A WORKBOOK AND ONLINE COMMUNITY
for Co-CREATING OUR SUSTAINABILITY ETHIC

Section V - Shamanic Wisdom
Chapter 1 - Inculturation

...that the most reliable source of understanding was to follow the teachings of the ancients rather than the observable evidence of the present.

Berry & Swimme,
The Universe Story, pps. 227-228

Ceremonial activities performed at the sacred sites of their Spirit Ancestors are integral to Aboriginal identity and relationship, and their sense of responsibility in the continuation of all species. In Aboriginal cosmology, everything and everybody, all space and all time, is intertwined and interdependent, and all are kin. Aboriginal people recognize that they have a spark of their Spirit Ancestors within them, which can be activated in ceremony and ritual, and thus they have an unbroken link to the Creation Epoch, known in English as the eternal ‘Dreamtime’ or the ‘Dreaming’. This essence of the Spirit Ancestors – held as a life force within them, as well as in all features and creatures of the sacred Earth and the Cosmos – gives Aboriginal peoples the primal awareness that they are an integral aspect of primordial Creation, and thus are part of all that ever was and ever will be. It is this knowledge that they revere and celebrate: the dawn of today is in essence the same as the dawn of the Universe.

Wisdom from the Earth:
The Living Legacy of the Aboriginal Dreamtime, p.23

How has my culture, and perhaps its innate preferences, shaped my biases?

In the mid 1990’s I had the opportunity to attend two storytelling festivals. A few Native American storytellers were there, and I made a point of hearing their stories every chance I had. I listened for the rhythms, the repetition, and the beautiful lessons to be learned. I also tuned into my own dissonance when I became impatient with the pace, or out of touch with the visceral connection to the natural world and physical intelligence of the Native Americans. At times I sensed that many others in the room, almost all of who were Caucasian, felt a dissonance. There was something compelling about the stories, but we couldn’t connect completely with them.

The content of the stories is so much deeper than fable or myth. They are grounded in cosmology – an understanding of the individual’s and the community’s relationship to evolution and its creation stories. The storytelling process is essential for building relationships with family, with community, and with Mother Nature. Each story is an invitation to others to share their stories. Passed from generation to generation, embedded in ritual and ceremony, the stories engender a deep energetic connection with all the Earth’s living beings. These connections across past and future generations, and with all other living systems,
may at first seem very mystical, but for me over time they have become part of my reality. There is a deep, intuitive understanding and appreciation of what is sustainable in terms of the Earth’s capacity to produce, cleanse and heal, an acceptance that life is always in flux, and a reverence for the mysteries that underlie everything in existence.

Chief Seattle’s speech of 1854 is a response to a land treaty with the United States, and it begins like this:

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us.

If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man.

I ask myself what world-view would I have to hold to be able to write this – what would be my relationship with time, property, family, and generations past and future? Perhaps what is most important is to have a culturally shared world-view that this life, and the Earth that supports it, is a blessing from which all other blessings flow.

I know that I will never appreciate the natural world as deeply as those who have been raised to be in harmony with it and truly understand the notion of sufficiency, but I have gotten much closer and now believe that it is the shamanic, indigenous voice of wisdom, the lower right hand quadrant of the ‘Archetypes of Sustainability,’ that offers the most sage understanding regarding how to re-achieve a sustainable Earth. Their cosmological stories emanate from a deep connection of energy and spirit with the Earth and all its living systems; a deeply internalized understanding of our place in nature and the life-death continuum. These stories and other speeches and documents that I read express a way of being and co-creating sustainable life across generations - exactly today’s dilemma. I am not indigenous or even of the same human dynamic that is predominant in their cultures. So I feel as if I’m on the outside just catching a glimpse of their understanding, and in many cases, their pain. I believe that my education in both quantum physics and living systems theory keeps the glimpse from being fleeting, and opens the door for something deeply intuitive to be heard. I suspect also that my father, to whom this book is dedicated, was of the predominate Indigenous human dynamic, Emotional-Physical.

It is also my belief that shamanic wisdom is held by all the mystics of the world – including those of all our faith traditions. At the heart of the mystical beliefs is that there is an essence of life that connects us all; that we all came from the same cosmic process, and are endowed with a cooperative way of being in the life-death continuum. When this essence is found in all other humans, it becomes very difficult to take a life or live a life steeped in disharmony. When the essence is found in all other living species, a deep sense of appreciation follows and we are in harmony with nature.

We know that not all indigenous cultures lived in this idyllic way. Some indigenous cultures were less shamanic than others; perhaps their cooperative nature was generally confined to their tribe. But having nature as a primary model - and believing that nature is primarily cooperative - gave these peoples a basis for living their lives with a sense of communal happiness and peaceful coexistence.
Reflection

Think of a time when you were doing or learning something and there was a level of resonance because there was familiarity, but also a deeper dissonance because there was some basic flaw in whatever you were doing or learning. Perhaps you were caught up in some sort of ‘group think’ – following a social norm or doing what was politically correct.

What was the situation – the theme, the resonance and the dissonance?
What happened that allowed you to shift and address the deeper dissonance?
What have you learned, and how does it manifest in new learning and doing?
Do you feel you made a paradigm or transformational shift?