



Sharing Indigenous Knowledge on Survival in Times of Climate Change Turtle Lodge, November 18, 2016

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Boozhoo! Dinaymaginatook (We are all related)!

Elders and Knowledge Holders – The Peacemakers of our Motherland

As the Elders and Knowledge Holders of our Nations, our role and responsibility is to be the Peacemakers of our motherland. We have a duty and responsibility to be Peacemakers not only for our Nations but for everyone who has arrived in our homeland.

Our role is to encourage that we find a peaceful way through any situation or challenge we face. We are ready to be engaged as active participants in discussions that deal with the issues, including the issue of climate change. As Knowledge Holders we are positioned as a non-partisan voice.

Peace is our paramount concern, for all of us – for the child, the family, and our harmonious relationship with the land. Peace will be the only way we will survive as humanity.

In order to reach peace we must not overstep spiritual and natural laws, which should act as the foundation to any initiative or action that we take. Our participation as Elders is defined by the Great Binding Law – a law that is inclusive to all.

We believe our Indigenous knowledge can help us collectively design, implement and change the narrative to establish a real national identity, inclusive to the contribution of the gifts of all people, including the contribution of the First Peoples.

Our participation is critical because we know how to defuse the confrontation. We have thousands of years of knowledge and experience of how to live in peace and in balance with nature.

We want to move towards finding a peaceful unified approach to current challenges, and show a way for all of us to become a culture of stewardship – a culture of gratitude, generosity, warmth and positivity.

We acknowledge the current reality that we are living in today is in need of change. We are living in an environment of chaos and uncertainty. We can continue to bury our heads in the sand, but the fury of nature will prevail. We cannot continue to walk the current path that threatens the future for all of us. Climate change should be viewed as an opportunity for us to reflect on ourselves and to make the necessary changes that will ensure a future for our children.

There will be ongoing efforts by those attempting to deal with the many issues we face politically, and relying on science and technology, hoping we can make wiser decisions.

We encourage you to add our voices to the mix, and consider inviting us to set a foundation based on the Great Binding Law of *Ogichi Tibakonegaywin*, in the efforts to bringing real change in our motherland.

The environment that we have brought you into reflects a way of life that was left by our ancestors, which ensured their survival, in a truly sustainable way. The ancestors carried out the duties and responsibilities to be stewards of the land. This is what we want to share from our oral histories and our ceremonies – our knowledge and understanding that can help move us forward to a much more sustainable Earth.

The Great Binding Law – A Foundation of Values

As you heard today when the Great Binding Law was shared, our knowledge is there to provide a foundation of values. As Elders and Knowledge Keepers, we share our knowledge to provide a direction, guidance, and understanding of spiritual and natural laws and principles that are always in effect, to best empower you to make the right choices.

We are not here to tell you what those choices should be. We don't advise you to build a pipeline or not build a pipeline, although obviously we are not in support of choices that harm the Earth and our future. We are not here to tell you to engage in activism or protest, as we advise against engaging in confrontations that could escalate to violence. In the end, these are your choices to make. We support you in making choices that lead to peace, and that support life for all our children, choices that are about taking care of the Earth, and connecting with the Earth to seek your

answers. We encourage you to engage in activities and initiatives that are based on values found in the Great Binding Law.

Once you make a choice, and act on your decision, there will always be consequences of your action, consequences that you and your children will be directly confronted with. That is natural law. Our best advice is to follow the Great Binding Law, which we have laid out for you today.

The Totem Pole you see out front was gifted to us earlier this year by the Lummi Nation, after travelling across Turtle Island. It stopped in many communities including Standing Rock to receive the stories of the people. Our Elders recognized that the Totem Pole had come to us to help raise the Great Binding Law, and to help unite us in our efforts to be true guardians of the Earth.

Of major concern is the element of water. Water is life. Water is the passage to life. Simply, when we pollute the water, we pollute ourselves. Without water there is no life.

It is the women of our nations who have been given the duty and responsibility of taking care of this element of life. It is through their words of gratitude that the spirit of the water is kept fully alive with the spirit of life.

The values found in the Great Binding Law can guide us to find a way through all our challenges as a society.

Across the country the youth continue to take their lives, and depression is increasing at an alarming rate in all young people in Canada. This should become a primary concern for all of us. We need to engage our youth beginning with restoring their identity. The issues that the youth face will not only be dealt with using simply western type approaches. It will require the help of the Knowledge Holders who will take a holistic approach. We can create a new economy and new opportunities for the nation based on stewardship, where youth can take the lead, mentored by the Knowledge Holders.

The Earth rewards us with abundance when we follow her Natural Laws

In order to receive the abundance that nature really has to offer us, not only in terms of the physical gifts she has for us but also the spiritual gifts of guidance, teachings and love, we need to make an alliance with her. That alliance is achieved when we follow her laws and values.

The Earth has her own laws, that we are all bound by, reflected in the Great Binding Law and the Seven Sacred Teachings.

The way we protect the Earth is by following her laws. In her expression of her

natural laws, the Earth will respond to our following the Seven Teachings by showering us with her abundance.

Natural law dictates that whatever decisions we make will always result in negative or positive results. If we act negatively, that has dire consequences. If we are able to act positively, we are rewarded, and that ensures survival. When we follow her laws, the Earth takes notice, and she herself begins to teach and guide us toward a life filled with peace, unity and abundance.

We fully realize our current structures and systems will not change overnight. What is important to consider is that whether we choose to change or not, nature holds the final card to protect herself.

What is needed is to form an alliance – a reciprocal relationship with the Earth, supporting her natural laws.

It is our opinion that the real change needed around climate change is a change of the heart. We must become stewards of our hearts before we can become stewards of the Earth. We need to make a full commitment from the heart. Only a commitment of the heart can open our eyes to the role that nature plays in our lives, ensuring our survival.

Technological development has advanced without a foundation of values, which has brought a great degree of dehumanization and alienation to our present reality.

No matter how we may want to deal with the issue of climate change we cannot escape the fact that it is our own behaviour, our loss of values, and the separation we live as the human family that have resulted in the damaging of the Earth.

Together we are confronted to find a vision that is filled with hope and offers a direction we can embark on together. We have an opportunity to set a completely new narrative, which can offer a new national identity for this country.

As the Knowledge Holders we have laid out the spirit of a vision that has a strong foundation with values that could help us to find a new way to become real stewards of the land, and to formulate a community around what could be a new shared identity for our country.

This new national identity is not just about having a collective passion for natural environments and a concern for their conservation and stewardship. At its core it is about having a passion for and living the natural laws and values of peace carried by the land herself.

We have been focused on dealing with the symptoms of issues, rather than going to the root of the problems we face. The root of our problems today as human beings is that we have lost our sense of identity. We have lost our relationship with spirit

and our connection to our purpose. We have lost our relationship within our own families. We have lost our relationship with the land. Our well-being and our true identity is connected to the well-being of our lands and waters. Having lost our identity, we have lost our connection to the natural and spiritual laws that govern all of us, whether we realize it or not.

Education and awareness are the key to change. We must resist confrontation and find ways to be open towards each other and put efforts into working together.

We must become activists of love and kindness, beginning with each other.

No matter where we find ourselves as we participate in our society, we all have a duty and responsibility to help take care of the land. We all have a role that we can play in ensuring the Earth is given full respect.

In order for this to happen, respect has to begin within ourselves. We would never be able to show respect for anyone, for the land, until we begin having respect for ourselves. This is what we need to teach our children.

One of the past Prime Ministers of Canada asked me, "What can we do to change the view that the average Canadian has of Indigenous people?" I answered him, "Simply, send us your children, and we will teach them."

We must set up environments for all children to be educated with the values that can sustain us as human beings. The children should be allowed to be taught the Seven Teachings that can act as the foundation of their education.

The Seven Sacred Teachings

In order to access the power of the land we must reflect and live the Seven Teachings.

It is the Seven Teachings that can act as the foundation of a way of life that we create and build that is sustainable, that reflects respect for all life. This of course will require a change of heart. It will require a commitment of the heart.

These are our Seven Sacred Teachings:

Respect – Represented by the **Buffalo** – is to continue to be a giving and sharing people, first and foremost, following the example of the buffalo who gave its whole being for the life of the people.

Love – Represented by the **Eagle** – is what our country should be all about, loving the Great Spirit, loving Mide-Aki, the land, loving ourselves in the way we were created, loving each other in the highest way, as the eagle brings vision that is

always based on love. Through the unconditional love of the Great Spirit, we have all been given the ability to have vision.

Courage – Represented by the **Bear** – is to live from the heart, having the courage to be ourselves. It takes courage to do the right thing for the sake of the children, the way a mother bear would die before seeing harm come to her cub.

Honesty – Represented by the **Sabé** or Bigfoot – is being honest with ourselves, speaking and living our truth from the heart. Honesty is refusing to lie or engage in gossip about others; simply, being true to our words.

Wisdom – Represented by the **Beaver** – is about using the gift the Great Spirit gave each of us to serve, and build a strong family, community and Nation. Our gifts do not belong to us as individuals, but belong to all the people, to serve the good of the Nation. If the beaver did not use his gift to build, his teeth would grow long and he would die. Similarly if we do not use our gifts in a good way for the benefit of the Earth and the brothers and sisters of our nations, we too would die spiritually, and experience the negative consequences of natural law.

Humility – Represented by the **Wolf** – is about showing gratitude for life received, never overstepping the natural laws of Mother Earth. Humility is to know that not one of us is ever above or below our fellow human beings. We are all equal in the eyes of the Great Spirit.

There is so much we could learn from the wolf. The teaching of humility was especially important for the leaders of the Nation.

The teaching of **Truth** is represented by the **Turtle**. Our motherland is referred to as Turtle Island. To know and live truth is to walk and live all the Seven Teachings. Living truth means living in the spirit of Respect, Love, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility and Truth. It is when we live truth that we will know peace and find the truth of our humanity. The turtle lives in the water and on the land to remind the world of the truth we should be living by.

The animals that represent the teachings ensure that we have a close relationship with the land – an alliance with nature. The animal world are our brothers. They live with each other in harmony, and bring us teachings, as do the trees. It is the land that gives meaning to our lives. It gives us our language, our teachings, our life.

This is the beginning our Elders have identified, as we have expressed it in the Great Binding Law.

In order for positive change to happen it will require knowledge and an awareness that can help us understand our duties and responsibilities of being true stewards of the land, guided by the Seven Teachings.

When you are able to walk the spirit of the teachings is when you become truly free, it is then that you receive the full support of the universe, and the forces of the Earth itself. There is no struggle, but rather catching the natural rhythm of the Earth. You become a part of the land. You become the land.

Indigenous-Led Guardianship and Stewardship Initiatives

We must develop a system and a collective identity that emphasizes humankind as stewards of the Earth, and stewards of the values of the Earth.

We should seriously consider committing ourselves to initiatives that are founded on guardianship and environmental restoration – on true stewardship – and allowing the First Peoples to take full leadership in defining the process of sharing the knowledge and understanding of what stewardship really means.

We should also consider initiatives that offer greater opportunity for youth to be engaged in stewardship training initiatives, especially youth who are in need of extra support, guidance and direction. Connecting with the land can benefit all youth by bringing healing, strengthening identity and building confidence. It can instil core values and natural laws of survival that will empower them in whatever path they take in life. It will ensure the path they take is sustainable and one that is filled with peace.

There are initiatives at the present moment that have been suggested that should be supported. The Indigenous Guardianship Network proposed by the Indigenous Leadership Initiative is one example. It builds on approximately 30 existing Guardians programs already running in Indigenous communities across Canada. Guardians are employed as the “eyes on the ground” in Indigenous territories. They monitor ecological health, maintain cultural sites, protect sensitive areas and species, interpret culture and heritage aspects for visitors, contribute to land and marine planning and management, and promote intergenerational sharing of Indigenous knowledge. They also help build capacity to engage with other land users, industrial development proponents, and governments, thus strengthening decision making at all levels. Most importantly, Guardian programs connect Indigenous Youth with Elders, the land, our languages and cultures.

Another initiative has been proposed by Giigewigamig First Nation Health Authority, a collective of four of our local First Nation communities working together. The initiative is to create an on-the-land camp at the site of one of our most beautiful lakes here in Manitoba, to help us re-establish our true identity as a people, and to help our young people who remain lost in the system that has created so many social problems. The communities are working hard to make this happen. With added partnerships and resources this camp could be used as a model of land-based education, healing, suicide prevention, addictions treatment and an alternative to incarceration.

As a People we are rich in initiatives that can help restore and nurture the human spirit, to engage in the activism of the heart that is needed to change course.

We can lead the movement toward an alliance with the Earth. It will take courage, imagination and skill to be a steward of the land.

It is the spirit itself that provides the incentive to change from within. We receive spiritual guidance when we live the Great Binding Law and the Seven Teachings. As long as we continue with approaches based on domination or confrontation we can never access the support and guidance nature and the universe has to offer us.

If we want real change to happen, it will come back to us individually to make that change. It will require only a few who have made a commitment to the heart. Natural law will then dictate the growth of that seed of a new life carried by the few.

The new seed we plant must be filled with values that are in alliance with spirit and with the Earth itself.

Can you find in your hearts to support our efforts, efforts that are built on sharing a knowledge that can lead to defined actions of stewardship – actions that can help in the process of restoration; actions that set up infrastructures of higher learning, sharing values of Indigenous knowledge with the proper protocols required in reconnecting with the land? Can you pledge yourself to that today?

Positioning Elders and Knowledge Holders in a Leadership Role

It is our recommendation today that the Elders and Knowledge Holders of our nations be positioned in their rightful place of influence, guiding all of us to our greater purpose as humanity.

The Elders of our nations have been basically displaced, and we have all suffered because of it. Today, given the overwhelming challenges we face we need their wisdom and guidance.

It is within these lodges that our Elders are most active. It is here that our knowledge is taught and shared - the values and teachings that help nurture and strengthen the human spirit. It is in our lodges that we conduct rites of passage for young people to ensure their passage into adulthood has a strong foundation of understanding their duties and responsibilities in becoming leaders, in themselves, in their families, their communities and the nation.

We acknowledge that this is our duty and responsibility as Elders and Knowledge Keepers to rebuild our Youth and our families to become strong again. It is all of our responsibility to support our Youth!

Our next step will be to set up a formal group of Elders and Knowledge Holders and hold a Summit here in our Lodge. This Summit will begin a roundtable discussion around our further participation regarding how the Great Binding Law can be implemented as initiatives such as the Guardianship initiative and other initiatives.

As we develop these initiatives we extend an invitation to all levels of government, science, industry, the private sector, as well as the Knowledge Holders of your people who wish to participate, to join us in this collective effort.

We have to create a non-confrontational, non-partisan approach, an approach where we can have serious respectful discussions within our environment, as the First Peoples lead following the protocols of our ancestors.

It will require a trust and respect from all of us, and I believe we have this. All it requires now is the commitment of the heart to embark on this journey.

The current reality is we face today, with so many challenges, will continue and hopefully will be resolved peacefully. We must be open towards each other and base our decisions on the well-being and future of all children. Will we leave them with a legacy that we took care of the land for them? Will we create a world where they can live in peace? Will they be filled with kindness for all life?

Conclusion

As the Knowledge Holders of our Nations we step forward and offer our advice that hopefully will appeal to your hearts. Our intent today was to show you the significance and meaning of the gifts that have helped us survive, and continue to help guide us as human beings in the future.

In one of our sacred ceremonies, on the Winter Solstice, we look to the sun to come and save us from the longest night. Since the beginning of time, the sun has been there to guide us and again it will take us past this darkness, this tornado of chaos, and bring birth to a new life.

The sun is the clearest physical symbol we have that we can see with our own eyes, that there is a Great Spirit. Without the sun there is no life. Without the Great Spirit there would be no life.

For us as Indigenous people, we look to the sky, to the sun, to the great star in the east, to guide us home. As a symbol of the Great Spirit, the sun is a symbol of a doorway and entrance to the spirit world, and shines a light on the path to peace. We are closer now than we have ever been to peace.

Our love of the Earth and her love for us will bring peace and balance to our world. The Seven Teachings will ensure our survival.

In the words of the Elders, they say "*Pay shi na gon*" – "it is near – so near we can see it" – the change that will bring peace to our world.

Out of the chaos of uncertainty we are living today, the Earth will give birth to a new life. Nurtured by ourselves and the contributions from all of us from the different colours of humanity, and the four elements of life - earth, air, water and fire.

We come with this reminder – we are all truly brothers and sisters. Now we must unite as the human family. It is our destiny here on Turtle Island. Prophecy has foretold this.

All this must begin with spirit - the spirit of courage to do the right thing that is expressed in all our hearts. Please join us in our continued celebration of life. Join us to become a country of gratitude for all that we have, for all that we have received from Mide-Aki - our generous Mother Earth.



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