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Credo Mutwa: Keynote Address



**Living Lakes Conference, October 2, 1999
US Forest Service Mono Lake Visitor's Center, Lee Vining,
California, USA**

**Back to Lake St.
Lucia**

The following text was transcribed from an audio recording. The speech includes Zulu words for people, places, and things that are spelled phonetically in italics.

As we say in our country *Bash-on-e-payg* which is a completely asexual way to address those who we respect. I stand before you as a man who is stunned and shaken by what he has seen, what he has heard, and what he has experienced. First of all, did you know, you who live around Lake Mono, that your lake joins together Africa and the Native American people? Did you know that the most amazing word I heard when I arrived here was the word *Inyo*? Which is said to mean the dwelling place of the creator, or rather, the place of creation. Did you know that that word occurs in Africa as a reference to the sacred organ of a mother? Did you know that the word Mono is a name for something delicious and nutritious that you eat? Perhaps one day if I return this way I shall share more of these things with you.



Shumenitch-y means "the one," and no matter who we are, no matter in which part of the world we dwell, we are one. We are one with each other. We are one with the earth. We are one with the moon, the sun. We are one with the stars. Please, please remember that. It is useless to conserve entities such as water and trees if you have severed yourself away from those entities. You cannot conserve something which you do not feel within you. You cannot conserve something which is not part of you.

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When I was initiated for the first time in 1937 into the mysteries and knowledge of Mother Africa I was ordered by my teacher, who was my aunt, to go outside and fill a small clay pot with water. Then she said to me, "Look into the water--what do you see?" I was caught in a trap because an initiate is not supposed to have an ego. An initiate is not supposed to refer to himself. I said, "Aunt, I see a person in this water." She said, "Who is that person?" I did not dare say it was me. I said, "It is the person I know who is the son of my mother, the only son." And she said, "Yes, you are in this water, and the water is in you. **Until** you know that, that you and the water are one, you must not even drink ~~the~~ water, you must not even think about it, because you have cut yourself off from it."

Respected ones, no matter where you go in Africa you will find African people referring to water by a very interesting name indeed. In the language of the Swahili people in Kenya, water is called *ma-gee*. In the language of my people the Zulu's, water is called *amanze*. And in the language of the *Besutu* people of *Esutu* in a small kingdom in South Africa, water is called *mazte*. And all of these words mean one thing no matter where you go: the fluid of creation, the thing that did something, the thing that caused

something to be.

In olden days Africans used to risk their lives in protecting water. In olden days our people used to severely punish anyone they caught urinating into a stream or a river. There are some ants which you find in my country, they are called *ma-the-bella* ants. When you hold one in your hands it looks as fat as myself, and it fights like nobody's business. And if you were caught, wise guy, making water into the water, one of those babies was taken, and made to bite you on your *thing*, closing the hole for several hours, and it will be the biggest lesson you will ever learn.

Africans used to say that no punishment is too severe for somebody who murders nature. There are trees in South Africa and in other parts of Africa which you are not allowed to cut. And sometimes this thing is carried to such extreme ends even now, that one day, I, Credo Mutwa, was brought before a chief and accused of murder. It was a really serious charge, and after a trial which lasted for three days. I was acquitted because I pleaded that I was guilty but insane. The holy person whom I had murdered had interfered with my dinner, which in the Credo Mutwa book is a mortal crime. Now, who was the holy person? It was a fly, an ordinary housefly. In South Africa, there is a tribe called the *Bahune-bamata* who even today will charge you with murder if they find you hurting a fly.

Honorable ones, our people believe many strange things regarding water. They believe that water is a living entity. That water has got a mind, that it remembers. The reason why a lake forms where it is, the reason why a river flows through where it flows, is not because it happens to be the right place for water to flow--no! It is because in that place where the river flows, there is an energy, an invisible spirit that moves like a snake, under the ground through the fine sand and which moves in the direction opposite to the one down which the river flows. If this great fire snake, as we call it, this unseen energy, if it dies, then the river dies too. We are told that lakes form where they form because there is an agreement between the water and certain types of rock.

In the language of my people, the Zulus, a lake is called *icibi*. Now this word *icibi* gave birth to the verb *icibella* which means, "to patch." If there is a hole in a cloth and you put a patch on it, that patch is called *icibi*, and you, *icibella*. Now why do we say that a lake is a repairer? We believe that a lake controls the life forces of all living things around it. A lake controls the life forces of every bird, every fish, every tiny creature that you find in water, and it also controls and stimulates the life forces of bigger animals up to and including human beings that they are of the same. And each time there is an illness in the land, our kings used to prevail upon the tribespeople to go closer to lakes, to get into that field. There is an invisible field of power all around a lake. If you take off your clothes and moisten your skin slightly and walk into that field, you will feel a tingling. That is what we call the spirit of the water, the *icibi*, the repairer of life.

Our people believe that there is a music, a sort of communication that goes on between streams, and rivers, and lakes. If you destroy a lake, say about 20 miles away from another one, this music is cut off and the lake that you have destroyed dies, and so does another lake which has been in communication with it.

Ladies and gentleman, many, many times in Africa, when I started fighting to

preserve what I thought was sacred, I was often snarled at, ridiculed, and even beaten up as a superstitious heathen. But I was only preaching what my grandfathers had preached. I was only preaching what our mothers had taught us: that water is sacred. It is the life-blood of the great mother. It should not be dammed or in any way interfered with because if that is done, the water dies.

Our people say that water is the first thing that happens to you. It is also the thing that happens to you throughout your life. And it will be the last thing that will happen to you. When you are born, you are bathed, and thus, you are married to the spirit of water. When you leave, you take-in water and you become one with it. You drink, you wash, and you clean your clothes. You drink in the spirit of water whether you like it or not, or whether you believe in the spirit or not. Our people also believe that when you die, you are bathed with water, not to clean you up, because who needs to clean something that has kicked the bucket in the first place? But you do need to be bathed so you can quickly go into the village of judgment and advance to reincarnation. We say that a dead body which has not been bathed will not be able to reincarnate.

Our people further say that water has got ears. We have a proverb amongst my people that says: he who makes love to another man's wife on the bank of a river must be careful not to utter loud and stupid noises. Because why? Because water. If there is a fierce emotion near a stream, that stream somehow records it. And guess what will happen? What you did near the river will be heard by every person in the surrounding villages one day. And you will wonder how they got to hear about it.

In South Africa there is a range of mountains called the *Devaterbergh* Mountains. There are many springs and fountains of water, and there were many more in the past. And when you come to the water mountains and you sit alone in total solitude, you are going to hear clearly the sounds of ancient battles which were fought in that area. You will hear horses screaming, sabers clashing, and you will hear warriors shouting and people dying in pain. You will hear that because water has got ears.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is much I could share with you. But our people say that he who talks too much makes people tired. I am not here to make you tired. I am here to tell you this: let us by all means conserve the beautiful song of nature. Let us regard each lake and each river. Not simply as an interesting stretch of water across whose expanse spoiled millionaires will zip around in their powerboats--no! Let us feel the water, let us hear the water, and let us be one with the water.

Accompanying me is my ritual wife, Nobella. Nobella is capable of finding water. Nobella is what is called a dowser. In Europe she would be honored and here in the United States, but because of rapid death of the black culture in South Africa a person like Nobella stands great chance of being burned to death as a witch. She can find water, and I sometimes play tricks upon her. I will sometimes lead her blindfolded to a place where I know there is a great sewage pipe that passes under the ground and she will find this, and very angrily, and she is a *Mantebella* with a very fiery temper. She will be furious that the water under her feet is dead and is not sinking to her breasts. Now what does that mean? It means that sewage water is water that is now so overloaded with dead matter that it has died itself. It has died as a living entity. It only lives as a liquid entity that is taking this rubbish to wherever it is

going to go.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please, let us bring back the earth. Let us accept one thing which our mothers accepted and our grandfathers knew: that the earth is a living entity where everything is joined to everything else in eternal marriage. And if you destroy something in one part of the world you create a chain of destruction that destroys things somewhere else.

Let me tell you two last things please. One, it is this, that I am told by the great storytellers of our tribes, that fresh water is not native to our earth. That at one time, many thousands of years ago a terrible star, or the kind called *Mu-sho-sho-no-no*, the star with a very long tail, descended very close upon our skies. It came so close that the earth turned upside down and what had become the sky became down, and what was the heavens became up. The whole world was turned upside down. The sun rose in the south and set in the north. Then came drops of burning black stuff, like molten tar, which burned every living thing on earth that could not escape. After that came a terrible deluge of water accompanied by winds so great that they blew whole mountaintops away. And after that came huge chunks of ice bigger than any mountain and the whole world was covered with ice for many generations. After that the surviving people saw an amazing sight. They saw rivers and streams of water that they could drink, and they saw that some of the fishes that escaped from the sea were now living in these rivers. That is the great story of our forefathers. And we are told that this thing is going to happen again very soon. Because the great star, which is the lava of our sun, is going to return on the day of the year of the red bull, which is the year 2012.

Well, I'm glad I won't be there to see the fun. My wish is this: that there may be ~~~ blessing over everything that you have done, over everything that you are going to do. May whatever power there is beyond the stars strengthen you efforts, because each lake that you bring back to life is a whole world saved.

Thank you.

Credo Mutwa is a Zulu spiritual leader.