

16 Facets
of the story "The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop"

(story accessible at <http://www.cpcsi.org/collected-writings.html> see #9)

1) One of the inspirations for the story is a prayer made by Black Elk (1863-1950), who was a "wičhášawakǰáŋ (medicine man and holy man) of the Oglala Lakota (Sioux)" (Wikipedia). The prayer includes the following passage: "Hey! Lean to hear my feeble voice. At the center of the sacred hoop you have said that I should make the tree to bloom. With tears running, O Great Spirit, my Grandfather, with running eyes I must say the tree has never bloomed. Here I stand, and the tree is withered. Again, I recall the great vision you gave me. It may be that some little root the sacred tree still lives. Nourish it then, that it may leaf and bloom and fill with singing birds!"

2) The story is from a time long ago, when the cultural heritage of a community of people was passed from generation to generation through the spoken word, and when the reasons for telling a story were (for the most part) to convey a message of cultural significance. [Note: here it is worth citing a passage from Chapter 1 "The Power of the Word" (by Margot Astrov), in a book edited by Margot Astrov titled "The Winged Serpent: American Indian Prose and Poetry":

"The singing of songs and the telling of tales with the American Indian is but seldom a means of mere spontaneous self expression. More often than not, the singer aims with the chanted word to exert a strong influence and to bring about a change, either in himself, or in nature, or in his fellow beings. By narrating the story of origin, he endeavors to influence the universe and to strengthen the failing power of the supernatural beings. He relates the myth of creation, ceremonially, in order to save the world from death and destruction, and to keep alive the primeval spirit of the sacred beginning. Above all, it seems that the word, both in song and in tale, was meant to maintain and to prolong the individual life in some way or other; that is, to cure, to heal, to ward off evil, and to frustrate death.... Healing songs, and songs intended to support the powers of germination and of growth in all their manifestations, fairly outnumber all other songs of the American Indian."

One of the primary reasons for telling the story "The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop" is to convey intuitive expressions of spiritual wisdom by way of a "further growth and flowering" of ideas and imagery in the prayer mentioned in Facet #1.

3) The story begins with a version of how the world was created. The creation myth "facet" of the story was partly inspired by Mircea Eliade's book "The Myth of the Eternal Return". In that book, Mr. Eliade writes about how some primitive and indigenous people re-created their connection to the sacred

beginning by reliving their particular myth of creation, and thus returning to the “center” and the “beginning of time”.

4) The story is cyclical in one sense: people establish a peaceful and happy way of life at the center of the sacred hoop, the sacred hoop is damaged and the center lost, and a long journey is needed to find the center again. And the story implies that this cycle will repeat itself, as the earth adjusts itself over time, and new equilibriums must be discovered. The story also implies that different spiritual gifts will be made accessible during different cycles, and thus people (and other spiritual beings) will also need to adjust at every new beginning, to arrive at accordance (see Facet #5) with the current mosaic of spiritual gifts.

5) The story identifies the following as sacred wisdom: “There the people discovered that if they lived in accordance with the spiritual gifts they had been given, the earth nurtured, supported, and sustained their peaceful and happy way of life”—and thus proposes the existence of wisdom which is represented by a sympathetic resonance between living beings and “the earth from which they grew”.

6) The story recognizes the importance of ceremonies and traditions as a way of re-living, re-creating, and perpetuating important cultural messages, and sacred cultural wisdom. (Example: “In accordance with their need to fully experience these deep feelings of love and affection together, as a community, the people created special ceremonies, at intervals throughout the year. One of the special ceremonies which became established as a tradition by these people was at the end of the harvest season. At that time of year, the people re-lived the most memorable spiritual gifts in the history of their tribe—through a variety of ceremonial events...”). The story especially encourages communities of people to create, and maintain, ceremonies and traditions which are inspired by the most memorable spiritual gifts the people have received.

7) There are many “archetypal moments” in the story (Examples: challenges which threaten the whole tribe, a vision which leads into a quest, receiving spiritual gifts in strange ways, a dramatic affirmation of the tribe’s sacred wisdom, a journey to find a new beginning, a critical decision which must be made by the tribal leaders, and ceremonies created so that the people can re-live the most memorable spiritual gifts in the history of the tribe). Thus, the story can have a “mirror like” effect on readers, and cause them to reflect on the similarities and differences between what such moments are like in contemporary life, and what they are like in the culture brought to life by this story.

8) In this story, the presence of “singing birds” is a sign or omen indicating a center of the sacred hoop: a place where people, and other spiritual beings, are living—or have the potential to live—in accordance with the spiritual gifts they have been given... and thus a place where the earth “nurtures, supports, and sustains their peaceful and happy life.” In a similar manner, the absence of “singing birds”, the leaving of “singing birds”, or the inability of “the people” to understand the “song of the singing birds”, is a sign or omen of dissonance, disharmony, and a center of the sacred hoop that has been damaged, or lost. Thus, the “singing birds” are meant to be a symbol for a special kind “cultural/spiritual resource or mosaic of resources” which are essential to the definition of a location as a “center of the sacred hoop”. The existence of this kind of symbol in the story raises the question: “what cultural/spiritual resources are essential for a peaceful and happy way of life?” A single bird also plays a critical role in the story: by conveying a message to the tribe (through a dream), and by appearing (Note: the appearances being different birds at different times) at intervals to guide the tribe to the “center” again. Thus, a single bird, or a flock of birds, can be seen as a symbol for an intuitive kind of wisdom which is like an “inner voice” or “guidepost”—pointing to the path that leads to accordance with the spiritual tradition, and the establishing of a peaceful and happy way of life at the “center of the sacred hoop” (Thus: “...all the tribe had to do was keep sighting the birds, and follow the birds wherever they went.”)

9) The narrator of the story both tells the story—and speaks of parts of itself in the story—as if the narrator is both the source and origin of events in the story, *and has been created as a result of events in the story*. Thus, the question “who is the storyteller?” is an interesting question.

10) There are parts of the story which are like Zen koans [“... in Zen Buddhism of Japan, a succinct paradoxical statement or question used as a meditation discipline for novices, particularly in the Rinzai sect. The effort to ‘solve’ a koan is intended to exhaust the analytic intellect and the egoistic will, readying the mind to entertain an appropriate response on the intuitive level” (from brittanica.com)]/ a way of “seeing into one’s own nature” (Hui-neng). One example of a Zen koan: “What are your original features which you have even prior to your birth?” (Hui-neng)] Thus, the process of gaining understanding from the “Zen koan-like” experiences in the story—[Examples: a) “Who is the storyteller?” b) “You must look for the tree at the center of the sacred hoop. You will know when you have found this tree when you hear birds singing on the branches of a tree, and you understand their song” c) Why did what the little girl said when she heard the singing birds help the tribal leaders become certain that they understand the “birds’ song”]—is meant to be an intuitive experience (i.e.

there can be understanding, but in a way which may make it very difficult to explain what has been understood to someone else (they may also have to “experience” the meaning, to understand it).

11) “The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop” is a love story—between the sun and the earth—a love story which is described as profound and eternal (“Ever so gradually, over a mystical span of timelessness, the love between the sun and the earth evolved into the realm of what is profound and eternal. From that time on, it seemed as if love was efflorescing from the very source and origin of the Universal Spirit of Love—and the spontaneous creation, growth, and flowering of spiritual beings became an ever-present and ongoing part of the earth’s spiritual destiny.”) Thus, in an earlier version of the story, there was a closing poem which went: “And then I dreamed while I was wide awake, and saw where concrete used to be—tribal ceremonies grown from melted tears, singing once again about the marriage of the spheres.”

12) The story has a song at the end which recognizes and affirms a connection between past cycles of “the creation, growth, and flowering of spiritual beings” and the present cycle.

13) The first revision of the story (in 2004, 20 years after the first version), grew out of inspiration from the teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011)—teachings which I had been in constant contact with since learning about them in 1991. [In 1997, I created a 301 page collection of quotations titled “An Arrangement of Quotations from ‘Sathya Sai Speaks’ (Vol. 1-15)”. (“Sathya Sai Speaks” is a collection of discourses given by Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Vol. 1-15 include discourses given by Sri Sathya Sai Baba during the years 1953-1982).]

14) As an accidental outcome of the way the tribe goes about re-discovering the singing birds (and the center of the sacred hoop), the story contains one line—one sentence—which encapsulates the advantages of having many different paths by which we, as humans, can access the wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions (the wisdom associated with love, virtue, sacrifice, forgiveness, peace, etc.)

15) The story is meant to be a way of revitalizing appreciation for intuition and spiritual wisdom as important elements of community and cultural sustainability.

16) The story is narrated in a way which makes it conducive to being preserved through the oral tradition. In other words, the story is in a form which could be memorized (and which does not have

important details that are only meaningful in one particular cultural context); and thus the story could be passed from generation to generation—even in circumstances where paper might not be as plentiful as it is now.

I believe “The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop” is a healing story, and I have read the story many times with that outcome in mind.

I hope this story eventually finds readers who can appreciate its special qualities.

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