

Something big is coming.
It's still a secret, but arriving everywhere.
The atmosphere is charged with longing and searching.
The pilgrims and the mystery-lovers know.
They are gathering now
The sound of prayer drifts across the dawn.
It's All Peoples,
All mingled
All religions
All this singing
One Song.

In the Wake of Standing Rock

The Power of Prayer, the Promise of Ancestral Healing and the Peril of Inaction.

Yes, Something big did come. It came at Standing Rock and it's no secret anymore. The Lakota came, the Dakota came, the Nakota came, the Cherokee, the Navajo, and the Ojibwe came, the Menominee came, the Seneca came, the Onondaga and Anishinaabe came. Over 280 tribes from all over the Earth came. All five colors of people came. Over 500 clergy from all different religions came. Veterans came, Hippies came. **The pilgrims and the mystery-lovers came.** Thousands and thousands and thousands of people came to North Dakota to stand with Standing Rock, to withdraw the social mandate for fossil fuel extraction, to guard the rights of indigenous people so long trod upon and to give voice to the transformation of humanity in which we find ourselves.

They came together and prayed. They drummed and danced and they sang One Song. And across the world, millions and millions like you and I joined these indigenous leaders and allies in that prayer for peace, that prayer for protection of our Mother Earth and for basic respect for the ways of a people that have been victimized by the dominant culture for over 500 years. Against guard dogs and rubber bullets and mace and sound cannons and water cannons and freezing cold temperatures, the Water Protectors stood strong. They stood strong for all of us and for the Next Seven Generations and in the massive wake from this action we find lessons about the **power of prayer, the promise of ancestral healing and the peril of inaction.**

Some Native elders say what happened at Standing Rock resulted from peaceful direct action fueled by the **power of prayer.** **The air at Standing Rock was indeed filled with a prayer** and that prayer has been unbroken for thousands of years. When I say prayer, many Unitarians go headed for the hills and there are as many ideas about prayer as there are people in this room. Today is an invitation to think of prayer in a different way. Just imagine we have one hand holding on to the ideas of

peace and unity and love which are connected way, way, way back to the first time that the energy of peace, unity and love were felt and desired for all of this creation. Even in the strife of today this connection to these immortal concepts can stay intact and with the other hand, we do our work in this world amidst the chaos. When our actions are in alignment with these ideals intentionally and when we have gratitude for the happenings in life, we are 'walking in a prayer'.

When we live our lives this way, everything that is based on fear shows up and stands out for healing. So I actually take all the fear-inducing happenings today as a good sign that more, more and more people are walking around able to bring compassionate action to these very places. This awakening will inevitably lead to many strands of ancestral healing because the ramifications of these deep wounds of genocide, slavery and lack of integrity are becoming more clear than ever before and because we know more deeply that that which was visited upon previous generations sits within the current collective heart and soul in a very real way and must be healed. Where do we go from here?

In a sweat lodge at Standing Rock, a young Dine woman (Lyla June Johnston) poured the water for a group of people. She spoke of her healing journey as a Native American woman and the trauma she experienced as victim of sexual abuse. She spoke of the ancestral trauma of her People, who were systematically eliminated by the European colonizers. She also spoke of the people that came from Europe, fresh from generations of torture, rape and murder in their own countries, including the killing of millions of women for being witches. She spoke of the herstory which has been crushed and lost. She said that Western ancestral healing cannot occur until there is an honoring of the true partnership between the feminine and the masculine. I believe this is true and I believe that those who are living now are surely called to "live for the ages", for humanity beyond our own ego needs. We will be remembered for light we shine out of this darkness into the next seven generations. Let us shine...bigly.

In Germany, they have come a long way in the reparations for the wounds inflicted in the Holocaust. Over the years, billions of dollars have been paid to holocaust survivors and their families. Monies could never wipe out the horror of that time but at least the very real financial

impacts can be dealt with. It is a journey that begins with sincere apologies. Unbelievably, the United States government has never verbally apologized for the genocide of Native Americans. Maybe this is because we are scared of opening the door to financial reparations or scared of what honoring the over 500 treaties we signed might mean.

One thing I do know is that there is no benefit to white guilt regarding what happened to the First Peoples. In fact, in my experience, natives don't want to hear how you feel so bad about it. That just lays down more heaviness upon them that they do not need. And that story is just for Native Americans. There is an equally complicated and twisted history of non-reparations to Black Americans for the atrocity of slavery. My feeling is when we make right that which is in our past in the best way possible, we can stop making the same harmful mistakes in our present and we can truly love one another. This is the **promise held in ancestral healing**.

At the Black Hills Unity Concert in 2016, Basil Brave Heart and Paul Soderman announced the renaming of Harney Peak to Black Elk Peak after the late Lakota spiritual leader, Black Elk. Mr. Soderman is a direct descendant of General William S. Harney. The Harney name was offensive to some Native Americans because of his role in the 1855 Battle of Ash Hollow where a force of 600 soldiers under Harney's command attacked 250 Sioux and killed 86 of them, including some women and children. A letter from Mr. Soderman in favor of the renaming was among the materials presented to the South Dakota Board of Geographic name changes. I spoke to Mr. Soderman after the announcement. He impressed me as a man with strong convictions and integrity. He told me that sometimes he was mad at his ancestors for leaving him such a mess to clean up and yet he knew the time had come to make these things right.

One of the things that I have been told by friends who are Native American is that they are pleased that I have found things to love about their culture (for instance their drumming rhythms, their ceremonies and traditional designs). They have been very generous in sharing them. At the same time they encourage me to find my own bones and blood. Where did I come from, what are the spiritual traditions of my ancestors' homelands? I took these questions to heart. This has sent me on a deep journey of exploration of my own genealogy, through many generations

of Southern families that definitely include people who owned slaves and killed Indians, all the way back to my Western European and Celtic roots. I found out just last year, that my fifth great grandfather was John Sevier, first governor of Tennessee and a rival statesman of Andrew Jackson. He led many a battle against the Indian tribes of the South-east. He was a man of his times and no doubt he believed that he had the right to do what it took to colonize America based on the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery is a Papal order given in 1493 and unbelievably is still a part of international law today. It gave Christian explorers the rights to “discover” any land that was not inhabited by Christians. This order became the basis of all European claims in the Americas as well as the foundation for the United States’ western expansion.

In 2012, the UUA passed a resolution condemning the Doctrine of Discovery. For the past 45 years, UUs have been rigorously supporting indigenous rights in everything from protesting the use of Native American mascots for sports teams to calling for an apology and financial reparations for our First Peoples nations. It is heartwarming to know all the work that our faith tradition has done. And clearly, there’s plenty more to do.

There are some things that are coming to an end and they will not go quietly. The tyranny of a super-rich elite class, the powers given to corporations to plunder the Earth, a petroleum based economy and non-sustainable living practices. We know these things have outlived their usefulness to us as a people of this Earth. We can now see that they are killing our ability to have a lasting home and of course All Creatures on this Earth are being impacted....This was not understood originally, but now that we have the knowledge, these ways are **still being** fueled by our collective hubris, denial, fear, greed, ignorance, apathy, selfishness and desire for comfort. However, I say to you today, there’s hope. There’s hope because a new dream is coming alive born of the realization that we are all in this together.

This new way of being and thinking requires an upgrade to our mental, emotional and spiritual software. It’s not always easy and doesn’t always feel good. For example, one night, in the middle of a long ceremony, I got upset and started crying and needing attention. The leader came over to me and gave me attention alright. She fanned me lovingly

with a feather and sage and said “We don’t have time for this”. I was kind of stunned and somewhat hurt that she would dismiss my drama with a puff of air and then I realized she was right.

What we no longer have time for is wading around in the personal drama of our past, in petty differences, gossip, victimhood, egoist self-flagellation and aggrandizement or investment in trivia. We have bigger things to care for. We no longer have time for over-focusing on the my, me and mine. We hardly have time to focus on the “ours” and the “we”. Now is the time for the “all”. We are all one. One family of living beings. Not just an interdependent web of life, but a single field of Consciousness of which we are all a part. I’m not saying that we stop our personal healing work. Continue it with a new awareness and new intention grounded in the knowing that when you heal yourself, you are healing that piece for the collective, for the All, in a very real way. Let us be warriors of Love in our own lives! If not now, then when? As always, I teach what I need to learn!

I want to read to you from a packet given out at Standing Rock for non-natives. It can help you know what actions you might want to take.

1. **Know your family’s history** – How did your family end up in the US? Was it through a colonial process or some other way? What was your family’s connection to land, spiritual tradition, and economies?
2. **Know whose land you are on** - In the Southern United States, we are not face to face with many Native Americans because they were forcibly moved west in the 1800s. However, at least know that the land you live on was most probably taken from a Native American. Know which tribe and if they still exist, know where they are now.
3. **Learn together.** Let our learning be personal, emotional, spiritual, embodied and communal. What is your belief about Indigenous sovereignty? Be respectful with spiritual and cultural symbols since appropriation is considered an extension of genocide, forced removals, and land theft
4. **Engage in struggles and build relationships.** There are ongoing Indigenous-led struggles for land and self-determinations taking place all over the Americas and around the world. Not all are looking for help, but many are.

And finally, to the **peril of inaction**. What happens if we do not take action on all these knowings. What happens if we do not make the transition to clean energy, what happens if we don't shore up the integrity of our country in light of our "awarenesses" today? I suppose we can expect for the moral fiber of our country to continue to disintegrate and the livability of our world to continue to diminish. We refuse to act or we fall asleep again at cost to our children and grandchildren and the future of the human race.

Like all of us, I have wondered about my destiny, my mission in life. Now I know that it is part of my calling to make reparations for the wrongs done by my ancestors as well as to celebrate the things of beauty and accomplishment in my lineage. Perhaps you are also hearing the calling of your heart.

Today you can silently ask yourself three questions. Will I say yes to this journey of reparation and respect? Will I say yes to protecting clean air and water? Will I say yes to fully embracing the reality that We Are All One?

Whatever your answer today, Rise up and go on your strange journey and let this day be a new day in your hearts, of love for your ancestors and for the next seven generations and on this day may you dream a new dream of oneness and deep healing. And may you feel the full measure of hope that flows from the bosom of the Mother, herself.

Closing Words: Something big definitely happened and is happening at Standing Rock. It is connected to the very heart of all that is in this world, the soul of this country and the spirit of each of us. All religions, We sing One Song of Love. Mitak-u-ye O-yasin. We are all related.