

Prophets and Prophecies

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The Origin of Disease and Medicine from the Cherokee Oral Tradition

According to the old ones, long ago, the humans and other animals got along well and could understand each others' languages. The old ones say the animals of that time were much larger than the animals of today. In fact, it is said that that the animals of today are but shadows of those that once were.

Then there came a time when we humans forgot our place in creation. We lost sight of the fact that we are but one part of, one aspect of the Earth. We began to think that we are all that matters. And so, in that long ago time, we humans began to multiply at an alarming rate, to the extent that it looked as though our cities might cover the Earth, leaving no room for other animals or plants to live. In that time, we humans also began to fashion for ourselves all sorts of weapons: spears and atlatls, bows and arrows, blowguns and traps of all sorts made for the purpose of killing animals. With all these new weapons, humans began killing far more than was needed for food and clothing; the large animals we killed for sport or for trophies. Smaller animals: reptiles, amphibians and especially the many-legged animals such as insects and spiders were often killed from a sense of disgust or from the carelessness of simply not looking where one stepped. Some animals, both large and small, were killed for reasons of irrational fear. Many animals began to die out, and it looked as though all animals would be wiped from the Earth, this to include humans as well, for we humans cannot live apart from the rest of creation. In their concern, the various types of animals began to meet in council.

The first to meet were the bears. Representatives from all the various kinds of bears gathered in their subterranean council house at kuwahi or Mulberry Place with the Great White Bear, unega yona equa, presiding. "What is the problem?" she asked of those gathered.

"The problem is the humans!" the assembled bears proclaimed. "They kill us, not just for food and the warmth of our skins. They kill just to kill, or the kill for fear. Our numbers greatly decrease."

"And with what do the humans kill us?" the Great White Bear queried.

"With bows and arrows," came the reply.

"And of what are their bows made?" she asked.

"The bows of locust wood," the bears responded, "and the strings of our guts!"

As a result of lengthy discussion, it was decided that the bears would make bows and arrows of their own with which to defend themselves from the humans. One bear pushed down a locust tree from which a stave was cut and a bow carved. Another bear sacrificed himself to provide material for bowstrings. When the first bow was made and ready, one of the bears stepped forward to shoot at a target, but it was no good. The bear's long claws kept catching on the string, throwing off his shot, so that sometimes the arrow went this way and sometimes that way, missing the target. At last, his sharp claws accidentally severed the

bowstring. "Maybe you could cut off your claws," another bear suggested. With his claws cut off and a new bowstring on the bow, the bear was able to shoot properly, hitting the target nearly every time. "Now we can hunt the humans!" the bears declared. "See how *they* like it." And with that, the bears all made as if to cut off their claws.

"Wait!" the Great White Bear shouted. "With what do we climb trees? With what do we rip open rotten logs to get at tasty grubs and field mice? With what do we dig medicinal roots from the ground when we are not feeling well? With what do we make our living as bears?" she asked.

"With our claws," the bears replied.

"If we cut our claws," the Great White Bear continued, "we will be no different than the humans. We will no longer be able to live as bears."

Seeing the sense of this argument, the bears abandoned the idea of making bows with which to hunt the humans. The issue of the human problem was tabled for discussion at a later date.

Next to meet in council were the deer, with their chief ahwi usti or Little Deer presiding. Little Deer is a small white buck with a large set of antlers; he most often goes about invisibly but may appear in visible form when he wants to be seen.

After much discussion, the deer determined that we humans are a pitiful people who live by the deaths of others. Even the plants we humans eat must give their lives, as humans can't live on grass and leaves but must eat seeds and roots to get proper, usable nutrition. The deer decided that they were willing to give of themselves to keep us humans from dying out. In return, we humans would be obliged to give respect, killing deer only for the necessity of food and clothing and materials for tools with nothing wasted, never killing for sport or simply for a trophy.

A treaty was drawn up and sent to the humans. From that time until this, whenever a deer is killed by a hunter, Little Deer will come. Swiftly and invisibly he will come. Seeing the blood on the ground, Little Deer will bend low and whisper to the spirit of the slain deer, "Did this hunter show you respect? Did this hunter offer a gift of tobacco? Did this hunter express sorrow and ask your pardon?" If the answer is "Yes," all will be well and Little Deer will proceed on his way. However, should the answer be "No," Little Deer will track that hunter to his home and strike him with rheumatism, that he may never hunt again.

The reptiles and the fish met together in council. The fish charged that we humans had been taking more than needed for our sustenance, sometimes fishing in disrespectful ways, even to the extreme of poisoning isolated pools as the water level of streams and rivers went low. The snakes complained of humans killing snakes as a result of unreasonable and prejudicial fear. "The last thing we want is to waste venom on a human, the snakes commented; you can't swallow one. We object strongly to being stepped on, but when we give warning as clumsy humans blindly walk our way, the humans kill us rather than simply going around or walking away.

It was decided that those humans who took more fish than needed or who fished in disrespectful ways would be plagued with dreams of eating rotten and stinking fish, thus ruining their appetites. Those who killed snakes would be subjected to horrifying dreams of many snakes striking and biting them, and even in their waking hours, they would see more snakes than were encountered before the offense.

Finally, representatives of all the smaller animals, including birds, insects and creeping things met together in one great council to discuss the human problem. The grub-worm presided at this council, since his people were among those most oppressed by us humans.

“First,” the grub-worm began, “we must determine if there *is* a problem.” With this, the talking stick was passed. The first to speak was the toad.

“I’ll say there’s a problem!” the toad exclaimed. “The humans hate me. They say I am disgusting. When they see me, they kick me or step on me or throw rocks at me. Just look, I’m covered all over with bumps.”

The talking stick was then passed to jisquaya the sparrow who said, “The human boys shoot me with darts and hold me over the fire until my feathers are singed and my feet burned off. They go so far as even to steal the eggs from my nest. If something is not done, not one of us will be left alive.”

And so, the talking stick went around the circle with one animal after another complaining of oppressive treatment received at the hands of us humans, but then it was the chipmunk’s turn to speak, and the chipmunk, being too small to be hunted by the humans for food and too fast to be stepped on, could not think of anything bad to say about the humans. The other animals, having all received such outrageous treatment from us humans, became so infuriated with the chipmunk that they jumped on him, viciously scratching him down his back. The marks are there to this day. Finally, consensus was reached that, indeed, there was a human problem.

The talking stick was passed again, this time to brainstorm ideas of what to do about the human problem. All sorts of solutions were offered, but agreement was finally reached that each type or species of animal would inflict the humans with at least one disease or ailment. In this way, most of the humans would be killed with the remainder hopefully learning some respect. The stick was passed one last time to give each each animal opportunity to describe the affliction their species would prepare for humankind. Every disease and malady from cancer to p.m.s. was offered by the animals in that circle. Listening to the descriptions of all the diseases and ailments, the grub-worm began to giggle. Finally, he laughed so hard he fell over backwards and crawled away. The grub-worm has been crawling around on his back, laughing at us humans, ever since.

As predicted, most of the humans died. It looked like maybe all of us would die out. Then the plants met in council. Taking pity on us humans, the plants determined that each type or species of plant would give itself to cure or alleviate at least one human disease or ailment. Even those plants which humans have disrespectfully called weeds would provide cures. To learn what plant or plants will cure a particular disease, all we humans have to do is ask in a respectful way and carefully listen for the answer.

Some Sayings of isga gua ᏓᏍᏉ JD the Chickamauga Cherokee Prophet also known as Clear Sky, born about 1760

Clear Sky or isga gua accurately foretold the Louisiana Purchase, the New Madrid Earthquake, the Civil War and the Dust Bowl. He also foretold the putting to sleep and reawakening of the Sacred Fire. Many of his sayings have been passed down through our Chickamauga Cherokee people. We do well to pay attention to what he had to say.

Clear Sky on the Importance of Listening to the Children

Will not even the greatest of nations fall when they do not heed the words of their children? Both strong forts and fine homes will perish in angry flames, leaving ashes.

Excerpt from a Clear Sky Prophecy of 1817 Foretelling the Possibility of Human Extinction

....Yo! Ho! Listen with open ears to the will of Creator most noble. Yo!.... "Listen, I vow to you that unless you heed my words and take up this New Road of universal brother/sister-hood, learn again to love and live in peace, to cease over-kills of the game and forests, allowing room for all men and creatures to live in comfort and dignity, you as a people shall give way to others and cease to exist. I will eliminate race after race until I bring up a people who will live as I so instruct! I vow if no human race or nation meets my instructions, I will remove humankind from this world and make to myself a new creature to take your place."

Excerpt of a Clear Sky Prophecy Foretelling a Possible Time When "Not Even the Plants Will Aid Us"

We have heard it before, when in the times of the beginning, the animals punished our grandfathers for greed and only the plants came to defend mankind, and how the Lucky Hunter punished the twins for making sport of their prey. I tell you that unless our hunters and the yonegwa (whites) repent, that not even the plants will aid us. Yo! I speak true. I am but a messenger.

Have you ever wondered why a dollar bill is called a "buck"? During Clear Sky's time, deer hides came to be used almost as a form of currency in trading posts frequented by Indian people. Asking the proprietor, "How much for this cook-pot? or, "How much for this rifle?" the reply would have been something like, "Ten bucks," or "Twenty bucks," meaning the number of deer hides it would take to purchase the item. Succumbing to this economic colonization, many, maybe even most of our Cherokee people broke our solemn treaty with the deer. Deer carcasses were left rotting in the forests as the economically valuable hides were stripped off to trade for whatever the white man said we needed. Such is the historical context of this prophecy. Even so, from that day to this, most still refuse to respect the animals and plants upon which our lives depend. The bears have met again at kuwahi to discuss, once more, a solution to the human problem.

Clear Sky on the Slumber and Reawakening of the Sacred Fire

This is what the old ones say to the ones with open ears to hear them: Ho! They speak to me from the dream. Soon the Fire will slumber and will be reawakened in a new bed in the land of early twilight forty generations from now. There, it will shine forth, drawing our people from out their hiding places of the dark wilderness of stone towers. Happily, many will be drawn to Him and the people of the Flame shall draw strength from Him.

Seven generations shall build, when the smoke of their towers will blacken the sky. Men and women of knowledge will say, "Ease off your filthy ways, so that the sky will not become so dark that the Sun is blackened." Five generations

shall build, and men and women of knowledge will say, "Cease your filthy ways, for you are poisoning the water with unnatural filth, and your cattle urinate into the rivers!" But, unless the grasping ones awake, woe to them all, for He of the White Fire will spread out from His hearth and consume his houses, his towers, his barns and trading houses. His warehouses shall burn as with lightning, leaving his gold too hot to ever hold.

Then soon comes down hot, burning rains and storms. Twisters shall walk all over this land, and the angry sea shall over-wash the low places! Yo.

Ha! Listen, you of the open ears, you of the White Fire. Be foreknowing ones. Keep beside my reawakened Fire. Keep your hands clean and white. Do not be like the greedy, filthy ones. Keep the Earth clean. Keep the air clean. Do not defecate or urinate into my rivers. Do not burn unnatural filth into the air. Live in clean and natural ways. Do not cut down but few trees nor over-stress my creatures. Walk in the pure path and I will spare you few who listen.

When the Fire burns away and the smoke chokes and the twisters and the sea rage and the mountains clash together, the grasping ones are then nearly destroyed! Yo! Ha! Then, the old ones whisper to me, the ice and cold shall descend and cover this benighted land, leaving only those natural people beside seven White Fires, sparing those, but the ice will put out the avenging Flames from all about. The cold shall be the Great White She Bear come down to chastise men, and where she walks will be made pure and clean again. Yo!

Ha! Listen, you who would know the warnings of the Elders. It comes surely, lest hearts are amended. Yo! Ha! When Grandmother Bear again withdraws to her den in the Far North to sleep, then shall the ice again melt away, leaving this Turtle Earth to become green and pleasant again.

Then the peoples of the Flame shall see coming up from the South lands a natural brown people come up to rejoin with them to be one people of Monole, the Good Turtle Earth Mother. Yo!

In the face of genocidal oppression, including laws against indigenous ceremonial practice and, in the State of Missouri, even a law against Indian residency, Chickamauga Cherokees living in Missouri and Arkansas continued keeping the Sacred Fire or *ajila galvquodiyu* until the spring of 1918 when the Fire was put to sleep. The Sacred Fire was reawakened in 1993, following only three generations of slumber rather than forty. Why the discrepancy? Some say the spirits have a different perception of time, difficult to translate. Some say that although the spirits may accurately foretell certain events, no one, not even the spirits, can accurately set a time schedule for future events, there being so many variables involved. It could also be that, in this case, the need for awakening the Sacred Fire was so dire that the time was shortened by the spirits who actively sought out and prepared people to bring back and maintain the Sacred Fire. As for the Sacred Fire spreading out to consume the houses, towers, barns, trading houses, etc. of the "grasping ones," well, the present alarming increases in wildfires, tornadoes, floods and hurricanes are the direct and predictable result of humans burning "unnatural filth into the air," forgetting, once again, our place in creation. I think this prophecy is best understood in terms of a very real and sentient spiritual force radiating outward to restore balance in the Earth. Restoration of balance has always been the essential purpose of indigenous ceremonial practice. The wise will take heed.

The following was said or written by gojinosta digadahladv AḥZᵒᵓW Ḑᑖᑖᑖᑖᑖ or Elmer Casteel, Chickamauga Cherokee Medicine Man and Culture Bearer from Wright County, Missouri, sometime in the 1960s or 70s:

Be totally aware of and support the environmental movement that is gaining attention these days. It is an ancient belief among our tribal people that is just now being born among the white Americans, that we ought not harm the Earth, i.e. Monole Elohi Daksi —Grandmother Earth Turtle, that we must indeed actively protect and sustain her, that we do nothing that would harm our descendants or their resources, ever, to the seventh generation!, to consider our present actions to how their results will impact the world and our offspring that far into the future.

Also, in our ancient mindset, we recognize that we are related to all of life – brothers and sisters to mammals, birds, fish, salamanders and lizards, even insects. Therefore, as their siblings, we need to leave habitats and sustenance for them too.

We, they, the forests, grasses, mosses, brush and all are born of this Earth, watered by her streams, breathe her winds and are nursed by her soil and energized by Grandfather Sun. So, we are all related. If we damage these things, we do violence to ourselves and our children.

Live cleanly, share, give up greed and step lightly upon the Earth!

A Few Notes About Prophets and Prophecies

Prophets seldom refer to themselves as such. They are known by their actions.

A prophet speaks the truth, either as forthtelling (speaking of the present) or as foretelling (speaking of the future – of that which *will be* or, alternately, of that which will be *if* present circumstances do not change or a change of path is not inaugurated). A prophet speaks the truth knowing it may not be popular or well received.

A false prophet courts favor, saying what people and especially those in high seats of imperial power structures want to hear.

Most often, the truth a prophet speaks may be easily ascertained or discerned by simple observation and by carefully listening to the spirits – in other words, by looking outside at all that is and by looking inside, to the heart of hearts where all is one. And so, a person hearing a prophecy may have a sense that, deep down, they already knew....

And yet, previously held notions, assumptions, beliefs and dogmas may blind the eyes to present revelation of truth. Also, firmly entrenched habit or lifestyle may make reception or acceptance of a truth unpalatable or inconvenient. For these reasons and maybe others besides, a prophecy may be despised and scoffed at. On the other hand, when the truth spoken is so evident as to be unassailable, the messenger is attacked rather than the message.

While some are scoffing at the prophecy or ridiculing the prophet, others make a show of receiving the prophecy. These may nod their heads or applaud in agreement, but unless or until their lives change, they have not received the prophecy any more than the scoffers.

After traveling from Sweden by sailboat, standing to speak at the United Nation's Climate Action Summit in New York on September 23, 2019, sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg said,

You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet, I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you! For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight. You say you hear us and that you understand the urgency, but no matter how sad and angry I am, I do not want to believe that. Because, if you really understood the situation and still kept on failing to act, then you would be evil, and that, I refuse to believe.... There will not be any solutions or plans presented in line with these figures here today, because these numbers are too uncomfortable. And, you are still not mature enough to tell it like it is. You are failing us, but the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you, and if you choose to fail us, I say, We will never forgive you.

My son nvya says, "The scoffers are more honest than those who applaud and do nothing." He may have something there. Hopefully, when the scoffers wake up and change their minds and hearts, they will also change their actions.

It is easy to look at prophets of past generations or of past ages and say, "While others were scoffing or seemed to agree yet did nothing, had I been around then, I would have received and acted on that prophecy."

It is also easy to say, "Change must come on a grand scale; I can do nothing on my own." Yet, real change always comes from the common people, the real people. So called government and imperialistic leaders seldom, if ever, initiate anything, at least not anything good. Real change is in the hands of the real people.

So what can I do? What can we do? We can each one look to own lives, our own habits and lifestyles and ask ourselves, "What can I do or stop doing to make my footsteps lighter? What can I do or stop doing to lessen my use of fossil fuels? What can I do or stop doing to lessen my waste of food and other gifts of the Earth? What can I do or stop doing to lessen the amount of trash I generate each week? What can I do or stop doing to demonstrate respect for the water, the air, the Earth and all the peoples of the Earth: two-leggeds, four-leggeds, many-leggeds, no-leggeds, standing ones, long people, all that is, all who live, breath and have being?"

If I can think of nothing, I had better think again! And, after implementing the changes in habit and lifestyle I need to make, the decolonization I need to implement, for that is what this is, I need to ask myself the hard questions again and again, making further changes, continuing to make changes, to decolonize, one step at a time. "What can I do or stop doing that will benefit the seventh generation or help to make a seventh generation a possibility? In this critical time, if I can think of nothing, if I make no changes, my children's children's children will have every right to stand and curse me in their day."