

Relationships

One of my sisters gave me a little pillow embroidered with the words: "I smile because you are my brother. I laugh because there's nothing you can do about it!"

Here is an excerpt from Chapter 11 of *Being a Real Person*, a little book I put together a few years ago:

Now, there is relatedness and then there is relationship. Relatedness is a principle. I am related to those with whom I share ancestry. This is so whether I know it is so or whether I want it to be so or not.... Every human being, every animal and bird, every plant, the streams, the rocks, the thunderstorms.... We are all brothers and sisters together. Whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, still it is so....Relatedness is a principle. *We are all* related.

Relationship, on the other hand, has to do with how we act on our relatedness or with what we do with our relatedness. My definition of relationship is this: Relationship: the state of affairs, actions or dealings between related parties (p. 75).

Within the framework of colonized thinking, relationships tend to be hierarchical, adversarial and exploitative. Colonized relationships are characterized by competition, conquest, control, domination, dependency and co-dependency. Colonized thinking is straight-line thinking: beginning to end, source to goal, investment to gain, the profit motive. This affects all relationships, i.e. relationships with plants, animals, water, land, the Earth in all her aspects, even relationships within families. "What can I get out of this?" is the primary question. Colonized relationships with deity are no exception. "Health, prosperity and comfort on earth and a mansion in heaven when I die," are the primary objectives. Extremely colonized behavior may include a tendency to treat human beings, along with everything else, as disposable commodities, to be used and then discarded like a Styrofoam cup.

A Dimension Called Loneliness

Trying to isolate us
In a dimension called loneliness
Leading us into the trap
Believe in their power
But not in ourselves
Piling us with guilt
Always taking the blame
Greed chasing out the balance

Trying to isolate us
In a dimension called loneliness
Economic deities seizing power
Through illusions created

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Armies are justified
Class systems are democracy
God listens to warmongers prayers

Tyranny is here divide and conquer
Trying to isolate us
In a dimension called loneliness
Greed a parent
Insecurity the happiness companion
Genocide conceived in sophistication
Tech no logic material civilization
A rationalization
Replacing a way to live

Trying to isolate us
In a dimension called loneliness

- John Trudell in *Lines from a Mined Mind*

Indigenous thinking bases relationships in cooperation rather than competition. Within the indigenous framework, coming from a deep understanding of the relatedness of all that is, relationships are characterized by dialogue, nurture, interdependence and respect. The exercise of respect includes holding one another in high esteem while holding fast to a basic attitude of non-interference and patient forbearance. In other words, relationships are governed or moderated by the harmony ethic. Decolonizing and re-indigenizing our relationships begins with taking the harmony ethic very seriously. Eastern Cherokee scholars J.T. and Michael Garrett provide what I consider an excellent articulation of the harmony ethic in their book *Medicine of the Cherokee: The Way of Right Relationship*. The following outline is adapted from their writing. Yes, I am aware of various Cherokee people expressing criticism of the Garretts' books or at least of some of the content of their books. All I will say about that is this: Whatever I read, I keep the salt shaker handy. It is best to sift through whatever is out there. This holds true with my own writings as well. For instance, I may look back at my own writings of 14 or 16 years ago and say, "Wow, did I write that? That's pretty good." But as I continue to read, I am just as apt to say, "Oh, did I write that? That's embarrassing." In any case, while books and writings may play a supplemental role in the process of decolonization and cultural restoration or re-indigenation, no one can learn Cherokee culture or indigenous culture of any kind from reading a book. An indigenous culture is properly learned only in relationship with an indigenous group, as an integral part of that group, honestly living out the indigenous culture of their people the best they can given the present circumstances.

Harmony Ethic

- The Harmony Ethic is held in common by most Native American Indian peoples. At its heart is the communal spirit of cooperation and sharing.

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Assumptions of the Harmony Ethic:

1. Every life is a special gift of the Creator, to be treated with gratitude, respect and kindness.
2. Everyone and everything has a special purpose to fulfill. Everyone and everything possesses some unique quality or talent.
3. All things are connected/related and live in an interdependent circle of harmony and balance.
4. Human beings should choose to nurture this sacred flow of harmony and balance and be careful not to disrupt it.

Aspects of the Harmony Ethic:

1. **A nonaggressive/noncompetitive approach to life.** Competition or aggression for personal gain is frowned upon. Competition for the benefit of family, clan, tribe or community is acceptable.
2. **The use of intermediaries or a neutral third person in resolving interpersonal conflict.** The goal is to minimize face-to-face hostility and disharmony in interpersonal relationships.
3. **Reciprocity and the practice of generosity.** It is giving and receiving that makes the circle turn. Sharing of food is especially important. One always feeds a guest. One never refuses an invitation to eat.
4. **A belief in immanent justice.** Destructive emotions, thoughts, words or actions against another will hurt that person, but evil will eventually return to its source to doubly hurt that person in whom it originated.

The Principle of Noninterference

- This principle is related to the Harmony Ethic and is also held in common (consciously or otherwise) by most Native Americans.

Assumptions & Aspects of the Principle of Noninterference:

1. All things have life, worth and personhood. As such, all things are worthy of respect.
2. All things are related, interconnected and inter-dependent.
3. Everything and everyone was created with a purpose to fulfill. Therefore, no one should interfere or impose upon others in ways that would take away or diminish their value of choice. Self-determination is a natural right. People are not meant to be controlled (I am NOT my brother's keeper; I am my brother's brother.).
4. Patience is a primary virtue governing relationships.
5. Each person has her/his own sacred space which is not to be intruded upon without invitation or permission. Sacred space includes the dimensions of mind, spirit and natural environment.
6. When a person is ready to share information, he/she will do so. If a person is in need of assistance, he/she will ask.
7. Caring and respect are not one and the same. Both are required for harmonious relations. One of the highest forms of caring comes through the expression of respect, that is, respecting a person's right and ability to choose, and practicing the patience to allow the person to do just that. Respect could be as simple as asking permission before touching someone, either physically or spiritually (pp. 179-189).

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The harmony ethic holds true for human-to-human relationships and also for relationships with the land, animals and plants, all things. In the indigenous way, group decisions are made by consensus through dialogue, and this includes dialogue not only within human groups. All of Creation is related. If we have forgotten how to listen to and dialogue with our non-human relatives, we must relearn this ability. Decisions made by humans without regard for the entirety of Creation, puts all our relatives and we ourselves at risk. Indigenous thinking is reciprocal thinking, understanding that everything turns in a circle and tries to achieve balance. What goes around comes around. Therefore, indigenous thinking sees all relationships as working within a reality of give-and take reciprocity.

Leanne Simpson says “good relationships with all living beings around us.... begins in our families and with our children (p. 122). The so-called nuclear family household norm of father, mother and children has been promoted in place of more extended or inter-generational family households which were normative prior to imperialistic invasion and colonization. The typical pre-invasion Cherokee household included a grandmother and grandfather, the grandmother’s daughters along with their husbands and children. Although the grandmother was considered the owner of the house built for her by her husband, pre-invasion Cherokee society was no more matriarchal than it was patriarchal. It was neither. Indigenous Cherokees sought and continue to seek balance between the genders. Pre-invasion Cherokees were not matriarchal, but they/we were matrilineal and matrilocal, which is to say, family or clan lineage or identity was/is passed along the mother’s side, and husbands, at least in the old days, went to live with their wives’ people. This served to preserve the balance and prevent devolution to a patriarchal system, exploitative and abusive to women and children. Even where multi-generational households are no longer normative, indigenous people tend to place high value on extended family.

In some tribes she is free
In some religions she is under man
In some societies she is worth what she consumes

In some nations she is delicate strength
In some states she is told she is weak
In some classes she is property owned

In all instances she is sister to earth
In all conditions she is life bringer
In all life she is our necessity

- John Trudell from “See the Woman”
in *Lines from a Mined Mind*

The Chickamauga Cherokee Prophet Clear Sky admonished parents against beating their children “as the English do.” Negating the “English Rule

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of Thumb” which allowed husbands to beat their wives with a rod as thick as the husband’s thumb, Clear Sky admonished Cherokee husbands to beat their wives with nothing thicker than one thin blade of grass. This was at a time when Christian missionaries were admonishing Indian men to assert themselves as heads of households and teaching that a father who does not beat his child hates his child (Proverbs 13:24). To the indigenous mind, children are first and foremost understood as teachers of their parents and grandparents and other adults in their lives. Children have, after all, just arrived from the spirit world and at least until the age of seven continue in very close relationship with the spirits. Children have many lessons to teach about love, trust, humor, the power of the openly observant mind; the list goes on and on. As children grow, they are best led by example. When children are loved and treated with respect and see the significant adults in their lives also treating each other with love and respect, they learn to love and respect others. When children are ruled over in an authoritarian manner, they, in turn, will learn to be authoritarian bullies. It goes against sound logic to think that a child may learn respectful behavior through being disrespected, either through corporal punishment or harsh verbal rebuke and scolding.

And yet, most American Indians of my generation and of my children’s generation (including my own children) can recall their parents scolding them harshly and also resorting to corporal punishment. Such are the results of centuries of colonization.

What are some implications of the harmony ethic and the principle of non-interference as applied to

1. **Spousal Relationships?** A wife is not the property of her husband, and a husband is not the property of his wife. Each spouse should be mindful of the other’s needs yet not overly needy. It is good that spouses be together yet respectful of one another’s space, not invasive of privacy. Spouses should work to develop understanding, knowing that men and women may not ever fully understand one another. Actually, no two people, regardless of gender, may ever fully understand one another. Appreciate and celebrate differences. Most of us have two ears but only one mouth; it follows that we should do twice as much listening as talking. Know that fidelity is a matter of what one chooses to do as much as it is a matter of what one determines not to do. Love does not exist apart from respect, as respect is an aspect of love. As for spouse abuse: There was zero tolerance for spouse abuse in pre-invasion Cherokee society. There should be zero tolerance for spouse abuse today. Whether it be abuse of a wife by her husband or abuse of a husband by his wife, there is no place and no excuse for spouse abuse, child abuse or any other kind of abuse.
2. **Parent-Child Relationships?** Children are not the property of their parents, nor are they clones or mini-mes destined to grow up to be exactly like their parents. Children have needs which vary or change according to age and development. Children need protection, food, shelter and clothing. They also need human contact, emotional support, commitment and constancy. Children need direction, training and mentoring.

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Children especially need good examples lived before them. Children, at all stages of development, also need freedom, freedom to make choices, freedom to make mistakes, freedom to learn from their mistakes. My mother mentioned to me something her mother-in-law, my Grandma Francis used to say when one of her sons or daughters-in-law was particularly exasperated with the behavior of one of their children. "She/He will become of it," Grandma would say. Patience is key. Direct criticism is seldom easy to receive and therefore seldom effective. Indirect criticism is easier to swallow. That's a big part of what the Oral Tradition is all about - indirect teaching lessons, very effective when self-applied. Also, very often an uncle or an aunt or a grandmother may be able to gently reprove a child when a parent has been unsuccessful.

When the situation is turned around, aged parents need contact and support from their children. According to an aged parent's physical and mental status, needs may change or increase. The need for respect, including the freedom to make choices, never goes away. And, just as with the little children, those aged ones are once again drawing very close to the spirit world. They have much to teach for any with ears to hear and eyes to see.

3. **Sibling Relationships?** In keeping with the harmony ethic, sibling relationships should be supportive and/or cooperative rather than competitive or domineering. I am not meant to be my brother's or sister's keeper any more than I am meant to be my brother's or sister's murderer. My brother or sister does not need or want a keeper. My brother or sister needs and wants a brother or a sister. "But, what if my brother or sister clearly needs advise and isn't asking?" someone may inquire. Well, as I have been taught, it is alright to make a suggestion once or even twice. More than that is interference. "But, what if my brother is clearly insane or incompetent, a danger to himself or others? Should I not then step in to become my brother's keeper?" Maybe so, but we need to be most careful with such judgments. In the Christian Bible, it is written that once some of Jesus' friends, kinsmen or brothers went to take charge of him, as they were quite sure he had lost his mind (Mark 3:21). They were not successful in stopping Jesus, but were they justified in making the attempt? Certainly, Jesus' defiance of the Roman Empire and their puppet regime in Judea was leading toward self-destruction. Jesus' arrest and execution came as a direct result of two demonstrations he led in Jerusalem earlier that week, the second of which was a not-so-peaceful takeover of the Jewish Temple (Matthew 21:1-13). So again, would Jesus' brothers have been justified to interfere with what he was doing, or did Jesus have a destiny that needed to be fulfilled, a path to walk that his brothers did not understand? It may be the same with everyone. Our brother's or sister's path may be obscure to us, and yet it may be a very important path from the vantage point of Creator or the Spirits.
4. **Teaching or Mentoring Relationships?** An indigenous teacher or mentor will generally understand that the best she or he can do is to help, in some small way, to facilitate the self-directed learning of those seeking knowledge or wisdom. Rote learning or memorization has never proven to be an effective way to learn the real lessons of life. Also, asking

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questions of mentors, hoping for pat answers, may not be the best approach. When questions are asked within indigenous mentoring relationships, they should be well thought out and, in the case of traditional American Indians, accompanied with a gift of tobacco. Generally, indigenous teachers or mentors understand the effectiveness of sharing knowledge or wisdom in small doses, allowing for freedom and divergence of thought. Often, something will be intentionally left out of an indigenous teaching, with the expectation that the one being taught or mentored will fill in the gap on his or her own or with help from guiding spirits. Those mentoring in traditional indigenous ways and practices are not expected to do and think exactly as their mentors. It is hoped that, with help from guiding spirits, they will advance beyond their human mentors.

5. **Employer-Employee Relationships?** Given the current level of economic colonization, it is difficult even to imagine indigenous employer-employee relationships governed by the harmony ethic. To begin with, such a relationship would have to be completely reciprocal, with the employee working to the best of her or his ability and being paid what his or her work is worth. This is contrasted with the colonized system which has the employer retaining most of the value of the employee's work according to a profit motive which is simply an excuse for theft and grudgingly giving some of the earnings to the employee after holding them, perhaps even drawing interest on them for from two to four weeks. In reality, colonized employer-employee relationships are most often simply slavery by another name. My other thought concerning employer-employee relationships governed by the indigenous harmony ethic is just this: When a person is given a task to do, they should also be afforded the freedom to do that task, not hovered over and criticized, unless of course, they are endangering someone's life or well-being. This is true not just of employer-employee relationships but also of teaching or mentoring relationships and even of parent-child relationships where harmony, respect and freedom of choice are valued.
6. **Enemy or Adversarial Relationships?** Taiaiake Alfred, in his book *Wasase*, draws a distinction between the words "enemy" and "adversary" when applied to an opponent, saying essentially that the word "enemy" implies hatred while the softer word "adversary" allows for compassion and hope of transformation (p. 202). There are those who assert that "All is fair in love and war." This was never the indigenous way. Applying the harmony ethic to adversarial relationships effectively rules out total war, killing of women and children and other non-combatants, destroying of crops, livestock or prey animals and food stuffs in attempts to wipe out a people or commit genocide. The harmony ethic would, of course, preclude all bombing of civilian targets, as happens so often in modern warfare, even if some dishonest war-criminal or an imperialistic politician says it will shorten the war and save lives. As I have been taught, Cherokees traditionally do not pray for victory in warfare, as to do so would be to ask Creator or the Spirits to take sides in a human conflict. We do not pray for victory but only for courage. Also, to disparage an adversary or enemy is to disparage ourselves. To dehumanize others is to dehumanize ourselves. We are all related. Is it not more honorable to

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be in conflict with a worthy adversary? Disparagement and dehumanization of those deemed enemies is the very thing that enables human beings to commit genocide and other atrocities.

Recently I heard about a rancher in Texas who kills every rattlesnake he sees. "Those snakes just want to bite me," the man asserts, "so I shoot them on sight." Most people are surprised to hear that killing snakes, especially hog-nosed snakes, copperheads and rattlesnakes, is taboo for Cherokee people. It is said that when a person kills snakes, he will see more snakes, and snakes may even haunt that person's dreams, driving him crazy or making him sick. When I see a snake, especially a copperhead or rattlesnake, I speak to that snake, saying something like this: "Our people are not at war, but let's keep our distance." I seldom see a poisonous snake, but that rancher in Texas sees them all the time! Now, there are peoples in the Earth, right now, today, who think so little of each other they have forgotten they are related and basically think of each other as snakes. They don't seem to understand that the more violence they enact toward the other, the more violence the other will enact toward them. So, they just keep perpetuating the violence. Sometimes the harmony ethic requires us to keep our distance, at least until we and the other can settle down and remember that we are all related, relearning how to co-exist alongside one another, peacefully and respectfully.

7. **Predator-Prey Relationships?** As a young man, I thought of myself as a skilled hunter. I could stalk to within shooting range of any squirrel I could see or hear while in the woods, and with my auto-loading .22 rifle, I was a crack shot. One Saturday, I walked into the woods with my friend, Kevin. Pausing for a moment, I pulled back the lever of my rifle to chamber a shell. Then, dropping the 10-shot clip from the receiver and taking from my pocket a box of .22 ammunition, I replaced the shell that had just been chambered. This gave me 11 shots at the ready instead of 10. Leaving Kevin at a likely spot, I moved on, walking toward the North, deeper into the woods. Before long, I saw a big, red, fox squirrel run down the trunk of a hickory tree just ahead of me and a little to the right. After loping along the ground for a few yards in the direction of the West, the squirrel turned toward me and stood straight up on his back feet. No more than 30 feet away and directly to my north, the squirrel stood motionless, just watching me, as I slowly lifted my rifle. Centering the cross-hairs of the telescopic scope on the squirrel's head, I took a breath, let half of it out, held steady and squeezed the trigger. The sharp crack of the rifle broke the stillness of the woods, as I caught a whiff of burned powder. But, to my surprise, the squirrel did not drop dead as expected. After looking at me a second longer, the squirrel dropped on all fours to scamper a little ways toward to West before returning to the the same spot where, once again, he stood on his hind legs, watching me. This time I centered the cross-hairs on the squirrels chest, thinking that perhaps the scope was a bit off, causing me to shoot high. Crack! The report of the rifle broke the silence again. Still unharmed, this time the squirrel moved toward the East, where he sniffed momentarily around the trunk of the tree he'd come from earlier, before returning again to same spot directly to the North of me. There he stood again, just watching me, completely

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unconcerned. Crack! And, once again, the squirrel moved to the West only to return and stand in the same spot. Crack! And, the squirrel moved back to the East before returning once more. Crack! Crack! Crack! Three more shots rang out, and the squirrel dropped, dead.

Approaching and lifting the squirrel from the leaves, I took out my knife and field-dressed him, removing his insides. I hung his body from my belt by way of a freshly-cut green twig inserted through his back legs. Then I thought, "Oh, I need to reload." Taking a box of .22 ammunition from my pocket, I counted out seven shells. I dropped the clip from the rifle and inserted one shell. I started to insert a second shell but it would not go in. "What's this?" I thought. "Now, there's something wrong with my clip; the spring is stuck or something." So, I unloaded the clip - one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10 shells. The clip was full! Shaken, I walked back through the woods to find my friend, Kevin. "Come on, it's time to go," I said.

"What's going on?" Kevin asked. So I told him about shooting seven times at a squirrel, being sure that I had shot seven times, depressing the trigger each time, hearing each shot, and yet, in the end, only one shot having been fired. "I heard only one shot," Kevin said and added, "You are one *crazy* Indian, and if I was you, I wouldn't tell that story to anyone else." For a long time, I *didn't* tell the story to anyone else. Recently, when I have told the story, some of my friends have offered "logical explanations", none of which hold up. The rifle did *not* misfire. Had it done so, each time I would have had to pull the lever back, ejecting the misfired shell and chambering a new shell before depressing the trigger another time. No, there are only two explanations for what I experienced that day. The first is that I am indeed "one crazy Indian", and like as not, some of you are thinking that is most likely. The other explanation is that the Spirit of the Squirrel decided to teach me something that day. Certainly I have not looked upon hunting in the same way since. Rather than seeing hunting as some sort of test of skill or contest between the hunter and the hunted, I now see hunting as a relationship in which some species give of themselves in order that other species may also continue in the Earth. For all the hunter skill and savvy we may think we have, the animals we hunt have spiritual power to give themselves or to not give themselves. As a young man, I needed to be reminded of that.

We Cherokees have a story of a time long ago when, much like today, human disrespect was endangering all life in the Earth. The animals decided to teach humans respect through the agency of introduced diseases and maladies. The deer sent word to the humans of the new treaty we would be obliged to live by. Due to our pitiful nature, humans would be allowed to continue killing some deer each year, but only what is needed for food, NEVER FOR SPORT. Furthermore, a human hunter, upon killing a deer, is required to show respect for the spirit of the deer by asking the deer's pardon and making a proper tobacco offering. And so, Little Deer, the chief and guardian of all the deer will come. Swiftly and invisibly he will come to the place where the deer has died. Gently he will bend down over the blood. He will ask the spirit of the slain deer, "Did this hunter treat you with respect? Did he beg your pardon? Did he

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offer tobacco?"

If the answer is, "Yes," all is well, and Little Deer will go on his way. But if the answer is, "No," Little Deer will track that hunter to his home. There, Little Deer will strike that hunter with rheumatism, so that he may never hunt again!

Colonized people often exhibit discomfort or angst over killing animals for food. Some deal with the discomfort by disrespecting animals, promoting ideas, some of them religious, some of them pseudoscientific: that animals were created solely for the benefit of human beings, that animals do not have spirits or souls or intellect or reasoning ability or feelings or spiritual power or wisdom, that animals are simply raw material to be disposed of in accordance with human will. Another way colonized people attempt to deal with discomfort over killing animals for food is by becoming vegetarians or vegans. While this second way may be somewhat better than the first, both ways deny very ancient and complex predator-prey relationships.

8. **Gathering Wild Plants?** According to the old story, when the animals introduced diseases into the human population, the plants elected to give of themselves to heal those diseases. Each plant agreed to heal at least one disease or malady. The humans would simply need to ask in a good way. As I have been taught, when gathering medicinal herbs or wild plants for food or any other purpose, one should pass by the first seven plants of that species that are encountered and take the seventh, after seeking permission and leaving a gift of tobacco. Often today, people go to herb shops to purchase herbs for medicinal use. Herbs gathered in a good and respectful way by the person needing them or by a traditional healer seeking to help someone will be far more effective. Herein lies the value of the good and proper relationship.
9. **Collecting Rocks?** Whether collecting rocks to heat for use in a sweat house, crystals for use in ceremonies or healing, pipe-stone, stones to be used in jewelry, small stones for a medicine bag or rocks or stones for any other purpose, as I have been taught, one speaks to the spirit of the rock to ask whether that rock wants to be moved. If assent is given, a gift of tobacco is left behind as the rock or stone is taken. Never spoken to or listened to a rock before? Open your spiritual ears and don't be surprised by what you learn.
10. **Gardening and Farming?** Indigenous farming practices involve raising plants as they like to be raised, in close proximity or companionship with other plants they like to be around, while moderately controlling the growth of plants they don't like to be around. An indigenous garden may seem overgrown from the colonized point of view. A certain amount of weeds may be healthy, and truthfully, every weed is beneficial in some way. That doesn't mean indigenous gardeners and farmers don't cultivate and hoe or weed. However, plants have their own toxins. Plants put herbicidal toxins or growth inhibitors into the ground, and plants also have insecticidal toxins. If you cultivate and weed too closely or use commercial or even organic insecticides and weed killers, plants quickly lose their natural protective abilities and hardiness. For example, the nicotine in tobacco is the tobacco's own natural insecticide. It is OK to pick

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horn-worms off tobacco plants, but eradicating all horn-worms will make tobacco weak in just a generation or two. A few horn-worms are needed to keep the tobacco strong. Heirloom strains of corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, tobacco and other crops passed down through indigenous families are far more hardy and insect resistant than strains of even the same or similar varieties purchased from seed companies. It only takes a couple of generations of pampering plants through use of insecticides, herbicides and commercial fertilizers to undo thousands of years of conditioned hardiness.

A person's lawn is a good gauge of their level of colonization versus indigeneity. Is the lawn all of a single variety of grass, closely cropped and without weeds? This would indicate a high value placed on control and a basic attitude of conquest or "war with nature," which are colonized tendencies. On the other hand, does the lawn contain a diversity of primarily native grass species with one or more varieties of clover along with dandelions, plantain, chickweed and other plants considered weeds by colonizers, even though colonizers introduced many of these "weeds"? Furthermore, is the lawn mowed infrequently enough to allow for grasses and other plants to recover and actually to reseed themselves? If the lawn is in a more arid or desert area, are the plants in the lawn either native or well enough adapted that they do not need to be watered, i.e. sagebrush, cacti, succulents and rocks? All this would indicate high value placed on diversity and freedom, a basic respect for all creation; these are indigenous tendencies. And, some of you thought it was just laziness!

- 11. Pets and Livestock?** In comparison with Europeans, Asians and Africans, indigenous peoples of the lands now called the Americas lived with few domesticated animals before the European invasions began. We all had dogs of various types. In South America, there were llamas, alpacas, cavies and chinchillas. It is probable that the harmony ethic actually steered us away from domesticating more species of animals. Why keep animals in confinement when, with less actual labor, you can work in dialogue with the land to improve habitat and increase the ready populations of species with which you have predator-prey relationships? Dogs did not need to be confined, and in truth, humans did not really domesticate dogs. Rather, humans and some wolves entered into long-term relationships, in very ancient times, that gradually altered both species. Indigenous peoples have always adopted many species of wild animals as pets. In the old days, it was common, in Cherokee towns, to see crows, ravens, Carolina Parakeets, raccoons, groundhogs and even black bears living in close partnership with humans, brought home as babies from the woods but not generally confined.

Cherokees took to raising various species of hoofed livestock and poultry shortly after first contact with Europeans. Horses, hogs, sheep, goats, cattle, chickens and even pea-fowl have all been raised by Cherokee for a long time now. As livestock raising developed, in the old days, rather than building fences to keep livestock in, crop fields were fenced to keep livestock out. This open-range way of raising livestock was still in practice up until the early 1980s in the area of Arkansas where

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my mother was born, but nowadays, open-range is pretty much a thing of the past. Everyone claims their own bit of land, and we are obliged to keep livestock from wandering. While we may have to exert some control over livestock and pets, in keeping with the harmony ethic, we remember that less control is better than more control. For instance, keeping chickens on open range is better than keeping chickens in a fenced yard, a fenced yard is better than a coop, a coop is better than small cages. We do the best we can given present circumstances.

12. **Use of Streams and Rivers along with other Use of Water?** It makes me sick to see people running across or even along the bed of a stream in one of those ATVs. Anyone should know better. It is also sickening to see people clearing the banks of streams, farming too close or spraying chemicals that leach into and pollute streams and rivers, or the smoke from coal-burning power plants that deposits mercury into the streams and rivers. Streams and rivers are the blood system of the Earth, and the blood systems of our own bodies, our own veins and arteries are part of this larger blood system, since the same water that flows in the streams and rivers, along with the contaminants, flows through our bodies as well. In the old days, every Cherokee lived close enough to a creek that they could all walk out of their houses in the morning and go to water, giving a gift of blessed tobacco and dipping themselves seven times. This was more than just a bath; it was a reminder that we and that long person, that stream or river, are related, even one and the same. As we wash our bodies in the morning or in the evening, and as we drink, taking water, the blood of the Earth, into our bodies, we need to be ever mindful of this intimate connection. This will go far to eliminate abuse and misuse.
13. **Relationship with the Earth?** One way the harmony ethic is lived out in our relationship with the Earth is by leaving light footprints, taking no more than we need, not wasting or abusing. To begin, we must relearn the difference between necessities and luxuries. Consumer capitalism has served to cloud our perception in this regard; this is a major aspect of colonization. Being exposed on a hill to fast and pray for a few days is a good way to remember what is really needed and what is not. A person being placed on a hill has already gone without food for about a day, in most cases, and so may be thinking about food. Once on the hill, the person begins a *complete* fast, going without both food and water. Before long, the person forgets about food and starts thinking about water. Then, in the night, a thunderstorm may come through with cold, drenching rain and lightning. Any thoughts of water fade away as the person begins thinking about shelter. Shelter, water and food: these are necessities. Air is another necessity. Air, shelter (including clothing), water and food. These are necessities, although even these may be taken in excess. Companionship is another necessity. We humans lose our minds without companionship. Sometimes we lose our minds even with companionship; even so, companionship is a necessity. Everything else is a luxury. Making due and being happy with less, buying less stuff, thinking of ways to use less electricity, less gasoline and less water, recycling, raising our own food or buying locally; all these are ways to lighten our footprints and exercise respect for the Earth, of which we ourselves, the human beings,

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are but one aspect. Here are a few things our household has decided to do, by consensus, to lighten our footprints in the Earth:

- a) Raise, hunt or gather most of the food we eat
- b) Eliminate or severely limit use of herbicides, insecticides, and commercial fertilizers
- c) Give up air conditioning
- d) Use less illumination in the house at night
- e) Put some appliances on power strips, so they may be essentially unplugged when not in use
- f) Use a hand-operated washing machine and hang clothes on a line for drying
- g) Use shower heads that conserve water by being easily turned off while soaping up
- h) Not purchase disposable dishes and wash dishes by hand
- i) Carefully plan and combine trips to town
- j) Mow grass less often

One more thing we are working toward is switching from flush toilets to composting toilets. People have to make up their own minds about such things, but keep in mind, most of these things not only make for lighter footprints in the Earth, they save money. This brings to mind another issue: All things considered, those with less money to spend leave lighter footprints than those having more money to spend, even if they can't afford hybrid automobiles.

Respect and freedom of choice are indigenous values; control of others is a colonized value. Colonized thinking moves people toward maximized control in relationships while indigenous thinking moves people in the direction of respect and freedom of choice.

The English word "please" is short for "if you please." Often people forget even to use the word anymore, much less to remember that this little word is meant as an acknowledgment of the freedom of choice. The Cherokee word "hadanvtesgvi" carries a similar meaning, literally, "what you think." It's a good word to use when making a request, even in our prayers.

As indigenous thinking understands it, there is no proper relationship with Creator, God, The Great Mystery, Deity, The Spirits, The Implicate Order or however one would term it apart from proper relationship with Creation and especially with the Earth in all her aspects, which includes land, water and air, plants, animals, humans, everything.

There is another relationship that is very important, maybe even most important, as it is foundational to all other relationships. The relationship with self. In this relationship, control is properly practiced, as self-control is indeed an indigenous value. Yet, even self-control has its limits. One must not beat oneself up. Self-respect is prerequisite to properly respecting others. Being understanding and kind with oneself allows one to exercise understanding and kindness toward others. Forgiving oneself helps one forgive others. One must love oneself in order to love or even to properly receive the love of others.

Now, here is something else to consider as we seek to decolonize and re-indigenize our relationships: As a child of seven or eight years old, my wife

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Janet had a dream in which she was transported back in time to watch a little girl, of about her same age, riding in a canoe with her parents or grandparents. As she saw them paddling swiftly down a stream or creek, Janet could see this was clearly an Indian family trying desperately to flee from danger. Suddenly the canoe nosed in close to the bank of the creek, and in a language Janet could not understand, the little girl was evidently told to get out of the canoe, since that is just what she did.

Then the perspective changed, for now Janet was the little girl she had only been observing before. Horribly frightened, she was running across a field as fast as her small legs could carry her. There was gunfire, and the sound of cannon fire ripped through the air. Acrid smoke was all around. Breathing hard, running into a building, bending over in an attempt to catch her breath, she heard a voice say, "What's *she* doing here?"

Janet says, "To fully understand relationships, we must take a hard look at abandonment issues and separation anxiety." Warfare rips families, bands and tribes apart. For the indigenous peoples of the lands now called "the Americas," all our families have survived centuries of warfare. Many times, children were separated from parents and extended families as a direct result of warfare. For some tribes, this was followed with the boarding-school era, and then came the 1950's, 60's and 70's, when half the children of some tribes were stolen away and placed in foster care or adopted out to white families. This is called "The Lost Generation." Actually, the boarding-school era and stealing of children was a continuation of the warfare, but the warfare continues. Even today, traditional indigenous families or those doing their best to live out their indigenous traditions, are torn apart generation after generation with every new wave of colonization.

Just as with all forms of grief issues, and this is a grief issue, abandonment issues, undealt with, are a root cause of all sorts of problems: domestic abuse and other criminal behaviors, addictive and suicidal tendencies and general mistrust. Due to difficulty or inability to form and maintain healthy, harmonious relationships, abandonment issues wind up being passed down or inherited, generation after generation. Often, we are so afraid of being abandoned that we either find it very difficult to commit ourselves in any meaningful way to one another at all, or we distance ourselves or abandon others before they have a chance to abandon us. As my friend John James remarked, "Do unto others and do to them first."

Recognizing the problem is the first step to doing something about it. The "lone wolf" lifestyle is not an indigenous pattern of behavior. We must be courageous enough and thick-skinned enough to risk ourselves in proper relationship building and maintenance, even with people who are emotionally wounded and broken, for we are *all* emotionally wounded and broken. Together, we may, at last, begin to heal.