

From Greed Kingdom to a New Planetary Consciousness

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It seems like yesterday when so many, after the dismissal of Communism signified by the fall of the Berlin Wall, looked forward with shivered expectations to a "lone superpower rule" in the world. Later, during the George W Bush years, the world witnessed a sort of political takeover of the US by the neo-cons, promising a **new American Century**, that is, a new century of a US-led world. To that effect, the rallying cry of "**war on terrorism**" came very handy.

But the starker reality had other things in store. The US financial meltdown, brought about by the US "**casino economy**" culture, broke out and quickly spread to a world economy long-contaminated by the same reckless values and greatly dependant on "the US locomotive." Today, it seems as if hell has broken loose; dreams of a prolonged US hegemonic rule lie shattered; and looming large is the peril of a world economic downfall, somewhat like "**Samson bringing the temple down.**"

But each crisis, however unnerving, brings with it an opportunity for needed change. Amidst the baffling pain, a profound introspection of what was wrong has now ensued; previously unlikely *mea culpas* of so many on the driving seats are being heard; many for so long moronised have taken to the streets to reclaim their voice; and a clean break from the decadent oppressive old in favour of a fresh liberating new is being demanded, not just in the US, but the world over.

Above all, a longing to take refuge in the transcendental, in spiritual and moral values, and a revaluing of many overlooked prophets who forewarned about the times now upon us, are the order of the day. Among the said prophets was one who personified and emblematicized the highest of native people's wisdom: **Chief Seattle**.

Seattle, the Great Chief from North-Western US, foresaw much of present day sorrows and pleaded for wisdom to avoid them, mostly to no avail. His message was kept in oblivion to most, particularly in the US itself. But Seattle's message lived on, guarded by the ones who saw its relevance and transcendence from the beginning; disseminated increasingly by the committed; and surging on more and more to larger audiences, to the point of having become today the most emblematic piece of native wisdom at world level as well as the "**Bible**" of the world environmental movement.

Today, in the face of the present triggered-out-of-the-US world financial and economic crisis and as well as the promising winds of change emanating from the same country ["the Obama phenomenon"], it is only fitting to evoke Chief Seattle's vision, its continuous relevance, and pay tribute to it. The subsequent text is devoted to this [at the end is presented a fresh like-minded message to the US and the world from a south-of-the Planet perspective].

Seattle: great indigenous prophet

In 1854, Isaac Stevens, a Commissioner of the United States government, met with Chief Seattle with the goal of acquiring his people's land in the Northwest Territories. The response from Seattle to Stevens has become perhaps the most renowned piece of Indigenous wisdom in the world and for many, a kind of "**bible**" for the global environmental movement. It is a profound testimony of love and defense of Nature, and a warning to the new conquering civilization of what could happen if it remained unaware of the true ways of life.

Seattle wanted to avert the worst evils of a confrontation in which he knew the indigenous ways were about to be smothered by the overwhelming wave of powerful new "masters" who cast a shadow on his beloved world. Rather than opt for a war of resistance, or resign to a defeat at the hands of the conquerors, Seattle opted for a sobering ethical statement questioning Stevens' rationale for the US government's claims over the "**culture of the earth**" honoured by his people.

There has been some historical controversy about what Seattle actually said, fueled both by some legitimate reasons and by stakeholders to discredit the Indigenous ecological cause. Regarding the former, which matters most to us, serious scholars point to problems in translations and interpretations, as well as to reiterations. They are probably correct that in this type of translation chain, surely some things were lost or subtracted from the original version. Despite this, the historical evidence available (including finding of oral testimonies from descendants of the tribe of Seattle itself, as well as comparison of his ideas with other indigenous traditions) has confirmed undoubtedly the authentic core of what Seattle accomplished in his speech - a core of truth that continues to resonate powerfully today.

Three major versions are known today of this famous speech: **Henry Smith**, a contemporary of Seattle and a witness to the speech, wrote a version published in the Seattle Star some thirty years later; **William Arrowsmith** from the University of Texas in the sixties transformed the somewhat flowery Victorian English transcript of Smith to a plainer English version more in accord with the Indian style, on the basis of field research with Indian descendants in Seattle's land, and published it during the celebration of the first "Earth Day" in 1970. **Ted Perry**, also a teacher at that university, adapted and modified Arrowsmith's text to provide the script for a video commissioned by the

Southern Baptist Christian Church in the United States (to which video producer John Stevens added some modifications). The video, done in the wake of the **First Earth Day**, focused on environmental concerns and was titled "**Home**". Ted Perry's rendering, the best known of all, was made national and world célèbre when it was picked up by the in-flight magazine **Passages** of Northwest Airlines.

In all three versions, regardless of their greater or lesser fidelity to what Seattle initially said, a common message with a powerful universal appeal remained, which could be summarized as: "*If every corner of this land is sacred to us and our revered ancestors, if the land does not belong to us and we are not owners of the sky, water and earth, how then could we sell them, or how can you pretend to be owners?*"

A message stating that the human being is a custodian, not an owner of Creation, and therefore has a duty to take care of it more responsibly rather than the right to possess it selfishly and do what one wants with it, is made more powerful by the way **Seattle warns of the cycles of boom and decline of life and civilizations, including that of his own people**, whom he considered already in internal decay and on the threshold of a "*long night*," in alignment with other Indigenous prophecies relating to the ominous appearance of the White conqueror.

A cardinal shamanistic principle is that "**All is one and all is alive**" – including besides human beings, animals, plants, soil, water, air, and even the rocks themselves. It leads to a mandate for respecting all of Creation. Seattle's emphasis on non-violence to ensure a deep and lasting approach to the conflict he was trying to resolve into some kind of coexistence with the White man (although violence could be a last defensive resort), was in accord with the formerly stated shamanistic principle, as was his bet on an affirmative comparison between the Indigenous and Christian religiosity. Concerning the latter, he even got to the point of giving himself the biblical name of **Noah** – by no means fortuitously in our view, since Seattle, a committed Prophet of Salvation of his own times, must have felt a lot of relatedness with the ancient Bible's *Saviour of the Ark*.

Thus, Seattle was a bridge between two worlds. He offered a choice between the new arrogance and ancient wisdom, between war and peace, between despair and hope, between death and transcendence.

Of course, his speech took courage. As a bridge between worlds he ran all risks of both sides in the face of a clash between Indigenous and White colonialists. He endured the misunderstanding or rejection of some of his own people by seeming to side peacefully with the enemy. Still, the great authority, strength and wisdom of Seattle had prepared him for such an extraordinary role. Having himself been previously a great warrior, he knew the high cost and limitations of solutions on the basis of violence. Having been raised in the

strong and healthy Indigenous lifestyle, and in a lineage of chieftdom which stressed more its exemplary performance of duty than any invocation of privilege, he had formidable physical strength and an orientation to service.

And having been instructed in the most advanced shamanic arts, even under the sign of a "spirit of personal power" as significant as the mythical "bird of thunder" (Thunderbird), Seattle became a keeper of great wisdom, wisdom of prophetic and visionary nature. With regard to the latter, it is of interest to note that the name of Seattle in his native language was pronounced *See-ahth*, namely with the preponderance of a prefix such as "see" which derives from the English word "**seer**" which means "visionary" !

Seattle indeed had qualities of a visionary prophet. Thus, all the "curious coincidences" or resonances in Seattle's story come as no surprise; such occurrences have often accompanied the mission of true prophets. One of the most notable contemporary early oral translator-interpreters of his statements to Whites (according to evidence dating back to 1850) bore the name of Benjamin Franklin Shaw – almost the same as the eminent pro-Indian US Founding Father who had lived nearly one hundred years back!

The second historic "translator" of his 1854 Statement, William Arrowsmith, who was bent on improving the work of the first "translator" Henry Smith, by drawing more faithfully on Indian ways of speech, bore a last name differentiated from his predecessor only by the addition of the prefix "arrow" ("arrow" for more "native accuracy" in the conveying of the Message?).

Seattle had addressed his plea for understanding with the White conqueror to the Christian soul, on a bet on a common God; over one hundred years later it fell - strikingly enough - upon a group of Christians Southern Baptists to be the most instrumental in making his statement universally famous. This was done first through a video whose producer, John Stevens, bore the same surname as the US Commissioner to whom Seattle had addressed his 1854 admonition, and later - and largely - through the publicizing of the base-script of the video in the in-flight magazine of an airline from the Northwest - Seattle's own region, that is, in airplanes, surely mighty "thunderbirds" of a kind to traditional native eyes, Seattle's own "animal spirit of power"! All these are striking "curious coincidences" or resonances! The hand of the Great Spirit or God at work!!

Seattle was connected with the fulfillment of Indigenous prophecies that foretold the times of great purification of humanity and the planet we are in; bringing death and disappearance of much of the known, but also new hope and life.

Unfortunately, such wisdom was not returned in kind to Seattle. A year after his 1854 speech, Seattle signed the **Treaty of Point Elliott** which, in exchange for a "cessation of hostilities" between Whites and natives provided

for, within a determined territorial confinement of the latter and a hegemonic territorial occupation of the former, certain rights and duties for both.

None of the chief obligations of the Whites were adequately fulfilled. The Indians were increasingly reduced and mistreated by the colonizers, resulting in the violent response of some native groups, including some who had signed the Treaty with Seattle. Seattle and the people closest to him remained true to his word, emphasizing a commitment to coexistence. But it is clear that all the faced problems caused great pain to Seattle, who died in 1866 at the age of 80 years.

Despite such failed results, the **genocide of Indigenous peoples in Seattle's territories was somewhat less than in the rest of the country where it reached Holocaust proportions.** His speech seemed to enhance a little more tolerance between the two civilizations in that geographic area. Surely this was a sign of the speech's significance. Many White settlers remained respectful of the Indian people and this led to naming their main settlement in the area after Chief Seattle - on the proposal of settler Doc Maynard, a Mason and settler leader personally grateful for having preciously benefited from Seattle's help.

It may not be a coincidence that today in the modern great city of Seattle we find a breeding ground for progressive and radically pro-earth, pro-justice, anti-reckless globalization, efforts. Seattle's words, deeds and vision continue to resonate around the world and inspire the ecological and Indigenous movement and its connection to spiritual awareness. Certainly those were the feelings of **all of us who gathered in Seattle back in 2004 to pay homage to Chief Seattle, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of his 1854 Statement,** and under the rallying theme of **Healing and Peace for Humanity and the Planet!**

All our preparations for and participation in the Occasion as well as talks with local direct descendants, researchers of Seattle's life and a cherished spiritually-oriented personal visit to his imposing burial site on Bainbridge Island, allowed us precious information and insights to write this piece - with great reverence and love in Seattle's memory and homage.

Despite his disappointment in life, Seattle **must have known in his heart that he was acting for posterity.** He planted seeds for the future. In another formidable piece of oratory he also said: "**Indeed there is not death but a change of worlds...**" in the best tradition of Indigenous understanding of transcendence and immortality of the spirit, the relentless cyclical evolution of life, the primacy of truth and eternal light over falsehood and worldly darkness.

He spoke a Truth we cannot forget. People today remember him and his words as do we when we ponder the long heroic struggle of Indigenous peoples and their allies, and the effort to bring wisdom, justice and peace to the world.

Being Indigenous is ultimately is more than a colour, race or type of blood: It is a state of mind to live in deep and consistent communion with Mother Nature and her laws. From that standpoint, all of us come from being indigenous on account of our common origin that connects us with Mother Nature. And Indigenous we should all today be, as a vital issue for the real defense and salvation of Humanity and the Planet.

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The following piece, of which the one who writes these lines was a humble channel, was written on **4 April 2004**, from a remote corner of the Venezuelan Amazon in South America. It was written one year prior to the ominous hurricane Katrina, and four years prior to the present US-world financial quagmire; major events which attested also to the prophetic chilling accuracy of the Piece.

But it is also a message of love and hope, as the contents of the Message likewise indicate. In sum, more than anything else, the Message may be viewed as a moving early wake-up call, a stern but brotherly plea, this time from the entrails of the South of the Planet, for the trying times that the US and the rest of the world are now beset with - a manifestation of a deep-seated malaise and a prelude of even more challenging times ahead; trying times which require, indeed, great vision and courage to be met successfully.

Letter to the United States

I speak to the United States From the very heart of my land to the South, I do
I speak to it from where rivers flow clear amidst pristine forests and
immaculate guardian hills
I speak from the very birthplace of Life itself, as handed down by my ancestors
From the Tropics I speak
From where aboriginal peoples in sacred communion with Nature still live on I
speak

I speak to it from a beautiful and generous Mother Nature.
But one too that feels besieged and fearful,
because of the threat of a civilization which doesn't comprehend her,
which hurts her, and which has managed to destroy so much of the paradise
that once reigned.

I speak to it from a natural Oracle where in tandem with the most sublime
natural splendor,
one may sense the tick-tock of the countdown to suicidal destruction advancing
towards its final hour.
I speak to the United States the great country of Chief Seattle, the one who

said:

“The Earth doesn't belong to man, man belongs to the Earth”.

Chief Seattle, among whose message disseminators stood out a translator named Benjamin Franklin Shaw; by some curious turn of history, a name echoing the one of the nation's founding father who, almost one hundred years earlier, had contributed to her Declaration of Independence the native values of liberty, respect for life and happiness which he admired so much: Benjamin Franklin.

A kind of occurrence that doesn't surprise us since The Great Spirit is given to resorting to this kind of coincidence to get its messages or designs across.

I speak to the country of visionary Chief Seattle, who in the last years of his life, concerned over what he saw coming, changed his native name to the Christian name of Noah, the steward of the biblical ark bent on the salvation of humanity, so that, from the new dominant culture itself, as well as from the heart of the cruelly downtrodden natives of his country, with his thundering voice he could sound the warning that the world was heading to a certain destruction if it didn't respect the memory of the ancestors and Mother Nature.

The country of prophet Seattle who saw all that was to be: the pollution and devastation of life, the oppression of the subjugated and excluded, the possessor become possessed, happiness lost; by the insatiable greed and selfish individualism of all those who would replace the cult to The Great Spirit -or God as the white man came to name him - by the new arrogant idols of money and technology.

I speak to the country of Abraham Lincoln, another great North American with name and mission of prophet. One who vainly tried to avert a terrible fratricidal holocaust whose roots, a cruel and addictive exploitation of slave labor, were never eradicated at the birth of the Nation.

The prophet and martyr Lincoln who also warned that corporations and money fueled by unchecked greed, could enthrone themselves as a corrupting power over the lofty goals of the new Nation.

I speak to the country of that other prophet and martyr who was Martin Luther King.

The one who, from his defense of the suffering North American blacks
rose to become a universal hero when he proclaimed:
“Every threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”.

I speak to the United States, a country also of good people.
Which generously offered many lives and material resources
to contribute to save the world from an ominous and terrifying fascist threat
and to reconstruct a continent ravaged by war.

A country that has had great institutions of learning
of libertarian vocation in search of truth,
such as the institution that gave me
some years of humanist and universalist college education
which sowed invaluable seeds in my life.

A country of great technological genius, and admirable productive might.
Who could deny it ?

But where such power, lacking a good orientation
has not led to greater happiness neither for itself
nor for all the wide world that has come to fall under the influence
of the North American Eagle.

Simon Bolivar, prophet of liberation, fighter out of my land for a better world,
after an initial admiration for the creation of your great nation,
would end up during the last years of his life
warning about a North American eagle run amok:
“The United States seems destined by Providence
to plague The Americas of miseries in the name of freedom”
- sentenced his visionary voice.

Too many foreign interventions and wars in the name of freedom or democracy
have borne witness to this.

I speak to the United States because,
due to the stimulus and hope it once infused in humankind,
and in me personally, is a country I love.
And because, for better or for worse, it has come to have a decisive weight
in the fate of the world.

I speak to the United States
because I have left in its land tears of emotion
standing before the awesome sight of its Grand Canyon,
the sublime beauty of its silent Monument Valley,
the sacred peace of its Four Corners region.

I speak to the United States because having nourished my soul with the ancestral wisdom of its guardian people The Hopis and the prophetic word of a Seattle, a Franklin, a Lincoln, a Luther King, is a country which I revere.

I speak to the United States because I feel that, having drifted from its initial foundational wisdom, it has been blinded by the materialism and greed of a voracious system; because it has sowed too many seeds of discord which are now bearing fruit, too many "bills" up for collection, too many "goods" which have turned into "bad". Still unwilling to recognize today the need for a profound course correction, for itself and for all those who have lashed themselves to the fate of its might

I speak to the United States because I feel that it is running out of time to avoid greater suffering and trauma, for itself and for all those who have joined their fate to the senseless might of this Titanic.

I speak to the United States to urge it to awaken, to urge it to change, without the numbing poison of arrogance, with the enlightening antidote of humility, with vision, with courage.

In order to reconnect with the wisdom of the Great Spirit, and convert the bad energy into good, darkness into light, death into life, unhappiness into happiness.

Such as a butterfly transmuted from insatiable voracious caterpillar into gentle splendid winged-being.
I speak to the United States because its time of reckoning has come. And it has to face it, because there cannot be any more waiting. As it has come for the country from which I speak, Venezuela, and the whole world.

I speak to the United States for love and for believing in the promise of a new dawn of all and for all.

Frank Bracho, a former Ambassador of Venezuela and activist of indigenous, environmental and spiritual issues, was a member of the international committee which commemorated the 150th anniversary of Chief Seattle's 1854 Statement. His piece "Happiness and Indigenous Wisdom in the History of

The Americas,” was published in *World Affairs Journal* and in the book *Unlearning the Language of Conquest*, University of Texas, 2006.