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INOWENDIWIN  
PEACE AND HONOR GOING BACK AND FORTH  
BETWEEN US

*Pamela Colorado*

The American Indian Movement is a nation of people concerned with life and continuity. The goal and the philosophical basis of this American Indian world view is Pimadaziwin which means life lived in the Good Way, or life lived to its fullest. This connotes responsibility, joy, and liveliness; it is an objective as well as subjective state of being.

This Spirit Way has neither beginning nor end and is often referred to as "the Life of the People". Successive generations are born and choose to enter the Good Way or not. In the past most Indian people lived this way as a matter of fact. And the very tangible and beautiful outcome of those choices can be seen in the Black Hills of Dakota, the Red Earth heartland Oklahoma, and in the wooded glens of New England called Wampanoag.

While there are many other such places in America today, the people who live with and care for these places are uniformly a people no one believes in. Yet this was not always so. Images of free Redmen and a Promised Land called many people to our shores. These strangers, experiencing the results of Pimadaziwin, called this land a virgin wilderness; which, by definition, necessitated taming through civilization and progress.

Under the rubric of civilization/progress, it is estimated that nearly twenty-four million Indian people were exterminated. And this figure does not include the population decimated by disease before Columbus. For example, Jennings demonstrates, in his book *The Invasion of America*, that

nearly half of the Indian population of the Eastern Seaboard died prior to 1492 as a result of earlier contacts, i.e. the Vikings.

These early European "contacts" escalated into full scale invasion. And the Good Way of Life, became distorted. Pushed, marched, tortured, and exterminated, Indians began to resist. But this resistance did not come easily to a people committed to life. Ward Churchill, Native American activist and writer, notes:

There is no historical record of any war between the tribes and the U.S. which was initiated by the Indians. Each known outbreak of open warfare was predicated upon documentable invasion of defined (or definable) Indian lands by U.S. citizenry. The defensive nature of Indian participation in these wars is thus clear. Logically, they should thus be termed, "settlers' wars" or, more accurately, "wars of conquest".

Thinking, now, of Indian resistance, a picture of the Little Bighorn comes to mind. I visited this place in 1981. It was summer and it was dawn. My husband and I scarcely spoke, and when we did, it was in whispers. Feeling what it was, to walk on earth, where our Holy Men and Spirit Warriors put aside peace and decided to kill—for the People, for the children, for the natural world. And I recall thinking how painful it must have been for those people to make such a choice. For the Old Ones know that it takes four generations to heal from a time of killing.

Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Gall, and Dull Knife, I was stepping in their footsteps. The green rolling hill sloped down to the river. A gentle wind blew early morning mist on our faces. In the stillness were the voices. And the voices spoke of love for the land, for the People.

Dots of white stone markers, nudged their way up the hill, mutely testifying to the valor of the man called Custer, and all those who fell beside him that day of Red Paint Dust. . . . The Old People tell us of the Medicine that day—how everyone knew it was going to be a time of death, that no one of the White skinned would breathe after sunset. They speak of the preparation, of the purifying Sweatbaths, of the Holy Men offering the Sacred Pipe, and they speak of how it was done. And the Great Silence afterwards, which stands today, next to a marble marker dedicated to the members of the cavalry . . . standing there, on lands of Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapahoe. They do not speak of Sand Creek or Washita Bend.

Now two tourists arrive and question the military bungling that led to this slaughter—of the Seventh Cavalry. And they ask us, isn't it nice that there is this monument? I am silent now too, for another reason.

Thinking of another time. In the snow, without food, old people,

women, and children --warriors gone --follow the aged Chief Big Foot to safety. They are Ghost Dancers. They are dancing their death but they do not know it. Facing starvation they see in their prayer, songs, and dance a Way to live, to stay vital to keep the Way of the People. And they understand that the holocaust visited upon the Land and People will end in a whirlwind of destruction for the invaders.

But they do not know they are dancing on land that holds gold. And they do not know that the cavalry is eager to kill and even now encircles the few ragged tepees on this bitter cold December night in 1890. And they do not know they will awaken to screaming, bloody massacre. They do not know these things. But if they did know, they would still dance, pray, and sing. For this is the Great Law of Peace.

And despite this horror, something good happened. You see, the Ghost Dance had opened up channels of friendship among diverse tribes and had taught the lesson of regional unity. Now, survivors continued to travel, and they began to pray in the manner of the Southwest tribes through the Peyote Way. By 1910, Peyote had spread north through the Dakotas and west.

The strength in this movement did not go unnoticed. Christian reformists, who were the policy makers for Indian affairs from 1900 to 1940, met at their annual conference at Lake Mohonk, New York. The theme of the 1914 meeting was the "menace of Peyote". The reformists labeled Peyote "a dangerous drug" and referred to its practitioners as "mescal fiends." For nearly twenty years, these policy makers attempted to outlaw the Peyote Way. While they did not succeed in creating law to that effect, they did inspire the Bureau of Indian Affairs to administratively outlaw the practice of traditional healing ways. In 1921, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs issued Circular 1665 to all Indian agents. This law not only affected Peyote, but all the remaining spiritual and healing ways, especially the Sun Dance, which is a renewal ceremony and involves giving things away as a part of the sacrifice. The Circular read:

The Sun Dances and all other similar dances and so called religious ceremonies are considered Indian Offenses . . . and corrective penalties are provided. I regard such restrictions as applicable to any dance which involves . . . the reckless giving away of property . . . in all such instances the regulations should be enforced.

In this manner, the massacre of traditional spiritual ways, became institutionalized. But even this did not succeed for the movement went underground; it did not die.

And in 1973, the American Indian Movement, which was five years

old, organized the first four-day Sun Dance since 1927, at the Lakota Sioux, Rosebud reservation, in South Dakota. Six months later, a group of Sioux women requested a meeting with AIM and traditional chiefs. AIM leader Dennis Banks recalls:

These women only asked that the spirit, the fighting spirit return so that there would be no reason for Indian people to drink themselves to death, so that there'd be no reason for Indian youngsters to be slashing their wrists.

One by one the Chiefs stood up and their names will come before you . . . Names like Fools Crow and Crow Dog, names like Catches . . . names like Kills Enemy, Iron Cloud . . . We'd reached a point in history where we could not tolerate that kind of abuse any longer where these women, these parents, these mothers who couldn't tolerate the mistreatment that goes on, on the reservations any longer, they could not see another Indian youngster die. They could not see another Indian man meet death, whether he was in Chicago or Nebraska or Buffalo Gap.

Then one of the Chiefs said: Go ahead and do it, go to Wounded Knee. You can't get in the BIA office and the tribal office, so take your brothers from the American Indian Movement and go to Wounded Knee and make your stand there . . .

And we did stand. For 71 days, Indians held the FBI, the U.S. Army, and hundreds of local and state "law" officials at bay. And when the occupation ended, the entire world and all of Indian country knew that the People were standing again. And the People continued to stand, for the organizing and sustaining force of AIM was "spirit, land, and people". The regionalism of the Ghost Dance had now transformed into an international unity of Peyote, Sweatlodge, and Pipe. By 1981 there were 19 Sun Dances held! Sweatlodges stood in Massachusetts and Alaska. Naturally the spiritual unity meant political strength.

In 1974 AIM founded the International Indian Treaty Council which carried Indian issues to the United Nations and to other nations struggling under foreign domination and corruption. In 1976 AIM "caravanned" to the Custer battlefield, in Montana, to protest the bicentennial celebration honoring Custer. The list of AIM achievements is long, nearly as long as the list of legal actions against the members of AIM. By 1981 nearly all AIM leaders had been imprisoned and the FBI admitted openly that it had used terrorist tactics against the American Indian Movement (Durham, "Columbus Day"). Russell Means, perhaps the best known Indian activist, would be beaten, stabbed, and shot.

It was generally assumed that AIM was dead; that the Indian movement was over. But, fortunately, this was only a superficial observation. For the

movement has merely transformed again to the spiritual basis from which it derives. And Indians, hundreds, from North, Central, and South America, are now meeting every year on sacred lands of the Black Hills and Oklahoma. Spiritual elders such as Philip Deere, experienced in international politics as well as healing ways, speak to the People about critical issues like colonialism and survival of humanity through Pimadaziwin.

Old people speaking this way teach us the power that we have. They remind us that our 391 treaties with the U.S. government put us in a strong position in the international community—because treaties are the universal language of coexistence in the world today. But they also caution us, for we should not expect a country like the U.S. "to recoil in shame at the exposure of its misdeeds".

But we do have another power, a power that comes with the understanding that we are related to the Great Mystery through the waters, fire, wind, and sacred Mother Earth. And through this knowledge, we are free, knowing that life renews when we live in balance. This is the single most liberating aspect of our traditional beliefs. Life renews. There is no scarcity, except that created by artificial boundaries drawn by those who seek profit. And we understand that balance means that all the Great Directions, Black, Yellow, Red, White, and Self, must work in spirit with the Earth. The Indian has always trusted this and lived it.

In fact, tribes were just beginning to form alliances and confederacies, to insure international peace, when the invasion began. For a while growth stopped but we have begun again, many times. Today, the ceremonial elements may be reduced to a bucket of water, a small stack of wood for a fire, our own breath, and a circle of earth fifty feet in diameter. That is all the natural resources a Peyote ceremony requires. But even this is viewed as too much by our enemies.\*

Looking at America, we see rivers burning, people suffering, and the desecration of all living beings. We are told that this is progress, and some of us believe it. We seem committed to a course of destruction. And while we may flirt with death and brush up against it, we cannot commit to it and survive. This is the lesson of the Indian and of the land. . . . Life. We must respect it; for the children and the relations.

\*The average annual income of an American Indian is less than \$2,000; approximately 30% of all Indian women have been sterilized; three of five Indian children die in the first year after birth; 70% of all Indian people suffer from malnutrition; Indian people are imprisoned ten times more often than whites; and Indian people have lost 45,000 acres of land every year of this century . . .

You who have assembled here are already committed to the survival of humanity, the Earth and children, or you would not be here. Let us hope, in the Old Way natural to this land, that we can put our minds together and become "one way of thinking—Pimadaziwin". It is vital, life-giving and joyful; it is natural.

Like the Tibee gee quay, song of the Anishnabeq:

nin a gamoo an  
inowendiwin  
inowendiwin  
nin mino inowendiwin

"Warrior spirits related with peace and honor going back and forth between us."

It is good to be here, to give voice to the People, the children, the land . . . and the spirit of CRAZY HORSE.

Metakuyeayasi