The Time of the Black Jaguar

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The Message of the Eagle

It is well known that Indigenous people have a close relationship with animal spirits. For those who are not familiar with the deepest aspects of Indigenous cultures, I want to share that in truth we are not interested in worshipping animals. Our close relationship with them comes from recognizing that they are our relatives, that we share the same home, and also from the fact that many of them generously give their flesh to us so we may continue living. But most importantly, the relationship we have is with their spirit, recognizing that in their spirit they carry a sacred gift, a talent, and a "medicine" that is very helpful to us when we are open to receiving it.

In some of the following chapters, I will share experiences that I had in which I was deeply touched and guided by the medicine of some animal spirits like the jaguar, the spider, the snake, and the bear. One that we hold very sacred and that often guides me and my *tioshpaye* – or "extended family" in Lakota – is the Eagle Spirit. Eagle feathers are sometimes used in ceremony not just as decoration or because this is part of our folklore but to bring in the powerful help of the spirit of *Wambli*, the eagle.

We see you Grandfather Eagle. You belong to what is high, and still you have the capacity to descend and bring blessings to us. We thank you for your medicine, your unlimited vision that allows you to guide us when we are walking without being able to see where we are going. We thank you for the gift of direction and the sense of peacefulness that you bring to us from the spirit world.

When praying in this manner – to clarify for those who do not know our ways – in our mind, we are not talking to an animal but to a sacred power that is an aspect of the divine great power.

All creatures of Nature have a sacred gift; each one carries one of the sacred powers of the All. The eagle has the gift of being able to see far away, the owl has the gift of seeing in the dark and in all directions, the hawk has the gift of being brave. What about us? Are we a mistake of Nature or do we also carry a sacred gift? One time, after praying in a ceremony, the Eagle Spirit kindly responded to us. Wanting to help us remember who we are so we may live accordingly, he told us the story of where we come from.

This story, which refers to our first grandfathers, connects us to a time so remote that when talking about it we feel the flavor of a myth, and at the same time has so much to do with what is happening to humanity right now. The best direction for us to take becomes clear when we remember who we are, and I believe this is why Grandfather Eagle gave us this gift.

This is what I remembered that he said:

"In the beginning there was only a point of light. This point of light fused its feminine and masculine energies and exploded, generating seven stars. All at once, these seven stars also fused their masculine and feminine energies and exploded, generating the thirteen creators of this world, who manifested the existence of all beings through their singing and dancing.

"The thirteenth, conducting the dance, was the one who had maintained his duality intact within himself: Eagle Dancer. To his left were six female dancers, and to his right six male dancers. They formed a circle standing on top of the open space of nothingness, each one of them carrying a staff with which they banged on the floor of nothingness calling it to become something. The first thing to appear before them was a tree that was an animal.

"While the dancers of Creation continued with their movements and songs, fruits began to appear in the branches of the tree, which are now all the animal species and all the plants that reside on Earth. One by one they detached from the tree and found their place on the terrestrial space that the dancers had called to solidify itself from nothingness. In this way the world and its inhabitants were created.

"At the end, the dancers who sang the Creation of the world decided to leave a species on Earth that had qualities similar to those of themselves. They created women and men and left them with the mission to care for the rest of Creation through the

power of their heart and their capacity to produce refined vibrations. The first humans were born to be guardians of the memory for the original design of life, guardians of the memory that resides in the song and dance of Creation. Keeping this memory alive in their heart and singing it back to all that lives became their gift, their mission, and the foundation of a beautiful way of life.

"Over time, the giant and powerful humans grew in numbers. Enjoying the fruits of their intelligence and their creative capacities, they kept life in balance and made beautiful things with what the Earth gave them. Some kept living in simple tribal ways while others developed great civilizations that became containers of universal wisdom.

"When they were at the peak of their power, darkness showed up in the souls of many, and for the first time humans knew emotions like jealousy, envy, and greed. Those trying to prove to be the most powerful and beautiful among the rest competed with each other and, in doing so, ended up wounded. A strange kind of pain related to the loss of unity with others, which came together with the loss of oneself, gave birth to fear. Defensive and aggressive behaviors born from fear made them close their hearts.

"Disconnected from the radiant light of their spirits, they kept going further away from their original selves. With time, they forgot their origin and the way Eagle Dancer encouraged them to sing in the beginning, becoming one. Those who had grown a hole in their souls had a craving for

becoming *the one*, ignoring that *the one* is really *the one heart* that is born from cooperating with others. The original brotherhood of the humans got lost. Some nations developed strong ethnic identities that they used for stating that they were not like the rest, forbidding their young ones to marry with an outsider.

"When the humans became divided, the rest of Creation lost the contributions of its caretaker. Their violence made them hurt not only each other but the Earth as well. The balance of life became debilitated to the extent that the Tree of Life became ill and began to die; its withered branches fell upon the Earth generating earthquakes, volcanic explosions and flooding.

"This violent way of life continued until one day when some of them decided to climb to the top of a mountain to cry for help. They were the ones who, listening to the beating of their own frightened hearts, remembered the staffs of the dancers of the Beginning, banging and banging, calling life.

"On the mountain their vision was healed and they remembered themselves, being able to feel their hearts again. When they came down they knew what to do. The dance and songs of the beginning were once again offered to the Tree of Life, which now was a dying tree. Fallen branches were good for making drums that made the heartbeat of the Tree of Life resonate throughout the Earth. The branches were also good for lighting the sacred fire that showed them the spirit of the Tree. In front of this Tree they danced to the rhythm of the drum day and

night, elevating their vibration higher and higher. In alignment with the beginning and the origin of all things, remembering and healing themselves, they were able to re-establish the health and equilibrium of life on Earth."

I consider this story that we received from Grandfather Eagle to be extremely important, because it tells us what we originally are, that we are capable of forgetting, and that we are also capable of remembering.

I find a story like this infinitely more useful than those that lead us to believe that we human beings are originally destructive and competitive killers who need to be educated in order to have a good heart.

Not only has religion told us that there is something inherently wrong with us; modern social sciences have told us this as well. Official books of social sciences repeatedly state that war is what determines the development of civilization. With statements like this one, we have been lead to identify ourselves with our destructive side – and that with which we become identified, we overvalue and empower. This has been happening for many generations, reinforcing this harmful image of ourselves.

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A Sacred Economy

After our grandfathers were "conquered," the authorities decided that we had to go to school in order to become good citizens of their world. When doing this, they didn't take into consideration that we needed time to continue being trained in the loving life arts. Those who destroyed our ancient sacred spaces didn't know that from these temples we watered their food as much as ours. Without really knowing what they were doing, they took the gold we were using for the generation of highly refined energy. It was sad to see gold, which for us was the most visible manifestation of the Sun's radiant generosity, become a matter of greed.

They also took the lands where our grandparents lived and declared that now these lands were owned by them. The survivors of the struggle were offered a slave job in exchange for keeping their lives. Our brothers who came from the other side of the ocean were never satisfied, no matter how much they possessed. Despite all their knowledge and the good tools they brought, they didn't really know how to take care of the Earth in a deep way. To have a reciprocal relationship with Pachamama was not part of what they knew. Seeing that they couldn't keep life in balance, we were determined to continue doing our spiritual work, even when their Church severely punished us for doing so.

Andean people, like most tribal people of this continent, have never stopped calling the Earth "our Mother," not even when people showed us those legal papers that said She belonged to them. There were prohibitions and punishments for those who celebrated the ancient rituals, and yet, throughout the centuries, we managed to continue lighting the sacred fires in so many different corners of the big temple that is Pachamama. How could we live without praying and giving thanks? We have the chance to continue being real human beings as long as we continue nourishing the sources that nourish everyone; this is true even for the children of those who took the land by force. No one is excluded from our prayer. If we excluded anyone, then our prayer would not be real, and we would be ignoring what we learned: that no matter how we act, we are one. This is how tribal economy works – it generates abundance for all those who share this space and this time.

If five hundred years ago our European brothers had developed an open cooperation with us and the land instead of striving to own us and the land, then the world would not be in the situation it is in today. The opportunity was missed at that time, and now it has returned. Elders and visionaries of more than

one tribe are asking that their voices be heard, as well as the voices of Pachamama that speak through them. This is a calling to acknowledge the original wisdom that all humans have, as it is expressed by people of Indigenous cultures and of all ancient lineages still alive on Earth. Wisdom, generosity and compassion should be the main driving forces behind the world's economy, not the business plans of investors who can't see yet that it is impossible to make themselves truly happy without making everybody else happy.

All that is natural works, matching the original designs that are born from the Great Sacred Power's intelligence which keeps the entire universe organized between the forces of chaos and the ones of equilibrium. This power is constantly multiplying lives and giving opportunities for an infinite amount of beings, old and new. Tribal economy is rooted in the simple recognition of that which works in favor of living well and healthy, all together on this planet – "all" meaning not only all humans but all forms of life for whom this Earth and this time are their home.

In my humble opinion, creating natural and ecological products is not enough for changing the destructive ways of the modern economy. In truth, our whole economic system needs to become natural, ecological and sacred. This will be possible when the consequences of all that we do are measured, taking a serious look at their possible effect on the health and well-being of all people, all forms of life, and generations to come. As long as we

perpetuate a system in which profit is number one on the list of priorities, very little can change. Would it be that bad for profit to be number two on the list? The first urgent necessity is that those who have economic and political power, no matter how large or small, regain their freedom to use the heart when making decisions that affect the lives of others.

I don't believe that Indigenous people are in need of a political victory or an ideological one. What we need is to know that all of us, the human race, have regained our direction – and what remains of the Amazon jungle may continue living and reproducing, dolphins and whales may continue inhabiting the ocean full of joy without illnesses caused by the contamination of the waters, polar bears do not lose the precious ice on which they walk, and jaguars do not lose their jungle trees and can continue drinking pure water from the rivers. We want all beings to feel relieved by knowing that we humans have returned to our place as caretakers of life, that we have agreed to stop the destruction, and that we will light our sacred fires to create refined vibrations for the nourishment of all beings.

The Tribal Way

What do our rituals and sacred fires have to do with the economy? Our awareness is activated by our ceremonies, because ceremonies open our heart and give us the chance to remember what is really important. We return to the sacred fire, to our

prayers and celebrations in order to remember how much we love all that is alive and how much we want to live. To put it in the simplest way, we return to our ceremonial spaces in order to feel our heart. Then our motivation and inspiration to do our task as guardians of life is renewed. When we remember our true nature, we feel good and content for being what we are.

Tribal economy, the natural economy of the children of the Earth and the Sun, is born from our natural talents; it is our birthright. This economy requires the sharpening of our intelligence to become capable of balancing the forces of Nature that we affect with our actions. This economy also requires heart, so with generosity and reciprocity we continuously look for the well-being of all life.

The tribal way is based on the generous circulation of goods and a deep caring for the health of the natural sources of life. Therefore, it allows the human economy to be part of the most successful economy ever known: the universal economy. The amount of resources, energy, and blessings that circulate on Earth is so vast that no one could even imagine it. The Sun actually radiates 15,000 times more energy than what is needed in order to meet the demands of our entire planet. The Universe and the Earth are not poor. On the contrary, they are abundance itself. It is we humans who create poverty when we create wealth in an unbalanced, unwise fashion.

Unconditional Love Is an Economic Issue

In the old days, there was no money, and so the lack of money didn't make anybody poor. Now it is different. Economic power is based on money. A long time ago there was the practice of barter that allowed for the possibility of showing reciprocity from the heart. To be grateful and help those who help you was not a condition but something born from the heart. Paying a fee can easily leave the heart aside, as the payment is just about fulfilling an obligation. On the other hand, taking the time to choose something to give to another as an act of reciprocity and gratitude is always an action of the heart.

The way we generate our economy is strongly correlated to the spiritual quality of the world we are creating. Our economy can be generated from the heart, opening the possibility for a culture of the heart to be developed in the world.

Now that there is money and the custom of putting a price on goods and services, some Indigenous people feel forced to be extremely careful. It is very difficult to live in two different worlds at the same time; it makes us feel like we are suffering from multiple personalities – and it is easy to make mistakes. Which is the voice to follow when they are both so loud? One voice says to go with the ruling system and sell what you can, even your traditions and your spiritual gifts, so you can have more money.

Another voice says that some things are not for sale and keeping our integrity has no price.

The ways that we inherited from our Indigenous ancestors are becoming mixed with the rules of marketing. Now, we have to be very careful because the best that we have to share with the world is the way of the heart. We could lose ourselves if we embark on a competition for getting "clients." Our ancestors did not have clients; they had relatives whom they helped unconditionally, trusting that they understood the need for reciprocity. How do we deal with people who do not understand the refined ways of reciprocity? Do we become like them or patiently wait for them to learn? I personally believe that it is our task to give a good example of how strong our will can be when we decide that our love for the people and the Great Sacred Power is unconditional. We need to trust in that which we want others to trust: that the Great Sacred Power will always give us what we need.

Nowadays, people from different cultural and racial backgrounds are approaching our villages and our ceremonies, looking for healing and for a place to remember themselves. The permanent growth of the tourism industry in Peru, for example, is happening in part because of foreigners in search of a mystical experience. In truth, this is good news; however, it gives us a lot of responsibility as it brings us the temptation of using this situation to become less poor, and maybe rich.

I have witnessed so many times to what happens in Indigenous sacred ceremonies. When the Cosmic

Mother feels touched by a sacred fire lit by the humans, she responds with contentment and generosity. Magic happens after the fire is lit and the offerings and petitions have been made. She and her powerful creatures give us rain, good harvests, knowledge, wisdom, inspiration, vision, joy in the heart and healing power.

These gifts are emanations from her sacred womb, generously given to us humans so that through us they may continue their course. They are not meant to be captured by us and become our possessions. They are a gift from Her to us and not really our belongings. How can someone sell what is not theirs? They were given to us so they could go through us and continue on their way, nourishing all that is hungry and healing all that is sick. Therefore, it is delicate for an Indigenous healer, instructor, or ceremonial leader to put a monetary value on these spiritual gifts that are meant to be given to those who need them. These gifts are for the well-being of everybody and not for personal profit or personal greatness. Ceremonies and spiritual powers cannot be put up for sale because no one can be the owner of Spirit, which is love and freedom in its essence. The understanding of the Elders of more than one tribe is that if someone decides to put them up for sale, these spiritual goods would have to lose their essence of love and freedom and become *something else*. This *something else*, even when it may be useful, doesn't have the same power of the original gift given by Spirit.

Based on what I have been able to see with my own eyes, I believe that what today is called *shamanism* has some of the wisdom of the Indigenous peoples, but it also has a lot of the influence of marketing. With all my heart, I wish my brothers and sisters who work for Spirit, serving the people, never suffer from lack in their lives and always have what they need to provide for their families. I just want to share what Spirit has shown me many times: spiritual laws and the laws of marketing do not combine well. When they are combined, the consequence is a degeneration of the powerful rituals that our ancestors passed on to us.

The main requirement so that our rituals work and are preserved in their full integrity is that they be unconditional, with the heart commanding, full of generosity and compassion. When the service is unconditional, the Great Sacred Power shows up. This power is the source of the healing and blessings that the people receive. Then, it is up to the people to decide how they want to show reciprocity, both to the ones who perform the ritual and to the Sacred Powers. In the way of the Lakota people, as in many Indigenous tribes, those who receive favor from a ceremony later sponsor a gratitude ceremony to feed the spirits and the people who worked on their behalf. This they do from their heart, and what they give, large or small, is what they wish to give and not an obligation.

Loving without conditions is an economic issue. All of us, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who have something to offer humanity so the heart comes back

to economic practices should do it with full passion and enthusiasm, because it is something the world really needs. When human societies are truly walking a good path, their spiritual life and their economic system match. When they don't match, then something needs to be checked. Good prayers should be followed by good actions that truly serve the well-being of all life and not just our own or that of our family or of those who belong to our church or to our country. All the practices of unconditional reciprocity and generosity that have been mentioned are both economic and spiritual practices. They have the power to connect and blend our spiritual and material aspects, with our heart shining in the middle.

None of us want more wars. Because I do not want my children and all the other children to experience the atrocities of war in their lifetime, I insist on saying, with the loudest voice, that the unconditional love we so often speak about has to be reflected in the way we run our economy. We all need to be genuinely willing to do our *give away* and participate in the generous circulation of vital energy – or money if you want to see it that way – around the planet and for the well-being of all life. Far from being a romantic idea, this issue, from my point of view, is a matter of life or death for future generations.

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The Time of the Black Jaguar

How many times in the previous centuries has the end of the world arrived for hundreds of Indigenous nations? How many times have our ancestors had to rebirth from the ashes of their destroyed worlds? Those were difficult moments when we learned to pray and to ask for help so that our people might continue living. In such painful situations, we rediscovered the power of our ceremonies and their capacity to connect us to the source of our well-being, peace, understanding and health. No matter how difficult times were for the survivors of a wave of destruction, they always had the opportunity to get their happiness back; they used the power of ceremony, their connection with Spirit, and the simple truth of the heart.

Indigenous peoples, as well as others around the world who saw their homes fall to the ground, know how important it is to ask for help from the sacred powers and how precious it is to know that we are truly being heard. This is why it is so important in

our spiritual work that we keep the channels for our connection with Spirit impeccable. We are doing this right now. At this time, we are praying for Pachamama's healing as well as for our relatives of the wilderness and of the oceans so that they do not lose their homes and their sources of nourishment. We are preparing for what is coming and praying for humanity so that we may wake up and correct our course before it is too late. We are dancing and singing strongly and sending a voice to the universe saying that we want to continue living.

Time to Change

It is time to change, and if we do not change something stronger than us is going to do it for us. We know this from experience. We know this because for thousands of years we have been observing the life-cycles of Pachamama. In Indigenous cultures and all ancient cultures of the Earth, there is the practice of studying the changes of the major cycles of life. This knowledge is important because cycles always have a beginning and an end that intensely affect our lives and our destiny.

Our ancestors observed the sun, the moon and the stars, and watched their cycles and their duration. They had the wisdom to live according to the nature of their time, like someone who dances to the rhythm of music being played. Thousands of years of experience have shown us that if we do not listen to the cosmic rhythm, we trip and fall.

Therefore, based on the wisdom of the ancestral nations, there exists the practice of getting ready to fully receive the blessings of certain cosmic dates – and to also get ready for the arrival of difficult times.

Times like the one we are in now are especially difficult. We are at the end of a long cycle where social and planetary change is born from a cosmic command that we humans have no other choice but to obey. These difficult times are good for us because of how they squeeze and change us. They contain the most valuable opportunities, and they could be dangerous for those who remain asleep and fail to develop a partnership with what has come to change us.

Sages of many Indigenous nations and other ancestral nations of the world say that we are now at the end of a very long cycle: the complete cycle of our present humanity. The Elders also say that the lack of preparation for the change that is coming is alarming.

There are small cycles, like the 500 year cycles; there are bigger cycles that last around 2,000 years; and there are even longer cycles, always containing smaller cycles within them. These longer cycles are the time of a complete *humanity* that lasts almost 26,000 years. According to the memory kept by some Indigenous nations, there were three other *humanities* before ours, so we are part of the *fourth humanity*. Now we are not only at the end of one long cycle of around 26,000 years, but we are also at the end of four of these cycles that amounts to 104,000 years of

human experience. Many endings are happening at the same time, which means that a big change is ready to happen. These 104,000 years are the longest cycle we have ever completed. After this, the *fifth humanity* will begin.

I was very young when I had the fortune of receiving a beautiful teaching from my Elders in Peru, which helped me to understand the cycles of life. They explained that the complete cycle of a *humanity* goes through three movements or "times." First comes the time of creation, next comes the time of conservation, and last is the time of renewal. The time of creation is that magic time that today is talked about in myths, legends and stories. This is the time where the creative capacity of the humans, supported by strong cosmic forces, does not know the impossible. This is the time of designing and building the forms that will become vehicles and containers for the essences that want to be developed according to dreams and purposes that will manifest over thousands of years. This is a time of great power and happiness; the time of a true earthly paradise in which perfect temples and happy tribes of impeccable wisdom are born. It is also a time to receive instructions for taking the steps towards a certain spiritual and human growth. All of this is driven by an immense possibility of expanding consciousness to places never before visited by the human heart and mind. This is a time in which divine beings guide men and women.

After having enjoyed this time of creation for a few thousands years, the time of conservation arrives.

The creative forces begin to diminish, and now darkness is needed in order to temper what was created. In this time, humans are tested and learn how to become stronger by dealing with difficulties. Staying connected to the original creative forces requires effort or an infinite gracefulness. Some people go through this time in a good way – always singing, dancing and laughing – while others have a really hard time dealing with their suffering. Afraid of losing the light of the beginning, some of the humans in this time tend to become more conservative than creative, more educated than spontaneous. Others become rigid and authoritarian, creating rules and keeping traditions that are jealously passed from generation to generation.

Of the three times, the time of conservation is the longest. It always ends when the essence of the beginning has been forgotten, when magic can only be found in certain stories, and young people rebel against formalities that have no freshness or explanation. At the end of the time of conservation, there is also evident corruption by those who have held positions of power for a long time, leading to an epidemic loss of human values. The tension continues to grow until humanity becomes like a bomb ready to explode or a woman ready to give birth. Now the third movement arrives: the time of renewal. This is the shortest and most intense of the three, the time when purification is needed so life may continue.

Understanding the Nature of Our Time

Evidently, today we find ourselves living in the most intense time, the time of renewal. This is the time of a purifying chaos in which lies are seen for what they are, and there is a collective craving for returning to the simplest truth. At this confusing time, old group and ethnic identities become debilitated, and millions of humans lack clarity about their future and their true place in the world. The social pillars and belief systems of the conservative past are broken, and the new pillars are not built yet. There has been a great deal of learning during the struggles of the conservative time, but the time to harvest has not arrived yet. The collective state – which is similar to being in labor – contains pain, fear, and great hopes all mixed up. This time is the most difficult, and it also offers the most opportunities for those who seek their liberation from old mental prisons. This time is somehow dangerous for those who resist, because its energy is fierce and incontestable. It also has the potential to quickly bring back to the light all those who move their will in favor of real changes. Now is when the big change happens, so that a new time of creation may arrive and find hearts that are clean and open to see and support the unfolding of a new world, still unknown.

In times of renewal, it is the Black Jaguar who rules. At this time, it is common for many people to experience major losses in their lives; some are

brutally taken out of their comfort zone. Many see their old life not working anymore or feel afraid when seeing destruction happen in the rest of the world. It all means just one thing: it is time to change.

What Makes Change Possible

I am of the opinion that while talking about change is good, it does not create change. According to what I have seen, real change happens in three different ways. The first way is a gift from Spirit, an enormous blessing that comes to us unexpectedly through a dream, some extraordinary encounter with a being, or an event that awakens our mind. I consider this kind of gift to be like a "loan" from Spirit so that we have the necessary spiritual "capital" to start doing our own work. The second way is the way of the black jaguar, which comes and says "Enough!" and destroys the prisons where we feel safe and comfortable so we wake up. The third way is what in the Andes we call *Munay*, the will of the heart. This path of the heart's will makes us persevere in the development of new habits and constantly seek encounters with the sacred sources that support our awakening. In times of renewal, like the one we are in now, I see that change happens for people from any of these three sources; however, given that we are running out of time, the prevalent way is the fastest: the one of the black jaguar. And even when I believe

this to be true, I was instructed to always keep choosing the path of my heart's will.

To be waiting for blessings to come and change me – or for an attack of the black jaguar to come and "kill" me, my ego, and all my bad habits – leaves me like a leaf at the mercy of the wind; it makes my life swing from blissfulness to pain, over and over again. But the swings are less frequent if I develop my own will. Instead of being at the mercy of the forces that come to wake me up, I prefer to choose to wake up and do my own work. Doing so will not stop the forces that bless or shake us; but I have experienced many times how different it is when these forces arrive and my will is in its place. Instead of feeling totally dependent on what they do to me, I have the opportunity to do my best to dance with them, to feel a partnership and collaboration with them. I feel this is similar to the difference between being a baby and being an adult. When we are babies, we totally depend on our parents to stay alive; when we are adults, we may still have our parents and receive their help and guidance, but in a very different way because now we are responsible for the condition of our own lives.

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The Sense of the Common Good

In a place called El Mallin in Patagonia, Argentina, I had a beautiful experience where I clearly saw the power of humans cooperating with each other. A group of people had requested that we do an *Inipi* or sweatlodge ceremony, and for this, we needed to build a structure. This structure is a little, round, enclosed lodge made from tree branches; inside, around 20 people can sit together, singing sacred songs and praying in the intense steam generated by water poured over heated lava rocks placed in the center. The problem was that we only had an afternoon to do this work, and we had originally planned to use this time to do some other spiritual practices for developing our awareness. The solution to this dilemma suddenly became clear to me. I proposed to the group that the time of building the sweatlodge also be the time for doing our awareness work. I suggested that all of us, around 20 people along with some of their children, go to a beautiful

place near the river and build the lodge together and without talking.

They had never built a sweatlodge before, and some were wondering how the instructions would be given, how we would make decisions and, in general, how we would organize ourselves without talking. In response, I told them that this was the challenge; we would have to pay attention as never before and flow together like in a dance, seeing the lodge form itself while we cooperated with each other. I also encouraged them to always do what they felt needed to be done, without asking and without doubt, and to never think that someone else would do it. Lastly, I recommended that anyone who saw someone in need of help just go and help immediately.

What for me started as an experiment to observe the true capacities of human beings, ended up being one of the most joyful experiences I have ever had. After two or three hours of working together in total silence, the sweatlodge was finished, perfectly built and ready for ceremony. What a beautiful ceremony that was! The energy we had left in the lodge as we worked in harmony was still vibrating and nourishing us while we were praying. It was a life-changing experience for us all to discover our human capacity to cooperate in such a powerful way. In this case, just by agreeing not to talk, the usual interferences were eliminated, and our true nature showed up. We not only accomplished our task, but every single person was feeling open and content.

In tribal and communitarian mentality, there is a "sixth sense" which eliminates the need for an

excessive authority: the sense of the common good. When giving direction becomes extremely necessary in a community, leaders can be firm and strong; the rest of the time, they use their talents to activate among the people a sense of the common good. Different from the cultural mentality of "following the leader," the sense of the common good makes every member of a community responsible for the well-being and health of everyone.

The sense of the common good is simply the real "common sense." It awakes every time an individual has a conflict between what he "likes" or "wants," and what is good for the well-being of the members of his family or his extended family, his community. Sometimes one seems to sacrifice a personal desire for the well-being of everybody else; but this is not really a sacrifice because the well-being of everybody is one's own.

Happiness is not personal. We are really happy when we are open and happy with others and with everything. A sense of oneness with others is developed through this mentality, as if the community is one big person of which we are all a part.

It is a great relief to put the personal ego to rest and to feel like we have a heart much bigger than our own: the collective heart. Contrary to what the personal ego fears, giving ourselves to the well-being of a circle of life does not take away our freedom. What freedom can be more real than being able to love without fear? Only strong individuals have the necessary will to love like this, living in solidarity with others. Communities where strong relation-

ships of solidarity are developed cannot be composed of followers or individuals who are weak in their personal will; only people with a strong core can live in this way.

The Consensus of a Human Community

There is a powerful place where the choice between the path of cooperation and that of competition has to be made: the place of decision making.

In societies where decisions are made by consensus, issues are discussed until everybody agrees on what direction to take. While the voting system promotes separating in bands and aggressive competition for the majority of votes, the way of consensus requires a conscious effort to unite the minds and hearts of the people. In this way, issues are discussed until everyone agrees on the right decision. When a community engages in the discussion of a possible decision, it becomes pregnant and circular – and when it gives birth, the right decision shows its face. The feminine principle is energy in motion that circulates through the people and ends up provoking a natural outcome, one that is healthy and serves the common good.

Those who have the right to participate in decision making by consensus, far from being passive and opinionated spectators of their social reality, are mature individuals who make themselves actively responsible for the condition of their world.

Sometimes, a little bit of conflict before reaching consensus is healthy. A healthy conflict can be like an intense fire that allows its light to illuminate what was in the dark so it can be seen by all. This serves the common good, because there are occasions when the truth only appears after a conflict. As long as the truth is spoken and there are no ego competitions, conflict does not have to end up in verbal or physical violence.

Contrary to the common good is trying to win a conflict for a personal victory – a victory that will only serve our ego. One stops being medicine for the others when trying to become the main light in the center of the circle. Born from conflict or from prayer, the light always comes from the sacred fire of Spirit, and the rest of us sit around it. Wise leaders do not put themselves in the center and take the place of the sacred fire; instead, they can humbly see and express what the fire is saying.

Developing the sense of the common good is extremely useful and necessary in this time of renewal when difficulty and uncertainty about the future threaten to cloud our minds. Many questions can be quickly answered when using this sense. Fear will always lead us to isolate ourselves and stay defensive and confused. The sense of the common good leads us to work with others, staying open to discover the solutions that we can all find together. It is good to practice having little councils with those closest to us, making decisions by consensus. Hopefully, we will all engage in the larger council of the human race at this crucial time, and looking for

the well-being of all, participate in making decisions that support change. Instead of watching the news every night to be told what is going on, we can all make the news together – really good news.

A Humble Way of Being

In Indigenous communities, councils are made up of mature men and women along with wise Elders. To complete a good circle, some "invisible people" are heard as well. On very important occasions, before or after the councils of the humans, very sacred ceremonies are made to pray, ask for help, and consult the sacred spiritual powers.

The sacred powers of Earth and Sky as well as of the ancestors are part of the Indigenous community. As members of our community and part of our life, they are also heard and included as part of the council. Decisions made by consensus also include the voice of the sacred powers. This is why our ceremonies are so important. In them, we activate our vision and our consciousness to feel the presence of the sacred powers and listen to how they respond to the call of our drums, our rattles, and our songs. We don't live alone in this world. We live with many sacred forms of life, and we owe respect to all of them: animals, trees, mountains, and the celestial powers that look down from above to the Earth. In this sense, it is normal to include them in decisions which affect their lives as much as ours. Their spirits show up to take care of us because they recognize

that we are part of the same universal web, that there is a strong interdependence between all of us, and – to put it simply – because they feel for us.

Good relationships among ourselves, with all creatures and with the sacred powers is the foundation of a good way of life. From good relationships, endless and rich possibilities are born. A healthy relationship with the feminine nature, with our mother Pachamama, creates conditions for the endless birthing of abundant sources of good food and water for our people. The expression of our true gratitude and respect for Pachamama comes always before eating our food. We do not put ourselves above the spirit of the Earth or act as if we own Her, because relationships of superiority or inferiority are normally not healthy. It is important for us to always remember that the unity of the circle of life – and not humans – is the greatest power on Earth. We want to respect the natural order and intelligence that moves in the circle preserving the health and balance of all life, including our own. Within this order, each species plays a role that is important for the well-being of everyone else. Every form of life in the wilderness naturally practices the sense of the common good.

Given that life moves in a circle, the natural way energy is meant to circulate is a clue to the health of all. For thousands of years, we have been using our sacred instruments and our songs to nourish the sacred motion of life. The energy we move is offered to all beings and, after circulating, returns to us to bless and nourish us.

The role we humans play in the circle is the one of caretaker, like a gardener. There are many forms of life in the garden, and we have the capacity to take care of their health. We use our creative talent to produce beautiful and nourishing vibrations. We use that within ourselves which is luminous like the Sun to configure our world in ways that are delightful for the spirits watching us. But the gardener is not superior to the plants, animals, and waters he takes care of on this Earth. For without water and plants, there would be no gardener.

It is true that we have great talents that other species do not have. But the purpose of our talents is not that the other forms of life serve us. On the contrary, the inherent purpose of our talents is to serve others.

We have put much attention into observing and getting to know the powers and talents of other forms of life: plants, stones, animals, waters, fires, winds and mountains, as well as the Sun, the Moon and the stars. We recognize that all of them have capacities that we do not have and that, when we really pay attention, they become our teachers and our medicines.

This mentality of not feeling superior over other forms of life creates a natural humility among Indigenous people. Humility is considered a very refined way of being. Lack of humility, arrogance, or personal greatness are seen as very rude behavior in the houses of the Indigenous people. There is no merit in being humble either. Those who are humble are simply aware of the truth and are naturally

serving the common good. They inherently know how to distinguish what is truly great and what is not. Greatness is always associated with the sacred. Because of their awareness of where the real power truly is, they do not dare to put themselves in the center of the world.

We call the unity of the great circle of life *Pachamama* in Runasimi and *Wakan Tanka* in Lakota. In the old days in Europe, it was called the Dragon – a great being made from the unity of many animals, like the snake, the eagle, the lion. This Dragon reminds me of the Sphinx of the Egyptians. In Egypt, Napoleon shot a cannon ball at the nose of the Sphinx as if wanting to stop her from breathing. In Europe, in earlier times, a knight named George was made a saint for killing the Dragon. For Indigenous people, these are very difficult things to understand. We see the death of the Dragon as a deep wound in our Mother's heart and as the end of the magic power that makes life beautiful. When the Dragon was killed, the powerful unity of the spirits of Nature as one large body was broken. The spirit of Nature was weakened, and a few humans could then rule above all beings. Since then, we are seeing a massive exploitation of the fruits of Mother Earth – with no other party having the power to oppose and stop it.

Did Napoleon grow up having a place within a circle? I wonder why Napoleon was the way he was, why he wanted to conquer the world. I wonder how he was treated by his father and his mother. Why did he need to become so important? It is really amazing what he did to prove that he was the strongest. So

many men like him have put themselves in the center, in the place of power for a while. Losing their sense of the common good, they become so destructive for the world and for humankind. I am of the impression that these men, even if they like women, do not really love the feminine. Or perhaps they never had real contact with the feminine so they couldn't even see or recognize the power and beauty of its presence. Perhaps they never received what they needed from the feminine and became angry. I do not really know if they were aware of what they were destroying; but surely if they were, they must have felt the need to get the wild feminine power out of their way to become rulers of the world. The feminine, Pachamama, the Dragon, the Sphinx and women, can also get angry and destructive sometimes to shake us a bit, to wake us up. This feminine anger, when not born from pride or fear, is just a surprising manifestation of a very pure love. It is like the sacred black jaguar who serves as a fierce protector of the common good.

GLOSSARY

Apukuna: Spirits of the Mountains *(Runasimi)*.

Andean People: Inhabitants of the areas in and around the Andes in South America.

Ayni: Reciprocity *(Runasimi)*.

Hanblecheyapi: The ceremony of Crying for a Dream or Vision, also known as a Vision Quest (Lakota).

Haywarikuy: To hand something to someone with tenderness *(Runasimi)*.

Lakota: An Indigenous tribe of North America. Can also refer to the Lakota language.

Munay: Love, wanting, the heart's power, the heart's will *(Runasimi)*.

Pacha: Time, Space, Universe *(Runasimi)*.

Pachamama: Mother Earth, Mother of Time, Mother of the Universe. *(Runasimi)*.

Pachacamaq: The Spirit that animates the world made out of time and space *(Runasimi)*.

Runasimi: The language of the Indigenous people of

the Andes. Runa means people. Simi means language. Also known as Quechua.

Taku Wakan Skan Skan: Something that is Sacred Energy in Permanent Motion *(Lakota)*.

Tiospaye: Extended Family, Community *(Lakota)*.

Tukuy Sonkoy: With all the heart *(Runasimi)*.

Wakan Tanka: The Great Sacred Energy *(Lakota)*.

Waka: A place where the Great Sacred Energy dwells *(Runasimi)*.

Wambli: Eagle *(Lakota)*.

Wopila: Gratitude *(Lakota)*.