

Daily Meditation 10-14-24 Blessed Indigenous Peoples' Day 2024!

Good morning. Happy Indigenous Persons' Day.

And that is the topic of our essay today. And I mentioned four indigenous teachers that I've had in my life. I'd like to share with you, a few of the teachings from a few of them.

Sister Jose Hobday, a Seneca woman, wrote this article, *Seeking a Moist Heart: Native American Ways for Helping the Spirit*. This appears in my book, *Western Spirituality: Historical Roots, Ecumenical Roots*, which was, I think, the third book that I authored back in the mid 1970s. But as is often the case with spirituality, these things, these lessons do not grow old with time. And so she's naming here some of the ways in which a moist heart, a heart with new blood, can come about. And one of the ways, is what she calls Silence that helps the heart.

The American people need to learn from the Native Americans the love of silence. For many non-Indians in this country, it is tolerated, held in awe, suspected, perhaps desired, occasionally cherished, but rarely cultivated. Silence is a part of the traditional way of living for the Native American.

She talks about eating slowly, deliberately so. For conversation is not primary. It also includes waiting, not being impatient: impatient pacing, persistent watch-checking, aggravated comments. All these are usually lacking at Indian gatherings and meetings. People wait in silence for things to begin. In worship services and ceremonials, there are often long silences. But the waiting is part of the action, not divorced from it.

A second way to moisten the heart is that it is good to walk with the dead. And she cites Chief Seattle in 1854, who says,

Our dead can never forget the beautiful world that gave them being. Every part of the soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. The very dust upon which you now stand, responds more lovingly to their footsteps than to yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors. And our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch. Let everyone be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds.

“Perhaps a great sense of the rootlessness of the Western world,” says Sister Jose, “is a separation from the dead. Familiarity with the dead, communion with the dead, can lessen the fear of death. Indians expect a friendly greeting in the other world.”

Another path to a moist heart is the beloved land. The land is a mother. The grass is her hair. She is fertile and generous with her gifts, yielding life and beauty and abundance. The land is vital and alive, and is part of the life of each person. Indians are close to the sources, to earth and water, fire and air, climate and seasons. Many of their spiritual ceremonials move around the seasons. Many take place out of doors. Land is not only the soil. It is the four-legged, the winged creatures, the growing plants and trees. It is the directions which teach courage, earth, warmth, and death, as well as what in life is up, what is down, and what is inside.

The other path to moistening the heart is this: Do not be afraid to seek the vision. Going apart for a vision quest is vision seeking. When one is seeking a vision, the person must be ready to fast and to pray. Fasting is space that is needed. Facing the unknown is part of the quest. It is important to look into the fears, possibly even hidden terrors, that may be lurking in the shadows of our lives. Solitude in a wild place makes the spirit reach out to understand the power the plants and animals. You can become a warrior against the darkness.

What gives us the strength for overcoming evil? Vision questing is spiritual adventure, and it may have many names. It's about giving the spirit space to roam.

Another way to moisten the heart is stories. Life has many stories. Stories are central to the Native American way of understanding and passing on spiritual values. The written language has not been part of the Indian history. It is the oral tradition that keeps the stories alive. This is why storytellers have always been important in communicating Indian values. Stories come with a history, and make a place for the imagination to play. A good story has a way of finding a path into the heart, as well as in the mind. Stories ask for listening and for believing. They say, put aside your doubting for a while. Storytellers pass on. Listeners come and go, but the story takes on a life of its own. It's like a wisdom river flowing through generations, one after another.

Sometimes there are rules for listening to a story. For example, some are called to be in a circle, to be this thing most deeply. And children are invited in the circle, but they're not allowed to fall asleep. If they fall asleep, the story ends, the storyteller leaves. Children must learn to stay awake, to keep very still and not spoil the story for anyone else. Should a child drop off to sleep, the story ends. So there is a peer pressure to keep all the

children awake. Storytellers are not boring, and children have no excuse, therefore, for falling asleep.

So these are some of the ways of the moist heart, that Sister Jose writes about, keeping our hearts moist, keeping our blood red, as she puts it.

In this book, *The Power of Ceremony: Restoring the Sacred in Ourselves, Families and Communities*, Linda Neale, whom I mentioned in the essay, lays out seven principles that she was taught, in a vision, that are intrinsic to ceremony.

First principle: Listen. Learning to listen and listening to learn.

Second principle: Setting intention. In this way, you align with Spirit.

Third principle: Preparing. Tilling the soil for the spiritual seed.

Fourth principle: Structuring. Transforming the mundane into the sacred.

Fifth principle: Creating symbols. Guides to the sacred.

The sixth principle: Praying. Breath and voice, ceremony.

And the seventh principle: Welcoming the unexpected. The trickster element, you can often expect that.

She cites Sun Bear, a Chippewa teacher and author who says, *When humans participate in ceremony, they enter a sacred space. Everything outside of that space shrivels in importance. Time takes on a different dimension. Emotions flow more freely. The bodies of participants become filled with the energy of life. And this energy reaches out and blesses the creation around them. All is made new. Everything becomes sacred.*

And she cites Karl Hammerschlag, a psychiatrist who writes, “The enduring gift from Native Americans to us is the importance of ritual. Ritual and their symbols invest the events in our lives with meaning.”

When we did our Cosmic Mass at the World Parliament in Chicago a year or two ago, afterwards, a woman came up to me, she was in her late 20s. She said, “Every atom of my body feels like it's electric. It's alive.” She said, “We need these rituals so badly. Our generation needs rituals so badly.” And I've always believed that. That's why I committed myself to the Cosmic Mass.

And finally, I referred to Eddie Kneebone, the Aboriginal teacher from Australia, and how he was interviewed at the end of this book on *Tradition, Spirituality and the Dreamtime*. Of course, the Dreamtime is a very rich naming from the Aboriginal tradition. In fact, the first question he was asked, “How would you describe Aboriginal spirituality, the Dreamtime, to someone unfamiliar with it?” Eddie answered,

How can I answer that in a few moments, but I'll try to do my best. Aboriginal spirituality is a belief in the feeling within yourself, that allows you to become a part of the whole environment around you. Not the built environment, but the natural environment. Earth, life and death are all a part of it, and you welcome each. All Aboriginals feel a kinship with the environment. The soul or spirit is common. Only the shape is different, but no less important. Aboriginal spirituality is a belief that the soul or spirit will continue on after our physical form is passed away through death. The spirit will return to the Dreamtime from where it came. It'll carry our memories to the Dreamtime. Eventually, it will return again through birth, either as a human or an animal, or even rocks or trees. The shape is not important, because everything is equal. It shares the same soul or spirit from the Dreamtime.

It's a wonderful interview. And he was asked, "What have you as an Aboriginal found in Creation Spirituality, that you haven't found in other Christian groups?" *I found that there was an opening up there. It felt as if a door had been opened and light was shining through. Felt that something was being offered, that I'd not experienced anywhere else. I realized that I was one who could fill a need. Because of this realization from being here -- (he was part of our week conference, and he taught classes throughout that week) I can now go out and see the world differently. I'm able to accept my place in a better understanding of it.*

"What aspects of Creation Spirituality are you most comfortable with?" *The aspect of being at one with the universe, not just the little piece of land that we stand on, not simply the environment around us, not the country that we live in, but the universe. It is included in our lives. It is a part of us. During the daytime, we can look outside and see trees, birds, rivers, the wind and the clouds and the sunshine. But at night, the other half of our environment is revealed: the universe. Every clear night, we can look up and see millions of stars. That too is part of our lives.*

So these are a few resources that have impacted my life, and I'm happy to share them with you.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.