

Mitakuye Oyasin!

We are all related.

I've noticed an increasing interest in Native American cultures, languages, and especially spirituality today, which has translated into full classes wherever I am teaching courses on these subjects.



I, myself, am Choctaw Indian. I am grateful to be Native American, but it wasn't always something one wanted to state publicly in the past. A fresh new spirit abounds today, and many American Indians are tracing their roots, learning about their cultures, and getting acquainted with their indigenous languages. A recent local powwow is a good illustration of this return to one's Native cultural roots. As I looked around the crowded hall, I saw rows of Native youth eager to participate. When the drumming and singing began, the dancing commenced and our spirits soared into the sky.

Many Native American spiritual leaders over the centuries foretold this phenomenon we are privileged to see today. White Buffalo Calf Woman, a Lakota, spoke of a great spiritual renewal. Other American Indian prophets expressed a dream that Indian and non-Indian would someday come together in unity. Deganawidah, Peacemaker of the Iroquois Confederacy, long ago promised he would "return," and other great messengers left similar prophecies that a great teacher would come, as the Navajos believe, from the East.

Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, did come from the East and Native Americans are increasingly joining his faith, because they believe Bahá'u'lláh has fulfilled these prophecies. The Hopi, for example, foresaw a time when the Indian and the Euro-American would join together in unity. Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed this, saying, "Ye are the flowers of one garden and the leaves of one tree."

Unity in diversity characterizes Native communities today. We Indians enjoy comparing notes on how languages, music, and customs differ in some cases, and appear similar in others. Bahá'í teachings encourage unity in diversity – the coming together of all peoples. However, Bahá'u'lláh never said Native Americans must give up their cultures or languages. Kevin Locke, Lakota musician, dancer and educator says that "the Bahá'í Faith actually enhances" his Native beliefs and culture.

The resurging interest in Native spirituality is not without controversy, and Native American Bahá'ís are quick to point out their beliefs are not being compromised or misused by the Bahá'ís. On the contrary, in 1916 Bahá'u'lláh's son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, gave a most splendid prophecy about a glorious future for Native Americans.

I believe I am lucky to be Bahá'í – it gives me answers to today's problems, it requires religion and science agree and if they don't, science without spirituality can become materialism and religion without science can become superstition. American Indians have always had "science" – our's just developed differently than European sciences. Natives see science as spiritual.

The Bahá'í prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for believers to use do not preclude using prayers of other religions, including those of indigenous religions in American Indian languages. Bahá'ís believe in the same God as Native Americans, Christians, Jews, Muslims and the other world religions. We have beautiful prayers for unity, marriage, the morning time and the evening hour, for assistance, and for children. And when life on life's terms gets difficult, I look up a powerful prayer Bahá'u'lláh revealed to be read in times of tests and difficulties: "Armed with the power of Thy Name, nothing can ever hurt me, and with Thy love in my heart, all the world's afflictions can in no wise alarm me."

Many folks ask about the sad things that happened to Indians over the last 600 years. Those things really did happen, so let us learn from those experiences and teach our children to look at all peoples as members of the same family, enjoying the beauty of all our cultures and languages. The Bahá'í Faith gives me this hope.

What the Bahá'ís express about unity can also be summed up in probably the most famous American Indian expression one can find around the country today: "Mitakuye Oyasin." Though it is Lakota, this phrase is used by Indians from many different backgrounds; it means "all my relations" or "all my relatives." In other words, we are all related in one family. So we must put hatred and prejudice behind us because one must not hurt one's own relatives. Mitakuye Oyasin!

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