, we might have been born a thousand years from now....You are all receiving special blessings because of where you placed yourselves, where you are now, and what you are doing.

—Joseph Rael (Beautiful Painted Arrow)¹

Joseph Rael spoke these important words at the 2001 SEED Graduate Institute Language of Spirit conference, an annual conference which has brought together Native elders and Western scientists in dialogue at SEED Graduate Institute since 1999. The SEED dialogues are a continuation of a tradition that began in 1992, when Blackfoot elder Leroy Little Bear approached the physicist David Bohm to initiate a dialogue between

¹ Rael, a Picuris and Southern Ute elder, was initially directing his remarks to the Native American participants in the dialogue circle, and then to all participants in the circle and beyond.

Native elders and Western scientists on the same soil in which Columbus first set foot on the North American continent exactly five hundred years ago.² Little Bear realized that quantum theory (which “discovered” a world of flux and radical interconnection) had come full circle to an understanding of the cosmos that was more in accord with Indigenous worldviews. He was also impressed by Bohm’s practice of dialogue that emphasized the flow of meaning and deep listening in a similar way as does traditional Native talking circle, and by his realization of the limits of the English language in describing the quantum realm, the latter of which led Bohm to try to re-create English as a verb-only language (which he called the *rheomode*—from the Greek *rheo* meaning “to flow”).

Little Bear, who is a remarkably gifted moderator, initiated and moderated the dialogues out of respect for David Bohm. The kind of dialogues held at SEED are a hybrid of Bohmian dialogue and Native talking circle. They are radically different than ordinary conversation or debate in which the listener tends to listen only as much as necessary to ready a reply; for, in deep dialogue, the purpose is to listen for the sake of understanding rather than to convert another to one’s point of view. There is no agenda or expectation of a result in dialogue; yet what does occur is often subtle but powerful shifts in consciousness. This occurs through a movement toward Group mind or collective intelligence that has nothing to do with sameness of thinking or all coming to agreement, but is instead a subtle process of allowing for new possibilities for learning as each person speaks. This unique form of knowledge construction is what Bronson refers to as a “creative hybrid space” in which egalitarian sharing leads to emergent ideas that seem to be larger than the personal consciousness of the individuals who participate (2007 SEED Dialogue). It is not so important who is speaking, or for how long, as the whole group becomes a conduit for the flow of meaning. Talking circle is distinguished by the allowance for each participant to speak as long as Spirit moves them to speak; the overall effect is less of a ping-pong exchange of ideas, and more of a deep and slower excursion into a multi-dimensional engagement with the flow of meaning. Both authors of this chapter have had the privilege of participating in the SEED dialogues for some time, and we feel that these kinds of venues (in which Indigenous and Western peoples meet and listen to one another with respect/appreciation) are extremely important and should continue.

² Dan Moonhawk Alford was instrumental in bringing the dialogues to SEED in 1999.

This chapter is modeled after the SEED dialogues, albeit in written form, and contains somewhat lengthy answers from each writer in response to specific questions. This is intended to be roughly tantamount to the way the oral dialogues are practiced, as each dialogue begins with a kick-start question as a way of initiating a flow of meaning between the group members, which prompts many of the speakers to go on for extended periods without responding point for point. This is not to be confused as a series of monologues, because each speaker is contributing to the overall flow of meaning that is continually being created on the spot. The intent is to engage in *participatory thinking* that is inclusive of all viewpoints—not to determine who or what is right in being said. When successful, dialogue can enact a deep change in how the mind works. It may very well be that this form of inclusive group mind or collective intelligence is what we need to develop and support if we are to successfully repair the schism that has occurred between Western and Indigenous worldviews—a schism that may be holding all of us back from becoming responsible caretakers of this earth.

As coauthors of this chapter, we are both concerned about the state of our nation and the future of our world. Western civilization boasts about incredible advances in science and technology—a claim that is undoubtedly true—but can anyone deny that these same technologies have brought many species, including us, to either extinction or the brink of extinction? From different viewpoints, we both address our concern for the way that Western civilization has gone about implementing an imperialist agenda and justifying its actions as “progress.” Phillip addresses Western civilization from an Indigenous perspective as a concerned elder; Glenn explores why the Western perspective of time confuses distance from the natural world for progress. Our common viewpoints and passions will become evident, such as the recognition that all of life is interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent.

Before we begin the dialogue, we will briefly introduce ourselves:

Phillip H. Duran (PHD): My tribal heritage is Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (Tigua Indians). I retired from higher education after 45 years as an administrator, faculty member, researcher, and systems analyst. I am an independent author, lecturer, and consultant. As Vice President of Hamaatsa, a Native non-profit organization in New Mexico, I'm assisting in the establishment of an eco-retreat center and Indigenous learning model whose purpose is to promote spiritual wholeness and healing systems from traditional cultures and to revive Indigenous life-ways and sustainable land stewardship principles for restoring our world. My special interest is comparing Indigenous knowledge with quantum and relativity

theories in matters pertaining to the cosmos. My book, *Bringing Back the Spirit*, tells about my long pilgrimage and conveys an important message to the American conscience.

Glenn Aparicio Parry (GAP): I am of Basque, northern Spanish and Eastern European Jewish roots. I am neither Native American nor an anthropologist. My background is in business, psychology, and transformative learning, but I am interested in all fields and particularly transdisciplinary education. I am currently President of SEED Graduate Institute, whose mission is to bring together Indigenous and Western ways of knowing in dialogue for the purpose of fostering original thought which is increasingly inclusive, interconnected and whole. I have benefited enormously from the wisdom of my Native American colleagues and consider the dialogues that SEED has held for nearly a decade with Indigenous elders and Western scientists to be some of the most meaningful and generative experiences in my life.

The Dialogue

As is our tradition in our dialogues, we will introduce a question to kick-start the dialogue. In the dialogue circle, the moderator would choose the kick-start question and introduce follow-up questions as appropriate, but in this case, the two authors agreed to the questions we would pose after conducting a preliminary dialogue about the chapter. So, here is the first easy question to get the discussion rolling:

“Where has Western civilization gone wrong?”

PHD: I want to include all of humanity in my response, including the citizens of the industrialized world who have long accepted the comforts and conveniences that advancements in science and technology have provided, calling it progress. Progress, however, did not deter us from creating the conditions for widespread unhappiness and despair that are so evident worldwide—a crisis that, in fact, now threatens our survival.

The sharp rise in the cost of gasoline in the spring of 2008 demonstrated how quickly a crisis could emerge, adding to existing anxieties over climate change, malnutrition and hunger, unemployment, and other issues. Governments were caught unprepared and decades behind in developing alternative sources of energy, prompting some legislators in the United States to propose controversial off-shore drilling for oil as a quick fix to the crisis. Why didn't science help avert these

problems in the first place? Or are the causes outside the dominion of science?

Whatever the answer, as citizens of the modern world, we may have already reached a crossroads between two destinies: *suicide* if we continue along the current unsustainable path of endless political debate and rhetoric, expert analyses, and conflict; or *survival* if we choose the right path. In 1977, the Six Nations Indian Confederacy, also known as the Iroquois, or *Haudenosaunee*, delivered an urgent message, addressed to the Western World, at the United Nations meeting in Geneva. Here is an excerpt:

The air is foul, the waters poisoned, the trees dying, the animals are disappearing. We think even the systems of weather are changing. Our ancient teaching warned us that if Man interfered with the Natural Laws, these things would come to be. When the last of the Natural Way of Life is gone, all hope for human survival will be gone with it. (Akwasasne Notes 2005, 90)

The spiritual elders who approved the message emphasized that Native peoples must remain rooted in the Mother Earth and challenge every model, program, and process that the West tries to impose. They also said, “the destruction of the natural world and the natural world peoples³ is the clearest indicator that human beings are in trouble on this planet” (Akwasasne Notes 2005, 83).

Not only the Haudenasaunee but also other tribal nations, specifically the Ojibwe, Hopi, and Kogi, have been issuing warnings for many years, pointing to their prophecies and speaking of two roads, or paths, and the circumstances that caused the right one to be abandoned in the past. The Kogi people say, “Now we will have to work together. Otherwise, the

³ A reference to the world’s tribal peoples, also referred to as Indigenous (Native) peoples. (The singular form, “people,” refers to individuals.) They identify themselves by different terms, depending on where they live: First Nations in Canada, American Indians in the continental United States (or simply “Indians” depending on the context); Native Hawaiians in Hawaii; *Indios* in Latin America. Many Americans also refer to American Indians as Native Americans. To learn more about the world’s Indigenous peoples, visit www.cwis.org. Title 25 of the U.S. Code (which uses the term “Indians”) defines the official relationship between American Indians and the U.S. government.

world will die.”⁴ In the Ojibwe Seven Fires prophecy, it was foretold that a light-skinned people would arrive from the East and be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the wrong road, “the destruction they brought with them will come back to them.” But if they choose the right road, the seventh fire will light the eighth and final fire of peace, love, and brotherhood (Commanda 1991, 35–47). In the cosmologies of ancient peoples, there were also previous worlds (DeLoria 2002); thus, as in other tribal prophecies, this one may point to the beginning of the next world.

Tribal oral histories also record occasions when the people did not remain faithful to the Creator’s original instructions and resorted to empire-building and dreadful violence. Among those stories are known cases of peacemaking and a return to rightful living. But as far as massive and cold-blooded killing and suffering are concerned, nothing the tribes have done can compare to the genocide committed by Europeans against the tribes in the Western hemisphere—an undeniable part of American history that some historians refer to as the *American Holocaust*. Although European diseases caused many of the deaths, they cannot account for an overall attrition rate of at least 95 percent.⁵

Perspective

Thus, my response reflects the above perspective, which is audacious and radically different from anything so far embraced by the world’s leaders. But if we are informed and honest, I believe we would be convinced that there is a “right” road as the only good alternative. In any

⁴ This warning from a spiritual leader of the Indigenous Kogi people, who call themselves the “elder brother,” is addressed to the Western World, whom the Kogi call the “younger brother.” (See <http://tierra-y-vida.blogspot.com/2006/09/kogi-elder-brothers-warning.html>.) Typically, an Indigenous prophecy does not say what will happen, but what will happen if a certain condition is not met. See also the video documentary, “From the Heart of the World: the Elder Brothers Warning,” which was produced at the Kogi’s invitation. The Kogi have lived on Colombia’s Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in South America in isolation from the rest of the world since the arrival of Columbus.

⁵ See, for example, David Stannard’s *American Holocaust*, Russell Thornton’s *American Holocaust and Survival*, and two articles: “The Holocaust in North America” by Simon Ortiz (Jaimes 1992, 3-7) and “The Demography of Native North America” by Stiffarm and Lane (Jaimes 1992, 23-54).

case, ethics and principles of decency and goodwill need to be infused somehow into science, or science itself needs to be transformed to include these inherent qualities. For this to happen, old wisdom must re-emerge and be allowed to enter into our modern consciousness—a wisdom that extends to the earliest roots of causal history to a time when important sustainable principles were abandoned. We must recognize that many of today's Native communities, particularly those in remote regions where they can live off the land, have not abandoned the old road, despite forces constantly working against them. About thirty years ago, the Iroquois affirmed this fact: "Native people can probably lay claim to a tradition that reaches back to at least the end of the Pleistocene, and which, in all probability, goes back much farther than that" (Akwesasne Notes 2005, 83).

The fundamental problem is that we have fallen out of proper relationship with the earth and created an ecological imbalance. Restoring the relationship will necessitate abandoning the current culture of hostility toward nature. It is the land that feeds us every day, and the land depends on the entire system of earth, atmosphere, and sky. The natural and sacred principle that governs all life cannot be violated without consequences. We must accept the reality that an ideology bent on conquering nature and nations was brought to this Continent, zealously imposed, and is now deeply engrained in modern culture. Humanity's survival, I believe, is linked to the knowledge possessed by Indigenous peoples, with whom citizens of the Western World would do well to collaborate.

But who will listen? A proper relationship to nature does not place humans at the center of the universe, as if we had the right to exploit the earth for our own purposes, yet this has been the dominant view since the first European immigrants came to America to impose an alien culture on those already here. They built large cities—hallmarks of Western civilization—and ultimately created an over-dependence on non-local resources. As American Indian tribes saw their ecological and social systems deteriorate, a mostly-immigrant America transformed the landscape into what it is now. But *it's a mistake to view the tribes today as the only victims of history. They are now a source of hope.* While displaying its great ingenuity, Western culture has also revealed its destructive power, affecting everyone; we are all victims of progress. Instead of heeding clear warnings from earth and sky, we have allowed predictable and avoidable crises to occur in disrespect for the very things that sustain life.

Furthermore, Americans are intent on maintaining the same course. For example, the high gasoline prices I've already mentioned had been

predicted at least four years earlier. Michael Ruppert, publisher of From the Wilderness Publications and the author of *Crossing the Rubicon*, who attended meetings of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil, said that Americans could expect to pay \$4 to \$6 per gallon by the summer of 2004, which did occur, albeit four years later. Yet in response to the crisis, most Americans have said, according to a poll, that they would rather drill for oil than protect the environment. There is no quick fix, even with our best science. And science is not determining our course anyway; it's culture and politics. This generation wants to accelerate its destructive behavior, which will surely harm future generations.

What to Do

The climate crisis, one of the consequences of our fallout with nature, is finally being taken seriously but not because earlier warnings were heeded. The Iroquois, the Kogi, the Inuit in Canada's High Arctic (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2002),⁶ as well as Alaska Natives have been reporting warmer temperatures and changes in animal behavior, such as early bird migrations. They and others who have maintained their traditions *know*, based on disciplined observations, why these things that are affecting life on earth are happening.

Preventing the depletion of the earth's resources so that future generations will not suffer is a major challenge; watching television images of so many of our human relatives who are already suffering should motivate us. But could it be that most people do not know or think about what is happening to the planet?

A solution based on the perspective I have described is not impossible. The continuing existence of spiritually based communities that are still rooted in the Mother Earth is sufficient proof that it *is* possible; they are models to be emulated. But instead of worrying about the extent to which the modern world can return to a simple lifestyle, or whether this approach is too idealistic, we must first think about how to create a change in consciousness. I believe that most people would desire to live under the laws of the Great Creator if they heard the prophecies in their entirety and in the proper context.

Americans adhere to written law, and I believe that one practical step among others is the adoption by governments of the Seventh Generation Principle, which many tribes once practiced as part of their oral tradition: *Every decision made today is for the welfare of the seventh generation yet*

⁶ Visit www.iisd.org/casl/projects/inuitobs.htm

unborn. Winona LaDuke (1977), an American Indian environmentalist, economist, and writer, sought to incorporate this principle into the U.S. Constitution by proposing the following amendment:

The right of citizens of the United States to use and enjoy air, water, sunlight and other renewable resources determined by the Congress to be common property shall not be impaired, nor shall such use impair their availability for the use of future generations.⁷

An Inferior Race?

It may seem strange to suggest that the world's politically weakest nations can advise powerful nation-states. The question we must ask, however, is who is right and what are the ultimate consequences of our choices?

I stated earlier my belief that old tribal wisdom must be invited into our consciousness. The significant contributions that Indigenous peoples of the Americas have made to the world in many areas—agriculture, architecture, astronomy, medicine, ecology, engineering, aquaculture, horticulture, and more⁸—should dispel the notion that tribes are “backward” and “primitive.” But what about the consciousness of a nation? It will be a significant challenge for the U.S. government to end its dishonorable posture toward the tribes after a long history of abuse and disregard. Only a concerned and vocal populace can make it happen. The same can be said of other nation-states in relationship to the thousands of unrecognized Indigenous peoples in the world.⁹ The tribes are not waiting for help to arrive; as proud survivors they, as always, will continue the fight for a better life. They have their prophecies, ancient stories and legends, and defining languages, which the United States—still only a child by comparison—lacks.

⁷ <http://www.semcosh.org/7th.htm>

⁸ See, for example, *Encyclopedia of American Indian Contributions to the World*, which contains more than 450 entries.

⁹ According to “Fourth World Nations in the Era of Globalisation: An Introduction to Contemporary theorizing Posed by Indigenous Nations” (<http://www.cwis.org/fwj/41/fworld.html>), one of the research documents posted on the Center for World Indigenous Studies website (www.cwis.org), Fourth World Nations are ancient nations in the world that number at least five thousand, represent a third of the world's population, and are internationally unrecognized.

Many of the battles are now fought in the courts, where unfortunately, cases involving land transfers carry the stigma of an old doctrine that favors the government. In the 1823 federal landmark case, *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, the issue was whether American Indians had the authority to give or sell land to private individuals. The U.S. Supreme Court determined that the U.S. government had acquired fee title to the land based on the longstanding practices of European colonization, and therefore American Indians could sell their land only to the U.S. government. This practice, whose approval by the Court is recorded and still in effect, is to treat Indians "as an inferior race of people, without the privileges of citizens, and under the perpetual protection and pupilage of the government."¹⁰ This rationale was the basis for the creation of the "Doctrine of Discovery" and its application to federal Indian law. In "Footnote 1: A Reminder for Indian Country," Steve Newcomb reminds us that this ancient doctrine is still invoked by the Court; it was specifically cited as recently as 2005 in the case of *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation of New York*.¹¹

Here's some background to the colonial practice mentioned above: In a series of Inter Caetera Bulls issued by popes in 1452, 1455, and 1492, the Church decreed that any Christian nation that discovers land first has the divine right to ownership of that land, whereas the Natives were considered "heathens," "pagans," and "barbarous infidels." According to the decree, the Christian "discoverer" of inhabited lands was required to evangelize the Natives. But if the Natives did not cooperate, such as refusing to trade, rejecting the missionaries' message, or attacking the invaders, armed force was justified. Because the Catholic Church has rejected several recent requests from Indigenous nations to have it nullified, *this decree is still in force*.¹²

¹⁰ This statement is part of the Court's opinion in the *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823), court case. See, for example, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnson_v._M%27Intosh.

¹¹ Visit <http://www.indiancountrytoday.com/archive/28165044.html> to read the archived article in *Indian Country Today*.

¹² See, for example, "Pope Asked to Revoke Papal Bulls" (<http://intercontinentalcry.org/pope-asked-to-revoke-papal-bulls>) and "Indigenous in America just say NO to papal bull" (<http://intercontinentalcry.org/indigenous-in-americas-just-say-no-to-papal-bull>). The Doctrine of Discovery stems from these papal bulls of the 1400s.

One would expect such antiquated perceptions to have disappeared in modern times. But in 1972, when the entire world should have known that “Indians” are human beings, a gang of cowboys lured a tribe of Indians in Colombia to come out of the forest, promising them a feast, and killed sixteen of them, including women and children. They were charged with murder and later acquitted after a lawyer argued successfully: “They did not know it was wrong to kill Indians” (Akwesasne Notes 2005, 126).

Lack of Spiritual Guidance

The unmistakable message conveyed by colonizers is that others don’t matter. They employ several methods to invade, colonize, and oppress weaker peoples who cannot resist: the treatment of human beings as non-humans; suspension or circumvention of current laws; violation of the U.S. Constitution; massacres; exploitation of opportunities that provide unfair advantage; racism; religious repression; persecution. American Indian tribes, for example, have seemingly played no important role in the nation’s history or in contemporary life except first as “savage” enemies¹³ and later as a hindrance to progress. In reality, they shed blood to defend their homelands and way of life against the relentless movement westward by the United States, and they later fought in foreign wars *for* this nation even before they were allowed to vote.

The official nation-to-nation relationship between the United States government and American Indian tribes, defined by Title 25 of the U.S. code, needs to be emphasized. It implies responsibility and can serve as a basis for collaboration during critical times in our nation. Instead, Americans, by and large, remain uninformed and some seem more interested in appropriating tribal religious practices than supporting vital tribal issues.

Indigenous elders remind us that the problems facing Mother Earth and her inhabitants have a spiritual basis. Human beings have the power to choose how to use the things we are given; we may eventually realize that industrialization has provided only a semblance of happiness. The popular term “quality of life” is mostly a materialistic notion with no sacred meaning. Because U.S. society separates the sacred from the secular, most decisions that affect public life and drive scientific research are made without a conscious effort to seek spiritual guidance. A Chippewa elder by

¹³ For example, the Declaration of Independence refers to American Indians as “merciless Indian savages.”

the name of Rising Sun once emphasized this important quality when he said,

The “scientific view” is inadequate to explain...how man is to find and know a road along which he wishes and chooses to make this said progress unless Manitoo by his spirit guides the mind of man, keeping human beings just and generous and hospitable (Deloria 2002, 121–2).

Christianity may claim to provide spiritual guidance. However, although I also believe in the power of Christ, I must point out that the Christianity practiced in the United States is modeled to fit a Western worldview; it separates the sacred from the secular and has essentially de-spiritualized public life. Even U.S. democracy is based on a political ideal. When Americans say they love their country, it is an expression of loyalty to that ideal, which does not protect the land through a loving relationship. Like other Western societies, most Americans perceive a dead universe, not one that is alive with spirit.

What is needed is a shift to an ideology of wholeness. Changing the direction of Western civilization, however, will require finding a spiritual path into the future. Of course, I don’t need to convince you of this.

“Where has Western civilization gone wrong?”

GAP: In answering this question, my colleague has already made such a devastating case for the failings of Western civilization that I am reminded of what Ghandi said when asked: “What do you think of Western civilization?” He simply replied: “That would be a good idea” (Ryan 2006).

In all seriousness, it is possible to approach this question from a number of different standpoints. The question we’ve posed assumes that Western civilization did something wrong; and implied within the question is an unspoken assumption that Western society is responsible for most of the ills in the world today. Many people, particularly (but not only) Westerners, would disagree with the very premise of our question, and argue that Western civilization is the apex of development and in effect has done nothing wrong other than the side effects of progress. Yet, as the late Dan Moonhawk Alford used to say, “there is no such thing as ‘side effects’—just effects.” It is certainly possible to make a cogent argument that rampant industrial pollution, global climate change, and other “effects” are disproportionately attributable to the actions of Western

society. Phillip has already detailed some of the egregious actions of the U.S. government toward Native Americans, and, if he had chosen to do so, could have continued almost indefinitely. The litany of offenses stems from an ideology of conquest fostered during the colonial era that is still ongoing within the Western psyche in ways that have become invisible to us. Yet, at the same time, it may no longer be possible to make a true separation between Western society and non-Western society. Five hundred plus years after contact, there aren't any purely Euro-American societies and precious few Indigenous societies that have not been fundamentally altered by the mixing of cultures. Thus, while the obvious result of contact has been the legacy of colonial conquest mentality, with its taking of Land and usurpation of Culture and religion, there have also been, especially recently, a few emergent positive trends and renewed openness toward non-Western ways of knowing. Western society is unquestionably changing to include these previously unheard voices, and ample evidence of this can be found in changes throughout the culture—in medicine, psychology, philosophy, art, and science (Gebser 1985, Lane 1996). Thus, it is not my intent to cubbyhole or limit the possibility of Western culture when I refer to the failings or challenges of Western culture as a general “we.” Yet, as Bohm himself argued until his death in 1992, there are tacit assumptions that often govern the actions of any society—for these assumptions, rarely noticed and even rarer examined, are at the root of how a given society forms its paradigm(s) about life. In the dialogues, we refer to these assumptions as our “tacit infrastructure” (a phrase from Bohm), and we encourage the participants to drop their tacit infrastructure, or at least their assumptions so that it becomes possible to hear another point of view. This is a task easier said than done, but that is our intent.

Phillip addressed one important assumption of Western society when he pointed out the inherent hostility toward the Earth that exists. I agree that the underlying assumption in U.S. culture—retained in the very grammar of English—maintains a separation and a thinly veiled hostility toward Nature. To Native people, the Earth is a genuine mother, imbued with spirit, that provides ongoing sustenance; but in English, the earth is inanimate. We express our relationship to the earth as one of living peoples toward a dead earth. As the late Dan Moonhawk Alford liked to say, “We have killed Mother Earth to death” (personal communication).

In my opinion, the root of this hostility is in the development of abstract thinking that posits an artificial separation from the natural world. Abstract thinking has served the West well in the development of technology, but it has a hidden shadow side that has spilled over into an

unhealthy relationship with the Earth and with all peoples who do not share the same paradigm as is prevalent in the West. I think Phillip is correct in linking the conquest mentality toward the earth and the conquest mentality toward other peoples. But there is something else that must change if the West is to break its cycle of abuse—and that is found in the Western relationship toward Time.

It's About Time

As counterintuitive as it may seem, I believe it is in the particular way in which *Time* tends to be conceived in the West—and therefore history—that is at the root of the arrogance of colonialism. The way time is conceived in the West is inextricably related with what it means to be human, our relationship with the natural world, and the purpose of knowledge. All of these are different facets of the same Western paradigm that, while enabling us to accomplish some great feats, has brought us to a world in crisis because we have (too often) arrogantly chosen to ignore other ways of knowing and interacting with the natural world that have been steeped in wisdom for millennia.

Long ago, all peoples of the earth depended upon observation of the cycles of nature for our survival. We understood ourselves as human beings, connected to and part of the sacred web of life that has no beginning or end. There is an ongoing tradition of perennial wisdom in the West that has never really lost this knowledge. Yet, in the mainstream culture, by the time the first pilgrims came to the American continent, that knowledge had gone deep into hiding. Specifically, the wisdom of local knowledge became devalued in place of abstract thought and technologies that can be applied *independent of locality*. Abstract thought, unrelated to the local landscape, becomes the precursor of imperialist conquest. The genius of the West—abstract thought and applied technology—is also behind its abuse of power and its inevitable undoing. For, once thinking is removed from the land, the physical reality of day-to-day life based upon the rhythms of nature is replaced by an *abstract concept* of time that is ultimately not sustainable. Western society made a choice to value knowledge that removes itself from the yoke of nature's rhythms rather than aligning and *participating* with the timing of nature as had been done since antiquity. Once the purpose of knowledge is no longer to harmonize and synchronize with nature's cycles but to progress away from nature, time itself becomes an arrow or a line—something outside our experience that we can do nothing about except to accumulate knowledge that is passed on like a baton to the next runner in a relay race. Western society

has a tendency to be always looking forward and attempting to move faster and faster. Thus, while most sensible Westerners will acknowledge they have committed a history of atrocities against Native Americans, they are equally quick to dismiss these events as something that happened before but are no longer present. Yet, to Native people, the atrocities directed at them are still happening—both in the political realm and in the spiritual realm, as they continue to reverberate in the land and in political policy today. This is in part because the West doesn't only think of time as a line; we also think *we are at the front of the parade!* We assume that we have made the most *progress*; that we are the most *modern*. The West never seems to seriously consider the viewpoint that Indigenous peoples are carriers of ancient knowledge—in effect, elders to Western civilization. After all, we once believed like Indigenous peoples, but we moved on—we changed and they didn't—or so we think. The superiority complex of Western society is an affront to Indigenous and other peoples; yet as long as the West believes it is the most modern, it will continue to treat Indigenous and other peoples with disrespect, either subtle or overt.

To Indigenous peoples, time is something very different. Grandfather Leon Secatero, spiritual elder and Head Man of the Canoncito Band of Navajo, refers to time as the fifth element. In other words, to Leon, time is spirit. To me, this is one of the most profound things I have ever heard and I have been thinking about it for many years since he said it at one of the SEED dialogues. If time is the element of spirit, then the way that we think about time largely determines our spiritual life. If time is spirit, then it is something not independent of us, but an ever-present source of nourishment. It is (at least potentially) a wellspring that infuses our life with meaning rather than an objective truth outside of ourselves.

To Indigenous peoples, Time is something similar to what a physicist might call “spacetime” or the “implicate order”; it is a spiritual force that is enfolded in all of life and unfolds in accordance with the natural rhythms and cycles of nature that don't end or begin. Time is closer to what we would call wisdom; it is perennial as opposed to accumulative and linear; it is place-specific and in relationship with humans—not independent of place and neutral. To Indigenous peoples, timing is everything—something sacred and interconnected—not separate and profane.

Where the West Went Wrong

I firmly believe the problems of Western civilization emerge from the way time is thought of in the West. Linear time and linear thinking have

become deeply embedded in Western consciousness such that we tend to believe that a theory five years ago is somehow inferior to a theory of today. In our rush to embrace the new, we dismiss original wisdom and instead blindly follow the latest trend in our unceasing pursuit of the modern. The exclusion of wisdom from economics, science, and technology is something we as a species have (perhaps) gotten away with until now, but only at the expense of imbalance to the ecology and in our relationships with other people on the planet. The idea that all humans can be economically prosperous without consequence is deeply flawed. It is flawed because our economic systems operate under the premise that human greed for control of limited natural resources is normal; once this is accepted, the ability to see the world as one whole is lost and fractional class warfare is inevitable. E. F. Schumacher (1973) understood this well when he said, “nobody is really working for peace unless he is working primarily for the restoration of wisdom” (33)

The Difference Between the Origin and the Beginning

Most Western people equate origin and beginning, but they are really very different. The word “original” has always meant arising from “origin” or “source,” but now it also means the *beginning*—which over time, has come to emphasize more of *new beginnings* and novelty rather than returning to origin. Thus, the root meaning of the word “original” as *source* has been deracinated; we have forgotten that to do something original was once to do something of sacred origin. We have forgotten that origin was once more of a place than a time; we have forgotten how to honor the beauty and completeness of sacred origin, once a staple among oral cultures in rituals of renewal in keeping with ongoing cycles of nature. Instead, modern society has come to view time as linear rather than emergent from natural cycles, and thus has come to emphasize the secondary meaning of origin as “new beginnings” increasingly divorced from its root meaning of source. We (particularly in the West) have conflated “originality” with *creativity* and with ego and accomplishment, for we believe that to be original or creative is to stand out from the crowd, to do something that nobody else does. Our belief in individuality and originality as separated from each other and from nature is the root of why we have become a disjointed, incoherent society of individuals.

All Humans Have Creation Stories

Western anthropology has a long history of studying Indigenous creation stories. Anthropologists study those stories as “myths” or “legends.” Although the power of Indigenous story, ceremony, and song must have been felt in the West on some level (otherwise we wouldn’t have attempted to outlaw them), we have rarely considered these creation stories and ceremonies as a means of remaining in touch with *original instructions* of how to live on this planet in harmony. Yet, that is what they are for Indigenous peoples. In the West, we have our own creation stories whether we are aware of them or not. Devout Christians see the Bible as a story to live by much like Indigenous peoples do in their creation stories, but with some important differences as to the role of humans. I will return to Christianity in a minute, but first, I want to bring attention to a creation story of the West that is rarely understood as such. I am referring to the creation story of science or “The Big Bang.” Of course, we don’t think of the Big Bang theory as a creation story, but that’s really all it is. Since we must have a beginning for everything (and a middle and an end), we insist upon a cosmology of linear development. Our grammar demands we think this way; any other society that differs with us must therefore be *behind us* in their development. The reason I bring it up is that the Big Bang holds at least an equal power over the West as does the Biblical creation story because they both share a common characteristic they are scarcely aware of: *the beginning*. This fact is usually missed because Western science and Christianity believe in vastly different dates of beginning; but the important point of agreement is that they both believe in a beginning. That Western science can find evidence for the universe expanding or any other physical evidence does not really prove there was a beginning to anything, or even if there was, that this was the first or only beginning. Yet, we believe in it without questioning. I really wonder about the sanity of science in postulating “the beginning.” Look around. Everything in nature expands and contracts. The ocean tides go out but then in; the seasons come and go; the trees lose their leaves and then regain them; the berries, fruits, and seeds disappear and then return; death begets life and life begets death. Why should the universe as a whole operate any differently? Why would the universe be expanding only and from one single point in time in which it would never return? That doesn’t make any sense to me.

Why is that important? It is important because we don’t realize how powerful our own creation story is because we are immersed in it like the air we breathe. We can’t imagine there is a different way to think about

time and thus have become slaves to time in a ways we do not know. If we think about it at all, we are still convinced that our way of thinking is the correct and *only way* to think about time. We have forgotten that we used to think of things differently, and that we still can. It is important that we listen to other ways of being in the world with an open mind so that we can recover from this odd detour we have taken in the West. We must realize that the Power of life is in circles, and that to move away from the center isn't progress—only distance.

I believe that the problems of the West have occurred in large part because of the delusional way the West views itself. The West is so in love with itself that it keeps assuming that both its accomplishments *and its problems* are endemic to human nature. Western society has a pronounced tendency to assume that their particular way of doing things is the only way to do things; that “science” is different than any other way of knowing because it is “correct” and other ways of knowing are not. In doing so, the Western world is conveniently ignoring the fact that the root of the word science is from *scientia* meaning simply “to know.” In actuality, Western science is just as culturally determined as any other way of knowing our world. Yet, it is quick to dismiss other ways of knowing as invalid “folk knowledge” but blind to the assumptions that govern its own epistemology. I will now give some examples of what I mean.

Western Tacit Assumptions

The West believes that humans are inherently flawed creatures, so in their most dominant religion, they posit a Creator who becomes flesh in the form of Jesus to die for their sins. They understand on some level that they have broken the covenant and eaten from the tree of knowledge, and no longer live in paradise. They have traded a worldview of sufficiency in the bounty of nature for one of fear and limited “resources.” If that were a self-confined phenomenon, it would be one thing; but the West has projected that belief system upon the entire world! In effect, any other culture that continues to live in harmony with the ecosystemic changes of nature must be primitive or not yet as advanced as the West. They believe that knowledge and language, which is understood by Indigenous peoples as coming from nature, is something unique to humankind. The creation story of the West begins with *knowledge*; in the beginning was the Logos, which originally came from the Greek *lêgein* meaning “to gather,” “recount,” or “tell over,” and is later translated as “the Word” to keep up with the advent of literacy. Literacy reinforces the belief that only humans have language. Literacy provides a written record, and thus reinforces the

belief that only humans are self-reflexive and can learn from their past actions. Korzybski (1933) called this “time-binding.” Literacy reinforces the break between a sensuous, speaking natural world that is all alive and experienced with one’s entire being, and a world that is seen from a distance and thought of in one’s head.

Separation from the Natural World

In the Renaissance, the curious invention of “perspective” in the arts occurred, which precipitated the advent of the Scientific Revolution. Perspective in art reified the worldview of subject/object division. Before perspective, it was believed that energy came from nature; after perspective, human consciousness became thought of as a separated observer of a disenchanted, de-souled world. Religious and scientific beliefs were developed to support this worldview until it became hardened into an all-embracing cultural paradigm that, by definition, includes a certain way of seeing while excluding others. The worldview of subject/object division is necessary for abstract thought, which is a precursor for the practical application of technological invention in the West. The remarkable successes of abstract thinking and technological accomplishment gave positive reinforcement for this way of thinking, and with each chain of positive feedback loops, the behavior of subject/object division became more and more addictive. It is now embedded in our language and culture in so many ways that it is invisible to our conscious minds. It was thus a simple step to see this way of thinking as superior to any other way of thinking—and then to think that everything that followed from this way of thinking was “progress.” Any culture that didn’t agree with this way of thinking was seen as “primitive”—as in arrested development. Yet, unrecognized by Western philosophy was that Indigenous ways of thinking were based on an understanding of the cosmos as an interconnected, dynamic flux and have always been changing in accord with the changes on the land. Indigenous languages embody a worldview of dynamic, moving interconnection and reciprocal relationship between themselves and the natural world (Whorf 1956; Alford n.d.). There isn’t the separation of subject/object inherent in Indo-European languages. Indigenous languages are the languages of change, rich in verbs; entirely different than Indo-European languages which are top-heavy in nouns that artificially stop the world in order to measure it. The idea that Indigenous thought is somehow static or traditional knowledge incapable of change is the most incorrect, misguided and misunderstood idea—and also the most intractable and difficult to change.

The Map is not the Territory

The biggest problem the West has is that it believes its own metaphors as actual fact—which ironically is the same criticism they level against Indigenous peoples to justify their supposed superiority, a criticism which is not only a projection, but may not be true at all. As many astute people have observed, including Korzybski, Whitehead, Barfield, Krishnamurti, and Bohm, a Western worldview is an abstract, removed view that has confused a representation of things for the essence of things—has confused the map for the territory. Indigenous peoples traditionally viewed their homeland as completely sacred, and so when they said Mother Earth, it really isn't a metaphor because the Earth really is their mother that gives birth and sustains life. In the same way, the stars really are their ancestors, for their light that reaches us and the elements that exist everywhere in the cosmos have helped create what is unfolding at this moment.

Final Thoughts: So What, Now What?

This difference in how time is conceived is an important clue to understanding *why* the West has acted in the way it has, why Native America has acted how it has, and why there may be hope for a different future if we really listen to each other. Much of what I have been speaking of here as Western knowledge has begun to be challenged in the past century (within the West) with the advent of relativity and quantum theory. I see the major events of twentieth-century science as a way to rebalance a deficient sense of time and space. Relativity and quantum theory brought together what was previously artificially separated: the observer from the observed, time from space, particle from wave. These new theories disrupted our confidence in linear perspective and linear causality, yet enabled us to rediscover the ancient notion of interconnectedness with nature. That was the basis for bringing together Western and Indigenous science in dialogue.

For the ideas of relativity and quantum theory to really penetrate mainstream culture, we have to change our view of linear time; we have to expose progress for the myth it is and stop racing blindly ahead without looking back and availing ourselves of the wisdom that has always existed. Quantum physicists already understand that linear time is an illusion. What they aren't saying, at least not enough, is that the knowledge they reached (through the means of Western science) was already understood in Native America. Western science came full circle back to Indigenous wisdom when it “discovered” that everything is

interconnected. In doing so, it didn't really have the language to articulate this new frontier, which is really an old frontier. Indigenous languages and worldviews are already constructed with this understanding of wholeness and interconnection. This is why we call our dialogues the Language of Spirit.

Ultimately, Western civilization did what it did because it went on a certain path, and Indigenous civilizations and other societies did what they did because they went on another path. They are all choices of how to be in the world. For myself, I always seek to find a middle ground somewhere between having compassion and understanding for the unique version of civilization that developed in the West and being alarmed at much of what Western civilization has wrought. I am grateful that Western civilization has an opportunity to learn from the wisdom of Indigenous cultures, because I believe that without this wisdom, we will not survive as a species. With all the distrust and abuse that has occurred, I still pray that the kind of relationship we have nurtured in the SEED dialogues can spread into the general culture. For, if there is any hope of changing Western civilization (and the world) for the better, we have to first listen and understand each other not on our terms, but in the language of the other. This is something of what we seek to do in the dialogues.

Now, Phil, I would like to introduce another question to the dialogue for you to answer. You, in particular, have articulated some of the consequences that have occurred as a result of colonization. Yet, we have also both experienced dialogue as a way of bridging some of the schism in Western and Indigenous worldviews. So, my question for you is:

“Can Western and Indigenous knowledge mix? Must they mix in order to save a planet in crisis? “

PHD: First, let me briefly add my perspectives regarding time. I believe that some people in the West are discovering wise principles that have long been practiced by Indigenous peoples but have never been in the West's memory. It was the deviation from these principles that, in my view, marked the beginning of Western culture.

Time as used in modern society is based on the clock, which, in physics, is defined as an *ideal periodic process*. It is inherently linear because the clock idealistically ticks at exactly equal time intervals. In reality, it measures time *interval*—the number of times the clock ticks between events—not absolute time. History consists of these time intervals. Physicists have found no laws to support the “arrow of time,” the popular belief that time flows (at the same pace) from past to present

to future. It probably arose intuitively from seeing events in nature occur in one direction but never in reverse, such as when an egg breaks and “can’t be put back together again,” as in the Humpty Dumpty rhyme—an example of nature’s tendency, known as *entropy*, to move in the direction of increasing disorder. But if we did not experience *change*, would we need to think of time? Time and space do not exist independently; this persistent notion was rendered obsolete with the discovery of relativity.

What is time without the clock? And regarding creation stories, why do we need a beginning? The Creator, creation, stories of emergence, and memory play an important role in traditional tribal life but not history, which is a temporal concept. Human ingenuity and abstraction are also a part of tribal life but Native peoples do not build technologies in order to destroy and conquer. Life as it existed before contact with Europeans, and still exists in certain regions, is patterned according to nature’s cycles without the use of clocks. Consider also that birds build their nests in a circle. These are examples of continuous processes in which “time” takes on a different connotation. One could say, correctly, that nature’s cycles serve as natural clocks. However, a fundamental difference is that life flows according to nature’s rhythms, not under the control of external, linear clocks. It also seems to me that humans were endowed with an internal “clock,” allowing us to synchronize with the creation.

Regarding time as the fifth element, Alaska Natives recognize five basic elements of the universe: earth, air, fire, water, and *spirit*, according to Yupiaq elder and educator Oscar Kawagley (Kawagley and Barnhardt 2007).¹⁴

I certainly agree with you that today’s world crises are largely the result of ignoring other ways of knowing and interacting with the natural world. In fact, in response to your question, I would like to elaborate on the idea of integrating knowledge by describing three main reasons that make it possible: sustainability, compatibility, and completeness.

Sustainability

Indigenous peoples are already modeling the principles of sustainable living, or science. Indigenous knowledge is as old as humanity; it has accumulated over time. While the West has been developing its own science, Indigenous peoples have held onto their traditional knowledge, which is embedded in their way of life and is under constant threat. Although these two systems of knowledge—Western and Indigenous—

¹⁴ www.ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Articles/BarnhardtKawagley/EIP.html

developed independently of each other and are not equivalent, neither are they completely disjoint. In fact, Native scholars have acknowledged a common area of knowledge in which the two systems intersect, and in at least one documented case, have integrated them in efforts to reform education. One example is the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (Kawagley and Barnhardt 1999).¹⁵

Indigenous knowledge did not result from a scientific “revolution” representing rapid “progress” within a short time period; rather, each tribal group acquired their knowledge in the normal flow of living in relationship to their specific environment. The table below, derived from presentations by prominent Native authors and speakers,¹⁶ lists some of the dominant values among Western and Indigenous cultures in relationship to the natural world.

Western:

The Earth belongs to humans
Full dominion over nature
Modeled on linear thinking patterns

Tame the wilderness;
civilize the primitive
Language of inanimate nouns
Accumulate for profit

Indigenous:

Humans belong to the Earth
Preeminence of natural law
Modeled on cyclical behavior
of nature

"Wild" is natural

Language of spirit
Give; take only what is needed

This topic requires careful attention to a perspective that is rarely articulated. Here I can only state, absent a detailed discussion, that a careful examination of the values listed in the left-hand column fully supports a worldview of conquest, which has characterized American history. Of course, many individuals from the Western tradition do not, at least in principle, embrace Western values, and I believe the number is increasing. Indigenous worldviews, on the other hand, are based on respect and reciprocity toward all our relatives, both human and non-human. If you ponder the values listed in the right-hand column and the fact that they formed the basis of life for tribes from different regions of the world living

¹⁵ <http://ankn.uaf.edu/publications/handbook/unitbuilding.html>

¹⁶ These include Winona LaDuke, Don Coyhis (White Bison, Inc.), Gregory Cajete, Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley, and others, who are well known in Indian country.

close to their environments over the span of thousands of years, it can hardly be questioned that they represent *proven principles* of survival and sustainability. Tribal peoples have lived for countless generations under some form of science, though the word “science” may not exist in their languages.

Compatibility and Collaboration

We must ask how Indigenous knowledge can influence the West. I believe that Western societies can embrace the *web of life*, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, because it is a unifying principle based on natural law as well as spirituality (not religion)—a path that can help avert the religious and political conflicts that plague Western societies. It is aligned with a fundamental tenet of the world’s oldest human cultures, those that are still rooted in the Mother Earth, and it represents good science. It allows people from vastly different cultures to engage and synergize so as to produce new technologies that are driven by the will to utilize, preserve, and help restore the fallen relationship between humans and the earth.

Completeness

The West has, without question, developed a powerful science but it is nonetheless a limited system of knowledge because it imposes restrictions on itself in three ways. First, it chooses to study only phenomena that can be objectively observed and measured. Another limitation is the falsifiability of theories, proposed by philosopher Karl Popper: In order to be scientific, a theory (or proposition or hypothesis) must be proposed in such a way that it can theoretically be falsified, even if it is true (Popper 2002). This implies that a single counter-example will disprove a theory so proposed. And third, by relegating all “unscientific” phenomena to religion or philosophy, it lacks spiritual and moral guidance. This kind of science, supported by culture, reinforces the unfortunate dichotomies that are present in our society, one example of which is the perennial science/religion (or evolution/creationism) conflict.

Although the above restrictions ensure empiricism in science, they clearly limit the domain of knowledge by not embracing the totality of human experience, such as spiritual experiences and numerous paranormal phenomena, which the scientific method is not equipped to explain. Scientific knowledge is therefore undeniably incomplete, yet, remarkably,

many people from Western culture seem satisfied with a science that, by design, omits other phenomena. One danger, which is probably a reality, is that the high regard for this form of science without spirit has essentially secularized most of society.

Although spirituality may never be integrated with Western disciplines, it can certainly be a part of an individual researcher's motivation. It is encouraging to see educators and researchers from the Western tradition begin to use holistic approaches in research and to accept the more realistic view of the Earth as a single interacting system, a trend that began with the advent of environmental science, which focuses on human-caused pollution and degradation of the world we inhabit.

There was a time in human history when knowledge was unified, as physicist and author Fritjof Capra points out. Matter and spirit were united; "science" and "religion" did not exist as separate disciplines. He explains that during the fifth century B.C. a major split occurred in Greek thought, after which the study of nature became separate from matters of spirit. After the split, Greek philosophers became occupied with questions about the spiritual world and the human soul, paying little attention to the material world. It was Aristotle who took an interest in the material realm and developed a scheme that became the basis for the Western view of the universe (Capra 1985). Today, we refer to this system of knowledge as Western science. The sterile attitude toward nature that is so prevalent in the West can perhaps be traced to this event in history when spirit became excluded from scientific inquiry. This split seems to have marked the beginning of Western thought, a detour from original concepts about matter, spirit, and time. Non-Western peoples did not participate in it.

Indigenous traditional knowledge is unified and it embraces all knowledge. It is not a specialized discipline but a way of life, lived in deference to the spiritual/physical universe. It involves the whole of experience: spirit, language, culture, practices, customs, and consciousness, with heart and intellect working together. This defined the Indian world prior to European contact.

American Indian reality involves philosophy and practice, forming a coherent view of the world within a system of knowledge that may be referred to as "Indigenous metaphysics." Indigenous cultures are specific to their local environments; they vary from place to place. An Indian relates to the cosmos personally and socially. The late Vine Deloria, Jr. expressed the relationship as follows:

The best description of Indian metaphysics was the realization that the world, and all its possible experiences, constituted a social reality, a fabric

of life in which everything had the possibility of intimate knowing because, ultimately, everything was related (Deloria 2001, 2).

While metaphysics transcends the physical realm in search of ways to explain phenomena, tribal beliefs nonetheless stem mainly from empirical observation. But for the Indian no experience is discounted just because it can't be replicated or analyzed.

Substantial evidence from quantum theory and Einstein's theories of relativity, which I cannot describe here, shows that the cosmos is an undivided whole. Matter, which is equivalent to energy, is the manifestation of quantum processes that are subatomic and invisible. While physics does not compel us to interpret phenomena in a spiritual sense, equally important is the fact that it is just as valid to say that matter is the manifestation of *spirit* as to say that it is the manifestation of *energy*.

The industrial nations of the world need to embrace and collaborate with tribal peoples and support their causes, instead of invading and exploiting their territories. They will not only discover a surprising amount of knowledge but also a spiritual dimension that can guide decisions affecting all of humanity. Otherwise, the argument that government leaders are acting in their nation's interests will eventually backfire. The conventional scientist and the Indigenous culture bearer must collaborate in a science that models the same wholeness found in nature, one that is ethical, moral, and guided. Only this approach can produce real progress.

“Can Western and Indigenous knowledge mix? Must they mix in order to save a planet in crisis? “

GAP: Yes. I believe Western and Indigenous knowledges can and must mix in order to save a planet in crisis. At SEED, we are making a protracted and conscious effort to bring together Western and Indigenous peoples and worldviews in dialogue, and there are profound and lasting shifts in consciousness that seem to happen when this approach is sustained. Yet, there is a danger in minimizing the differences between mainstream Western and Indigenous worldviews that are widely disparate. It is often a penchant of people (particularly Westerners) to systematize in ways that can sometimes oversimplify complex worldviews. I am probably guilty of that myself in my previous response in speaking of Indigenous (and Western) views of time. Such views are enormously complex and truly beyond my understanding.

It is by no means certain that Western and Indigenous worldviews can or even should be reconciled. In the 2006 SEED dialogue, Little Bear asked, “How do we reconcile linear, singular thinking with wholistic thinking?” The question presumed that we *can* reconcile these two types of thinking. At another SEED conference, we asked the question “Can oil and water mix?” as a metaphor for bringing together Western and Indigenous consciousness, and for human relations in general. It was said that oil and water can mix, but only in a way that the identity of each supports the integrity of the difference in the other. Some of the dialogue participants, such as Lee Nichol and Nancy Maryboy, among others, have cautioned against creating a forced synthesis between Western and Indigenous views. They believe a simple juxtaposition or a bringing together of the two views is advisable. While I understand why they are saying this, I hold out hope that an entirely different paradigm is emerging that can be inclusive of Western, Indigenous, and other perspectives. Such an inclusive paradigm could draw deeply from the well of Indigenous wisdom that already exists.

One of the obvious benefits for bringing together Indigenous and Western worldviews is that it is possible to access wisdom in a way that can potentially redirect the priorities of society as a whole. Phillip Sakimoto, an astrophysicist who formerly worked at NASA, made a significant impression at the 2007 SEED dialogue by countering a general approach at the table that was stereotyping Western scientists. Without coming across as sanctimonious, he pointed out that scientists have choices. They have choices where they work and how they work with technology. He also pointed out that there is a difference between public and private science; that publicly, Western scientists may feel pressure to present their work in a way that adheres to the Western “scientific method” but that in their private practice, they often go about their business in no such way, using intuition as much or more than logic. Sakimoto spoke in an open and balanced way that garnered respect from both the Native and Western scientists at the table.

Dialogue holds great promise for shifts in viewpoint, because dialogue/talking circle is a naturally egalitarian process, which is very different from the majority/minority dichotomy in the society at large, where minorities have to fight for “equal air time.” There have been many moments over the years in the dialogues where something that has been said makes a profound shift in my thinking. However, it is not only what is said that makes a shift in my thinking. As we have said many times, the most important thing in dialogue is listening, and sometimes that listening

occurs on a subtle level that is not traceable to the particular words that were said.

It is not always the pleasant memories that are longest lasting. There was a rare encounter in one of our early dialogues where a Western scientist made the tactical mistake of announcing his impatience with hearing the “same old stories” again and again. He said he wasn’t interested in the old stories anymore, and he implored the group to create new stories and a new language together—to really talk to each other in order to prepare for peace. If I give him the benefit of the doubt, his intentions were good; however, what he said was highly insulting to Native people and one participant felt compelled to say that she didn’t feel she had a place at the table anymore and got up and left. This never happened before or since, and it is clearly not what we wish to happen. But before she left, she imparted some profound words.

Thank you for saying what you’ve said. I really am sorry the stories are not what you really want....But the old is not old, the old is now. To re-create is just re-cycling, so I’m a bit confused here of how to start a new future, which I keep hearing about almost every century from the empire or empires that are past. Through all these empires, Indigenous peoples globally have survived, survived with songs that are older than anyone can think, can remember....I keep hearing about the new, the new, and the libraries are full of these new ideas....I have seen I can’t tell you how many new different ideas, new ideas, new technology, all this new, and none of it has worked. And the old songs and the old traditional way of being continues....Now, I have been to these libraries...and I do see all these wonderful solutions to world peace....if we’re going to let go and talk of new ideas, then we have to let go of also the ideas of science that it’s based on, letting go of more than our stories but things that have been formulated in this declining way of living right now.¹⁷

Concluding Remarks from the Authors

We are dealing with some incredibly complex and difficult issues in this short chapter. Yet, we only hope that in some small way our dialogue has modeled something of what must take place if we are to recover a coherent society with well thought out priorities for living on this planet. The truth is that all of us, no matter what culture or background we have, are all here together at this time and can contribute our unique gifts toward

¹⁷ Donna House, transcribed from 2002 SEED Dialogue recording.

sustaining our common survival. As Joseph Rael said in the opening statement of this chapter, we were born into this time for a reason. Wisdom never dies. It comes back when needed. We need to open our ears to the wisdom that has existed on Mother Earth for all eternity but is appropriate for today. We need original thinking that is neither old nor new, but timeless. “The old is not old. The old is now.”

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