

the objects you touch in your house every day and make the world a better place while you're at it! Use bamboo- or wood-handled dish scrubbers and kitchen utensils instead of plastic ones. Invest in a safety razor and stop throwing plastic razors and cartridges into the environment. Begin to do more things by hand rather than using modern-world conveniences. Touch your food to prepare it instead of just dumping it out of a can into a bowl and microwaving it. It's healing to work with your food by making it from fresh ingredients, to touch it, to bless it, and to infuse your love into it. Cooking and cleaning can be therapeutic, meditative, fulfilling, and even fun when done with heartfelt intention.

Naǵíksab'íč'íla Abléza—Psychic Senses

We should never underestimate how much unseen energy affects us. When we share space with sentient beings, we're also sharing their natural energy and this natural and unseen energy plays a role in our healing and self-actualization in ways we may not even realize. Our sacred spaces are vessels for love and we need to feed and nurture that love. We can do this by taking the time to walk the dog or lay with the cat. We can bring real plants into our home instead of fake plastic ones. We can grow our own herbs and medicines.

Not only can our home be a natural incubator in the development of our psychic senses but sharing our lives with sentient beings that we nurture and love helps the negative fall away just by inviting them into our home. When we do many little things with great intention, across a wide range of our senses, they compound and amplify the energy and greatly harmonize our sacred spaces.

HÁU, MITÁKUYE OYÁS'IN

CHAPTER EIGHT

HÓČHOKA—CENTER

THE CENTER OF LIFE

*I salute the light within your eyes where
the whole Universe dwells.
For when you are at that center within you
and I am that place within me,
we shall be one.*

— TĦAŠÚNKE WITKÓ, (CRAZY HORSE)



When Crazy Horse said, "I salute the light within your eyes where the whole Universe dwells," he was describing the moment when two spiritually connected beings recognize each other, as if they've known each other a thousand years, even though they may have just met.

Each of us is but a doorway through which the Creator expresses Itself in our particular physical image at this particular moment in the cosmic workings of the Great Mystery. When we meet each other for the first time, we are either about to repeat a pattern or recurring theme in our life, or

we're about to experience some type of new beginning. The light in our eyes—when we learn to recognize it—tells us the difference between the two.

As we learn to connect with the ways of the medicine wheel and our natural sense of spirituality, we realize that we're not separate from nature—we are nature itself. We're sentient beings that are naturally synchronized with the cycles of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the seasons of the land on which we live. Think about the power of nature. Consider the moon—something of such great influence that it can pull and push the all-powerful oceans of the world in both tide and current. And then consider: How can we believe the moon has no effect on us humans, even though we are mostly created from and composed of water? The fact is the moon greatly affects us, but many people have become too desensitized to feel her affects. Tuning back in to these types of natural energies takes practice.

We are not separate from the Hoop and we are not at the top of the food chain, as humans like to think, but we are part of the whole. When we say Mitákuye Oyás'īŋ, or "We are all related," it doesn't mean that only we two-legged humans are related, but that we are *all* related—every single sentient being on the matrix of Grandmother Earth. When we brush a single strand of the spider's web, that energy is transmitted and felt on every strand and connection point throughout the rest of the web. The indigenous tribes of the Amazon have a popular fable that teaches about the web of life, in which a butterfly flapping its wings in the jungle stirs the wind that creates many more small wind currents that divide and multiply and ultimately manifest into a hurricane on the other side of the world a few days later. The teaching is that *all* is connected, and our daily actions are inextricably braided into *everything else* in ways that we may never fully comprehend in the present moment.

The power structures of our modern-day society distract us from our internal understanding that we are part of that *all*. On every part of the earth, we can clearly see the devastation and horror humans inflict on other sentient beings and the destruction we bring to Grandmother Earth. It's not just the bad medicine humans bring to the world, but it's also the disrespect and abuse we inflict on ourselves mentally, physically, and spiritually with the toxic waste that we allow into our hearts, minds, and bodies. For those of us that walk the Red Road, it's part of our life's work to dismantle these harmful power structures in all the ways that we're able to.

There will come a time in each of our lives when we have to be honest with ourselves and decide if we're going to live in alignment with Grandmother Earth or live for a corporate system. This may be the most important decision we face in this lifetime—because finding our Center and living a life of genuine meaning and beauty is what's at stake.

ELEMENTAL ENERGY: WIČHÓNI—LIFE

The Four Sacred Elements, the Seven Sacred Directions, and the Seven Indigenous Values are all concepts to help us think indigenously and understand the natural order of the earth and the fundamentals of indigenous spirituality. It's in the Center of our being where we take these concepts and implement them into the experience of our daily lives.

Too often, however, we become so absorbed in the memories of our past and so fearful of the what-if scenarios of the future that we miss the experience of the present moment. When we learn to drop into the experience of the present moment, we become aware and available to the power and teachings of the sacred directions that are moving through us.

When we talk about the Center, we're referring to our life. Our life is the space through which the other six sacred directions are moving at all times. The innermost point of the Center is where we experience the present moment—and it's within the present moment that we're consciously co-creating our life as part of the wild divine. This space is also where we step away from our work-eat-disengage-sleep cycle and go deeper into the understanding of life and our role as a human being on this earth.

INDIGENOUS VIRTUES: WÓWIYUŠKIN, THEŃÍLA, HAHÁYELA NA WÓKSAPE—JOY, LOVE, HARMONY, AND WISDOM

Joy, love, harmony, and wisdom are the four primal expressions of our spirit through which we discover who and what we truly are and the teachings of how we are meant to engage life. The four sacred directions of East, South, West, and North each carry one of these four expressions as they move through our Center.

Wiyóhinyanpata—East: Haháyela—Harmony

We're starting the teachings of the four expressions with harmony because, when the other expressions of joy, love, and wisdom are in balance in our lives, their harmony becomes the bedrock of our spiritual intelligence.

Harmony is the combined state of tranquility, unity, and readiness between our thoughts, well-being, spirituality, and physiology. Harmony is not the pursuit of perfection in these areas of our life but the awareness and development of our internal relationship with them, as well as how we extend that spirit energy out into the world. Remember, we are meant to

be human—we are not meant to be perfect. Harmony is not a state of perfection but a state of awareness of balance.

We are often our own biggest obstacle in experiencing genuine harmony in our life. As perfectly imperfect humans, we easily get stuck thinking in terms of who or what we need to control, or who or what we need to exploit for our personal gain, or how we want others to see us. Observing is the secret to allowing oneself the ability of letting go of these unhelpful and hollow desires. The Sacred Hoop of Life already has natural cycles that we can observe just by intentionally connecting with nature and doing so helps us merge into the powerful rhythm of life itself.

Allowing is just getting out of our own way and allowing the rhythm of life to help co-create our life with us. The Creator is more clever and creative than we could ever be and allowing the Creator to just go forth and create will bring results and experiences we never could have imagined or created by pursuing them with our human desire for control, personal gain, or ego satisfaction.

Itókagata—South: Wóksape—Wisdom

What is wisdom and where does it come from? Simply put, wisdom is experience in action. The old ones tell us that teachings from the spirit world travel on the wind and the wind is born in the South. That is why the sacred direction of the South carries the spiritual teachings of wisdom.

Listen to the Earth. It speaks.

Listen to the Fire. It speaks.

Listen to the Wind. It speaks.

Listen to the Water. It speaks.

Listen to your Heart. It knows.

— The Ancestors

Geronimo, a Chiricahua Apache leader and medicine man, said that wisdom and peace begin when we start living the life the Creator intended for us. But we don't have to live in a cave for 30 years contemplating our navel to achieve some sort of enlightened wisdom. And the unabridged, esoteric wisdom of the universe certainly won't come flooding into our consciousness after one sweat lodge ceremony. Wisdom begins to unfold as we accumulate the experiences of living our life in alignment with the natural laws of the universe and how and when we put those teachings from our life into motion. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, everything we experience in our life is both offering us what we're here to learn in this life (what we need) and preparing us for what we're praying for in our life (what we want).

If you recall, the sacred element of the South is air. When air expresses itself, it comes as the unseen force of wind. Wind is associated with wisdom, because the nature of wind is to bring messages, initiate change, animate life, and bring clarity by removing obstacles and clearing obstructions. When the obstacles and obstructions are removed from our mind, we can understand things better because of that clarity. It's this type of clarity that cultivates wisdom.

Walking with Wisdom

Wisdom is the part of spiritual intelligence that allows us to see people and situations with clarity, as well as a natural understanding of the relationship between seemingly unrelated things.

Being wise has a lot to do with knowing what *not* to do, like knowing when to pause instead of taking action, or knowing when to praise instead of being critical, or knowing when to listen instead of talking. For example, when you communicate with an indigenous elder, you may notice

they speak deliberately and may take long pauses between thoughts before they reply to your question. They are allowing their information to be heard and thought through and for the intention of the message to blossom in its own space. In most conversations in modern society, many of us aren't truly listening as much as we're just waiting for the slightest pause so we can jump in and speak to fill the void.

We must be mindful that a pause is not an invitation to give feedback if feedback was not asked for. Understanding the pause in a conversation is the difference between talking "at" someone and talking "with" someone. Practice pausing before you speak. When you do speak, evaluate if what you have to contribute is even relevant and beneficial to what's already been said or what is already understood. The old ones teach us that our tongue is connected to our heart—the lesson being for us to learn to speak through our heart rather than letting whatever comes into our brain go running straight out of our mouth. Our breath carries power—our words can provide clarity, our words can heal, and our words can destroy—so let's not be reckless or wasteful with the wisdom of our words.

To be wise is to be relational. When it's time to offer advice, don't give direct advice, but instead offer something relational so that those listening can arrive at their own conclusions. Many times, the person you're advising already knows what to do; they're just looking for permission to do it. We cannot give them that permission—that permission must come from within themselves, through free will. Wisdom has a lot to do with guiding people to their own conclusion rather than leading them to *your* answer.

Always look to your heart to stay truthful.

—DOUG GOOD FEATHER

Wiyóhpeyata—West: Wówiyuškín—Joy

Joy is what elevates us into the best that life has to offer. Life is not meant to be easy—in fact, at times, life is meant to be difficult and the very act of living and engaging in life comes with trials and tribulations that can pull us into the undercurrent of an ocean. But joy is what pulls us out of that depression or suffering and prevents us from getting swept out to sea.

We can start by finding a buoyant sense of joy. With a buoy in an ocean, it doesn't matter if the sea is calm or raging, because the buoy's natural resting state is unsinkable. When we stop struggling, it's our natural state to float—both in the ocean and in life. A buoyant sense of joy may even save your life at those times when everything feels impossible.

Living a Joyful Life

Finding what gives us joy may be as simple as making a list of the things that make us happy, another list of what we do most every day, and then comparing the two lists and adjusting accordingly to bring in more of what gives joy and let go of what doesn't. We can also integrate joy into even the most mundane activities in our daily life. Finding joy is simple and it grows easier with practice.

The underlying causes for our loss of joy—whether that loss is temporary or long-term—are often our judgments and expectations about people or situations. A judgment refers to what we perceive to be true and an expectation refers to our assumption of future results. When we prejudge something, we don't allow for the possibilities of anything else and we block out any potential to find the interesting idiosyncrasies or serendipity the universe has to offer us. There is joy in the mystery of the unknown. And when we have preset expectations of how something needs to be, most often we are just setting ourselves up for disappointment.

How can we predict what's going to happen in the future? Disappointment robs us of joy, so releasing our expectations of how something needs to be or happen allows us to appreciate how the Creator offers up what we honestly need and not necessarily what we merely want.

In most situations, our buoyant sense of joy won't be at risk when we do things without the expectation of anything in return. The biggest thief of joy in our modern world is the epidemic of comparing ourselves to others, not only because it robs us of our joy but also because we have absolutely no idea what someone else's personal journey is all about. When we desire the lives of others, we may energetically bring all *their* hard-learned lessons over into our lives, without getting any of the benefits that we think they have. As the saying goes, be careful what you wish for.

The thing is, it's extremely likely that you have far more joy in your life than you realize, but you just can't get to it because it's been covered up by traumas that you've experienced. Healing these energetic traumas may reveal the joy that's been there all along. It's important to remember that all in-depth healing cannot be truly complete until it's reconciled through spiritual connection. Otherwise the trauma will continue to come up again and again and may even show up in the physical world as a disease or psychiatric disorder. Healing comes from within us. Medicine people, doctors, and traditional practitioners can only help us redirect and focus our energy to facilitate our health and healing and a buoyant sense of joy is the fulcrum for deep spiritual healing.

Wazíyata—North: Thehíla—Love

What is love but the life force for all of life? Let's consider how dimly or brightly love shines through us in our personal life. What does it mean when we talk about love shining through

us? It means that love is one of the four primal spiritual expressions of our spirit, because it's an accumulation of how we radiate joy, how we embody wisdom, and how we foster harmony in the various ways we show up in life. Love is expressed in how we show our love to others, how we let love in from others, and how we understand and spiritually process and work with love as it matures and evolves.

The person you will spend the most time with in your life is *you*, and that's why it's of utmost importance that you learn to care for, accept, and love yourself first and foremost. It's much more difficult than it sounds, because we're often our own worst critic, bully, and abuser. If we want to be loved—both by ourselves and others—we must make ourselves lovable. And we become lovable when we heal the parts of ourselves that we're ashamed of or that we think are embarrassing or unlovable.

Essentially, we must learn to love the many things about ourselves that we think are unlovable, including our emotional weaknesses and physical imperfections, our torrid and shameful past, and our lack of self-confidence and self-worth. When we haven't healed and we don't love ourselves first, we abuse those we are supposed to protect, betraying that which we are supposed to defend. We damage those we are supposed to love and we hurt those we are supposed to heal. Hurt people inadvertently hurt people. Through the indigenous ways of natural spirituality and walking the Red Road, we can find our way back to love through the healing of our invisible moral injuries and trauma.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: THE REFLECTION

This practice requires you to be vulnerable. It asks you to find all the love for yourself that you can.

Stand naked in front of a mirror and look. Really see yourself. Notice what your mind does—you probably look at all that is negative about yourself, all that you don't like. This is what the modern world has conditioned us to think about ourselves—we are trained to only see the worst, to judge and to compete.

What is that you see? Are you judging yourself for your weight, wrinkles, imperfect skin, or scars? Allow yourself to see all that you judge and view it as honestly as you can.

Now force yourself to move to the positive. This won't be easy at first, as it is not what we are trained to do. Again, we have been conditioned to look only at the negative in ourselves. There are so many positives and they far outnumber the negatives, but they can be hard to see.

Perhaps you can look at your hands and notice that they are your father's hands—capable hands.

Perhaps you can look at your wrinkles, wrinkles that you dislike, but can remember a beloved photograph of a grandmother whose wrinkles you love because of how beautifully worn she is in life. Can you find the evidence of your own wisdom and good life? Can you find smile lines and appreciate that a face without smile lines would in fact be tragic?

Perhaps you can look at your strong legs and feet and remember how dependable they are, how far they have carried you and will continue to carry you.

Eventually, this practice will make you feel empowered more than vulnerable. You will truly see yourself, in the negative and the positive. You will find love for all of yourself.

Hau, Mitákuye Oyás'ín