



SACRED INSTRUCTIONS

Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change

SHERRI MITCHELL

We'na Ha'mu Kwasset (She Who Brings the Light)

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Core Cultural Values

Our grandmothers and grandfathers have taught us everything that we need to know about our rights and responsibilities in this life, in accordance with the Creator's Great Laws. These teachings are beyond the laws of man, incorporating both spiritual and natural law. These laws teach us how to treat one another, how to live in harmony with all living beings, and how to honor and respect the Earth. They teach us that the Earth Mother, and all life that exists upon her, has the same right to live and thrive as we do. They teach us that there is a place within creation for all things, and that all life holds equal value. These laws teach us how to be quiet and listen, to ourselves and others, and how to speak simply, without flattery or exaggeration. They teach us not to chase our life, but to wait for it to reach us with open hands, and how to breathe into the dreams that life reveals to us.

Through the Creator's law, we have come to know that all life is nurtured by the energy of Mother Earth, who is in turn nurtured by the energy of the sun and stars. We have learned to connect with this energy as we bring our creations into form, so that what we conceive will be harmonized with the rest of creation. We are taught that we will never cease to exist, because the roots of our origins stretch all the way back to the beginning of life and are thus woven into the force of life that exists through every dimension of time and space. This knowledge teaches us patience with the unfolding development of human consciousness.

Our sacred instructions are passed from one generation to the next through vibration. They are transmitted through the living stories that spin out of our oral traditions. Our way of life is passed on visually and experientially, through observation of the elders and active participation in our cultural traditions. We learn a great deal by watching the balance of the natural world. And, we see that it is only the human family that has strayed from the laws of creation. We are the ones that are responsible for the brokenness and division that exists in the world, and we are the ones who

must trace our steps back and heal one another and reclaim our place within creation.

Our core cultural values help us to identify who we've been, who we are, and who we will become as a people. These values are constant and unchanging, and they guide our relationships and the work that we do in the world. They are transmitted behavior patterns that influence all aspects of life, from art, beliefs, and thought processes to structures of government. As tribal people, our lives and our systems are based on these values. They are shaped around a core understanding of our kinship and interconnectedness, and based on concepts of reciprocal sharing and inclusivity. We believe that life cannot be separated into individual compartments. There is no hierarchy of value that sets one part of creation above the other. Our beliefs are based on equanimity within the whole of creation.

There is a great difference between the cultural values associated with the Euro-American society and the values that are held by Indigenous peoples. It may help us to look at these differences as we chart a path forward, so that we can decide which values are more closely aligned with the future that we hope to create.

The chart below highlights some of the value differences that we have been navigating for the past six hundred years. When we look at this chart, it's easy to see how the contrast in these basic values has influenced the conflicts that we've experienced, and how the values held by the larger society have led to division, breakdown, and destruction of our key relationships, including our relationships with Mother Earth and the rest of creation.

Native American Values	Euro-American Values
communal	individual
elders	youth
cooperation	competition
patience	aggression
listen	speak
harmony	conquest
humility	arrogance

sharing	saving
inclusive	exclusive
wholeness	fragmentation
collaborating	winning

Communal versus Individual

The Indigenous way of life has always been communal. Today, our tribe still lives communally, for the most part. Our lands are held in common by the tribe. Individual families are able to hold individual plots of land, but those lands can never pass to the ownership of anyone outside the Tribe. The same is true for our business enterprises, when the tribe makes an investment, the entire community benefits from the profit. We have community health services and community gardens. We pass our laws at general meetings, where the entire community is allowed to speak and vote. Everything from resources to decision-making is shared equally among tribal members. Though there are still glitches to overcome, this communal system is in alignment with the core values that we hold.

Communal living is based on group philosophy. The central goal is to provide for the needs of the entire group, rather than the desires of individuals. Communal living allows for human connections to solidify and a sense of belonging to take root. The individualized lifestyle associated with the Euro-American dream is connected to isolation, individual ownership, and the accumulation of individual wealth. It encourages the pursuit of wealth at the expense of others, and causes division.

Communal living is also both cost- and resource-effective. There is a lot less waste involved in communal living, as resources are shared among all members of the community. For example, a person living alone tends to waste a lot food. If they have a garden, it may produce more than the individual can use. The same is true for food bought in prepackaged portions. In those instances, what's not used by the individual generally gets thrown out. However, if they live in community with others, the food is shared among community members, and the waste is reduced or eliminated.

Living individualized lives has furthered the division between us, increased consumption and waste, and set the stage for competition. A number of the social problems that we face could be addressed through a return to communal living. Living in community allows us to share our skills, resources, and burdens and dramatically reduces the amount of waste that we create. It also fosters kinship and establishes a sense of belonging. There are a number of ways to build community or engage in communal practices. For example, joining a community garden or establishing meal-sharing schedules with groups of friends; developing child care cooperatives with other parents who work mixed schedules, where parents trade off child care and the teaching of shared values—these are a few of the ways that you can build community. There has been a sharing economy that has been emerging around the world in recent years, where tool and appliance sharing, skill sharing, and time sharing provide the currency that is traded. This eliminates the need for individuals to buy every tool or appliance, to hire experts for everything that they need done, and to invest all of their time attending to the million little details that require our daily attention. All of these things represent a return to community, and a reduction in waste. They also free up time for us to be with one another in more meaningful and focused ways. Look around your area and see if you can find opportunities to join a community operating on these principles. If you can't find one, then create one.

Elders versus Youth

The pop culture's obsession with youth is a complete reversal of the Indigenous value around aging. In the pop culture, youth is viewed as synonymous with life, vitality, and excitement. Being an elder, which used to be associated with wisdom, peace, and a broader perspective, is now mostly associated with death, disability, and decline. As a result, people hide their elders away so that they don't have to be reminded of their own mortality. In doing so, they have separated themselves from the wisdom that they have to offer.

Indigenous cultures have an abiding tradition of respect and honor for their elders. Elders are revered for their wisdom and spiritual insight. Once a person becomes an elder, they have lived long enough to have witnessed

at least three generations of elders before them; the elders of their youth, the elders of their adolescence, and the elders of their adult lives. Therefore, they have an extensive amount of knowledge, history, and cultural value to share with the community. The elders are the guardians of our cultural knowledge. They also hold the structure of that knowledge and determine the form of transmission that is needed to pass that knowledge along.

It's amusing to consider that the founding fathers of this country powdered their wigs to look like elders. They acknowledged the wisdom of age and honored it in their mode of dress. It's also interesting to note that most young people wish they were older. Many imagine that when they reach a certain age their lives will begin. Then they reach that age and their life isn't waiting for them there. People stress over reaching a certain age, and they stress over going beyond that age. All the while, they miss their life in the moment.

There is great benefit in honoring, respecting, and engaging with our elders. They have so much to teach us, including how to navigate the aging process. Our elders are the living carriers of our history. They're the keepers of our traditions and the bearers of our cultural values.

Cooperation versus Competition

In tribal traditions, cooperation is highly valued. Everyone has a skill to share and no skill is better than another. However, cooperation and competition is not an either-or scenario. There were plenty of games that involved competition within tribal traditions. These games often involved cooperation with others to achieve success. They provided an enjoyable opportunity for individuals and groups to hone their skills. The primary difference here is that competition was never a consideration when one's life or livelihood was at stake. When it came to ensuring the survival of each individual and the well-being of the community, cooperation was always the standard.

In the modern marketplace, competition reigns supreme. Businesses constantly work to undercut their competition, often in cruel and cutthroat ways. Those who win at this game seem to have very little sympathy or empathy for those less fortunate. These behaviors and associated belief

patterns have led to our current crisis of hunger and homelessness. In this marketplace, the difference between cooperation and competition means life or death.

Somehow, people have come to value the ability to succeed in the marketplace to a higher degree than all other skills and characteristics. And those who possess these skills have come to believe that winning in the marketplace affords them a greater right to life than those who don't. The current valuation of skills is tied to financial gain and social power. If one's skill set doesn't translate into that type of gain, then their skills, and their lives, are not valued within the society. The implications of this imbalanced view are vast.

In times long past, the skills of all members of society were allotted some value. Though that value may not have been applied evenly, they still provided individuals with some opportunity to barter their skills to meet their basic needs. Today, the disparity between the haves and have-nots is stark, leaving many within our society unable to sustain themselves with any type of dignity.

When competition is connected to the ability to survive, the cost to those who can't compete is death. This is why competition was never connected to survival within tribal communities. The stakes were too high. Competition can be healthy when it's used to sharpen our skills, to improve our ability to solve problems, and to provide better options. Competition that allows us to improve ourselves and our groups is necessary and beneficial, and it also involves a great deal of cooperation. Very little is accomplished without cooperation. Individuals do not hone their skills on their own; they don't determine how to improve our systems without healthy discussion and debate. People tend to reach their highest potential in concert and through contrast with others. Thus, even in the midst of competition, there is an element of cooperation.

When cooperation and competition are balanced, they can help improve our functionality and move us forward. Yet, when they are imbalanced and competition is overemphasized, it becomes dangerous and destructive. Therefore, within the traditional tribal value system, cooperation and competition were carefully balanced and used to determine who was best suited to fulfill particular roles within the community. This process helped

strengthen the entire community by aligning the most competent individuals with the tasks best suited for them. The main focus of competition was to increase the skills of those individuals and to strengthen the community as a whole. It was never used to undermine the well-being of others.

Patience versus Aggression

Patience is the antidote to aggression. Often, when we are faced with uncomfortable feelings, our tendency is to lash out at the people or circumstances that we feel are responsible for those feelings. This is aggression. It is running headlong into the fray. Aggression serves a short-term need to address some conflict or wrong. Yet when we are in the heat of the emotions, our ability to meet the problem with any type of reason is lost. This is where patience is paramount. It offers us the space to meet the problem with balance, or at least some sense of grounding. I can't count the number of times the elders have told me to "do nothing" when I've gone to them with a problem that had me really upset. They'd say, "Just wait, let things settle down, and see what it looks like in a few days." When I listened to them, things always looked different, and I was able to approach the situation with a broader view. When I failed to take their advice, and jumped in headfirst, I always seemed to regret the outcome and ended up having to make amends in some way. The difference here is simple: either you lead with your head and your ego, or you slow down and allow your heart to go first.

Our teachings and our experiences reinforce our ability to be patient. Our teachings tell us that we are connected to the very force of life that has existed since the beginning of time, and therefore we will always exist in some form. We are also taught that the unfolding of human consciousness, like the arc of justice, is long, and supports the continuation of life. Though we may face challenges and obstacles that seem to threaten our lives, we can trust the life force to continue perpetuating itself forward. Those who oppose life aren't just coming up against us, they are coming up against the very force of life. So we can have patience in the work that we do to protect life, knowing that we are supported by the force of life itself in that work. Time is not a consideration. We can make our stand for decades, or centuries, knowing that we are in alignment with a force that is more

powerful than the force we are up against, and knowing that we can safely hand this work off to those who follow, since they are a continuation of that same force of life.

We also have centuries of experience with genocide and oppression, yet we're still here. We are still intact, we are still strong, and we still know who we are within the larger scheme of creation. This too gives us patience for the continued work that we must do. There is also the concept of Indian time, which I spoke of earlier: taking the time to examine an issue from all angles before acting often leads to better decision-making and less aggression. Patience allows us to de-escalate aggression and reduce needless suffering. Aggression tends to be self-duplicating: the more you act out of aggression, the more aggression there is.

It's important to distinguish between reactive aggression, which is what I've been talking about above, and proactive aggression. Proactive aggression is generally only achieved after patience has been practiced. Proactive aggression is based on intentional, well-thought-out action. Taking the time to stop, breathe, walk away, and consider the situation from every angle requires patience. Patience opens the space for good decisions to be made. Patience serves us on many fronts. It allows us to dissolve anger, avoid unnecessary conflict, and reduce regrettable action. Unchecked aggression often causes additional harm to us and to those around us, and leads to greater disharmony and turmoil in our lives. This is why patience is considered a core value.

Listen versus Speak

When you are taught to listen, there are two things that happen: you learn from what is being said, and you learn to be quiet and still. One of the many blessings of my life was being taught to sit and listen to my elders. Not only did I gain a great deal of knowledge from the stories that they shared, but I also learned something valuable by observing the cadence of their speech. In modern-day speech patterns, there is a tendency to jump in whenever there is a pause. Being instructed to sit and listen to my elders, and only speak when they asked me a question, seemed a bit harsh when I was a child. However, this training provided me the opportunity to see what

happens when the pause in conversation is allowed to sit there uninterrupted.

I observed that the long pause ratios in their communication didn't result from a lack of things to say. On the contrary, it was representative of the thoughtfulness that they applied to considering each word spoken. They didn't fill up the space with senseless chatter. When they spoke, there was something meaningful being said. I also noticed that they deliberated over their decisions and tended to make better choices than the choices I would have made had I been given the chance. I realized that the elders tended to make decisions that led to greater long-term benefit, or a more inclusive benefit for everyone involved. In a world that is driven by instant gratification, the experience gained from my time with the elders was invaluable. They had had much more opportunity to deal with the consequences of their choices than I had. As a result, they were able to see the larger implications of their choices, which enabled them to make better choices for themselves and those around them.

The elders that I was blessed to spend time with were also very generous with me. When they made a decision, they often took the time needed to help me understand why that decision was being made. If I complained that their choice would take longer, or require more of me, they helped me see the benefit of the extra time or effort needed, and how it would lead to a better outcome. I believe that these experiences have helped me learn to make better decisions in my life. One easy example is when I spoke to one of my elders about being offered a scholarship to go to law school. I was in my thirties; I was a mom and a wife. I had a good job. I didn't know if I wanted to make the sacrifices required to enter into that program. I'd have to give up my job, move my family to the other side of the country, and invest a considerable amount of money, making it seem like more trouble than it was worth. I explained all of this to my elder. She carefully listened to what I had to say. Then she was quiet for a while. Then she said, "Well, it's very simple really. The time is going to pass either way. At the end of that time, you'll either have something to show for it and a greater capacity to help others, or you'll be in exactly the same place that you're in now. The choice is up to you. But, I think you'll be happier if you have something to show for how you used that time."

She was right; it really was that simple. I could have spun through all the reasons for not doing it until it was too late for me to accept the scholarship. Or I could decide to use that time to improve my skill set and my ability to be of service. Later, she confided that she had allowed opportunities to pass her by when she was younger because she got caught up in the immediate needs that were before her. She focused on the things in her immediate environment and missed the long-term opportunities that were being presented. In hindsight, she was able to see that the time had gone by, and at the end of it she didn't really have anything new to show for it. She was still in the same place she had been in before, responding to the same immediate needs around her. I was able to benefit from that hindsight because I had been taught to listen and to honor my elders.

The pace of conversation today is such that it allows very little time to consider what is being said. Therefore, our conversations are often filled with a great deal of empty content. This leads to people tuning out what others are saying, and missing important relationship cues. When we listen carefully, we are able to decipher what others need. Sometimes people simply need a listening ear, someone who will hold space for them to talk through whatever they are facing. Other times, they need assistance or advice. If you listen long enough, you can generally decipher what those needs are. If you can't figure it out, then ask, and then listen closely to what is being said.

The experience of having to be quiet, listen, and observe helped me understand the value of listening over being heard. It also gave me the confidence to be silent. If we don't have a need to fill up every moment with chatter, we are far more likely to develop meaningful relationships with the people around us. We are also far more likely to develop a meaningful relationship with ourselves and to recognize our inner voice. One of the best things that we can learn to do is to listen. It enhances nearly every aspect of our lives.

Harmony versus Conquest

Peacemaking, or peacekeeping, is a traditional Native American practice that focuses on healing and restoration rather than adversarial or punitive processes. The goal of the peacemaking process is to heal the disharmony

that is causing the dispute or other problematic behavior. The belief is that healthy human beings don't seek to harm others. It is only when there is a state of imbalance or disharmony within them that they behave in harmful ways. The role of the peacekeeper is to restore the harmony and balance within the individuals or groups and then find a mutually beneficial solution, to ensure the long-term safety of everyone involved.

The peacekeeper knew that when you attack others, steal from them, or take their lives, you create greater division, and you place your own people at greater risk of retributive attacks. Therefore, they always sought first to bring about harmony.

The Euro-American viewpoint is steeped in seventeen centuries of conquest. Thus, the response to challenge or dispute is generally to overthrow, subdue, or eliminate. Conquering enemies has become the rallying cry for nearly all aspects of life, from conquering opponents and conquering fears to conquering fat. Conquest has been the mainstay, and it is often equated with valor and success. This pathology, for surely that's what it is, creates disharmony within the individual and in the society, and it creates generations of new adversaries. If we hope to shift from a divisive and adversarial society to one that is more peaceful and harmonious, then we have to make the pursuit of harmony our primary goal.

Humility versus Arrogance

In most tribal traditions, humility is a requirement in a leader. Humility allows you to be open. It allows you to listen to others, to seek out new information, and to be adequately educated or informed. It is believed that humility allows you to see things clearly, whereas arrogance limits your vision.

Today, humility has even greater value, as arrogance has become equated with a false sense of power. In the realm of reality television, arrogantly asserting your position is often enough to warrant a following, especially if that position is in opposition to some other. Being adversarial and boastful used to be considered in poor taste. Today, adversarial communication and boastful assertions are applauded. Possessing accurate information, speaking with honesty, and acting with integrity are less valued than a

powerfully stated opposing view. It doesn't matter if your opposing view is based in fact, so long as you state it emphatically. Because there is very little consideration given to the accuracy of what is being said, people are easily misled and quick to anger when challenged. The tendency toward anger results from the inability to verify the validity of the assertions being given. Rather than having the humility necessary to learn the truth, people instead arrogantly and often angrily attack those who challenge them. The goal is to be viewed as right; actually being right is secondary. This position is very self-serving and dangerous.

True leaders are those who attend to the needs of others. Humility is the foundation of good leadership; it causes you to look away from yourself and recognize your responsibility toward something outside of yourself. Arrogance tells you that you matter most. Arrogant people can't be wrong; they tend to be bullies who want to keep others beneath them, because they need to feel superior. Humility encourages you to bring out the best in others; humble people support and inspire others, because they are seeking to improve things for everyone, not just themselves. In order to be a good leader, or even a contributing member of society, you have to have humility.

Humility is a sign of strength, because there is a willingness to improve that is attached to it. In order for anyone to improve, they must know where improvement is needed. This requires one to be self-aware and self-confident. Arrogance, on the other hand, assumes superior knowledge and leaves very little room for improvement. Therefore, an arrogant person is nearly incapable of reaching their full potential. Arrogance is ultimately a sign of insecurity. It is based on a fear of inadequacy that is so great that it denies all notions of improvement. Arrogance makes you weak by prohibiting your growth.

Many of our tribal traditions are designed to help our young people grow into strong leaders. In that process, cultivating humility is essential. It ensures that our youth will have the capacity to reach their full potential by inspiring them to continue learning and growing throughout their lives.

Sharing versus Saving

When I was growing up, I felt like I had everything that I needed. I never felt that I was lacking or being forced to go without. Not only did we have what we needed, but we had enough to share with others, and others had enough to share with us. It wasn't until I was older that I realized that we would have been classified as poor. I never knew we were poor, because we lived as part of a sharing culture, where everyone shared what they had with others and no one ever went without. In our family, we share everything, even furniture. Every young person starting out from our family can count on having furniture, dishes, pots, and pans. Whatever we buy and no longer need goes into storage until someone needs it. We don't throw it away; we save it for the next person that will need it.

The native concept of saving doesn't equate with the notion of saving that is glorified in the popular culture. In the popular culture, saving is equated with hoarding assets for oneself. The idea of holding more than you need is foreign to most tribal value systems. If you had more than you needed, you gave the excess to someone else to ensure that everyone had enough. It would have been considered shameful to hoard resources while others went without. Yet this is the very structure that we live under today. There are those with extreme amounts of wealth, and others who cannot afford to eat or find shelter. People die with excessive amounts of resources and others die from a lack of resources. It's a truly disgraceful way to live.

If people shared with one another, in the same way that we did within my community, there would be enough for everyone to meet their basic needs. There would be no hunger, no homelessness. People wouldn't have to choose between food and medicine. There is more than enough food being produced to feed every person on the planet. Yet it is not humanely distributed. The sharing economies that I spoke of earlier are in alignment with the Native values on sharing and saving. This is a trend that is worthy of repetition. If more people devised sharing economies in their communities, eventually the whole world would become a more balanced, humane, and equitable place.

Inclusive versus Exclusive

A sense of connection and belonging are essential to healthy development. They build resilience, well-being, and cohesiveness. In order to make

connections and establish belonging, you must be included. In my tribal community, inclusion is built into the culture. Knowledge and decision-making are shared among all tribal members. Multigenerational learning is encouraged as a means of ensuring cultural continuity. We engage in a form of reciprocal inclusiveness that supports every generation within the community. We are raised by our extended families as we grow.

Grandparents, along with aunts and uncles, play a key role in the raising of the children. This creates a sense of belonging that extends beyond the immediate family, informing the child that they are included in a broader web of kinship. Different family members are responsible for teaching the children different lessons. When I was growing up, I had a very close relationship with my grandparents. In many ways, they were the ones who I looked to for guidance. I also had a very close relationship with my many aunts and uncles. They all attended to my needs, disciplined me, and took me on outings. My aunties attended to my internal needs. They negotiated the relationship between me and my mother when I was a rebellious teenager, and they gave me advice on becoming a woman. My uncles taught me practical things, like how to chop and stack wood and play sports. When I became older, I was expected to share what I had learned with the younger generations. Then, when I became an adult, my cousins and I were given the responsibility of giving back the care that was given to us as children by caring for the elders in our family. This not only provided us all with a diverse network of teachers and support, it also helped lessen the burden on our parents, which was helpful because we had a big family.

We lived in an inclusive environment, both within our family and within our community, which established numerous connections and a deep sense of belonging for us all. My siblings and cousins are a very tight group. Whenever we come together for family gatherings, we still share that sense of inclusiveness that we experienced as children. And we always step in to help each other when help is needed, despite any differences that we may be experiencing in the moment. During these times, no one individual feels overburdened. The work is shared among many individuals, and the children are cared for by multiple generations of caretakers. Everyone has the opportunity to feel helpful, and everyone has a chance to feel supported. When I see how we move together during times of crisis, I am always moved by the cohesiveness of our group and the genuine love that we have for one another. I have over sixty cousins, and each one of them holds a

special place in my heart and represents a specific memory in my life. This is an incredible gift, and it was given to me as a result of being raised in an inclusive environment.

Community is formed through inclusion. Exclusivity has a devastating effect on those who are left out or held to the fringes of the community. Those individuals seek alternative social groups that are oftentimes formed around the wound of being excluded, such as gangs or cults. If we look at the profile of school shooters, we tend to see a correlation with exclusion from their peers connected to their behaviors. Justice programs that exclude individuals who engage in negative behaviors may lead to short-term changes in behavior. However, they often lead to more problematic behaviors down the road. Inclusion programs that seek to bring those individuals back into harmony with their communities tend to be successful at changing those negative behaviors for the long term.

Popular society is based on principles of exclusivity. People belong to exclusive clubs. They don't share information on how their jobs are performed. They claim ownership of things and hold them for themselves alone. Does excluding others have a cost? How about being part of a society that is based on exclusion? Psychological research indicates that exclusion has an impact on the perpetrators and the victims alike.

If exposure to ostracism continues over a long period of time, then the individual's resources for coping are depleted, and he or she is likely to experience alienation, depression, helplessness, and unworthiness.¹ It seems that nothing threatens our social nature more than being ignored or excluded or ignoring or excluding others.²

Being part of a group that is instructed or encouraged to exclude others leads to reduced autonomy, and it interferes with the ability to meet one's own psychological needs by denying the benefits of relatedness. The research indicates that there are serious psychological consequences that result from complying with directives to cause social pain through exclusion.³ The cultural value of inclusiveness provides benefits that exceed practicality. It also improves our emotional needs and psychological functioning by allowing us to meet our most basic human needs around belonging and connection.

Wholeness versus Fragmentation

The Indigenous worldview is based on wholeness. My traditional teachings tell me that I am part of one living system, and that the actions that I take within this system impact the whole. This belief is not unique to my tribe, or even to Indigenous cultures. Intact cultures around the world hold a worldview connected to the wholeness of creation. Chief Seattle spoke of wholeness when he reportedly said that “humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things are connected.”

All life is interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated. In the next section, we’ll look at how this truth is translated into the way of life that is held in our traditional values as Wabanaki peoples. For now, it is enough to recognize that we are inextricably connected to all life.

The notion of fragmentation is tied to the ideology of conquest and the Euro-American beliefs on land ownership. The belief that the world is a commercial resource that can be broken into saleable pieces is contrary to the Indigenous belief of the world as the source of our survival. The view of land ownership that only recognizes ownership that is tied to “beneficial use,” and then limits that use to activities that are tied to commerce, is deeply flawed. It eliminates any possibility that the land has value on its own. All of our notions of value are self-centered. We assign value based on the benefit that we gain. We have lost sight of the fact that there is an inherent value in creation that exceeds our own selfish desires. When we break the world into fragmented pieces and separate it from that inherent value, we break something within ourselves.

Fragmentation results from being broken. Our natural systems are designed to function perfectly in relationship to one another. It is only when we break these natural systems down into fragmented pieces that the problems begin. It is like separating the organs in the body and expecting them to stand alone. Without the rest of the body, those organs will fail. We may be able to keep them alive artificially for a short period of time, but eventually they will collapse. It is the same with our natural systems and our societies. When we break them into fragmented pieces, they lose their ability to function in healthy ways, and eventually lose the ability to survive.

In order to survive, we have to become aware of the wholeness that we are connected to. We can't stand too close and begin tearing pieces of it away without knowing how it works. We have to step back and see the larger view. We have to recognize how the entire creation flows together, to understand its interdependence and interrelatedness, and then acknowledge our place within it. Wholeness is not a goal that we achieve. It's not a place that we can get to; it is an awareness that awakens within us. It unfolds slowly before our eyes as we expand our vision to see the larger picture.

To repair our brokenness, we first have to understand how everything fits together when it is functioning properly. This understanding is only offered to us when we have allowed the truth of wholeness to unfold within us.

Collaborating versus Winning

The irony in distinguishing between collaborating and winning is that when you collaborate, everyone wins. The value of collaboration is tied to the understanding that the well-being of the whole lends itself to the well-being of the individual. When we work together, we are able to get more accomplished; we also bring a broader perspective to the work being done, which often results in better outcomes. Collaboration also helps build community and allows you to share resources.

This last section brings us back to the beginning. Collaboration is connected to community, where the needs of the whole, rather than the desires of the individual, form the basis for decision-making. The notion of winning is tied to dominance structures. It requires the formation of hierarchies of power or value. Winner and loser scenarios tend to lead to an escalation of conflict, but not in intuitive ways. One may assume that the loser is the most likely to renew the challenge. Although retributive behavior plays a role, it is often the winner that instigates future contests in order to keep proving their strength and remain on top. Throughout time, the association between winner and loser scenarios and our history of warfare and conquest have left an indelible mark of the psyche of the people, causing them to hold irrational fears associated with losing. An automatic value is attached to winning and losing in the limbic brain, associating winning with life and losing with death. This is what leads some

to believe that they must win at any cost, which often leads to sabotage and other problematic behaviors.

Transitioning from value structures that prioritize individual winners to ones that value collaborative efforts actually makes our communities more secure. It reduces the friction caused by winner-loser hierarchies and increases the likelihood of success for the entire group.

The entire Indigenous value structure is based around the health and survival of the group, both today and into the future. Unlike the popular society, which only views growth in regard to commerce and individual wealth, Indigenous societies look at progression as a measure of the health, happiness, and well-being of the whole. These beliefs are predicated on the understanding that we are all related and deeply connected. Therefore, we are all responsible for one another, and we are all impacted by our treatment of one another. These values have played a key role in my upbringing and the development of my worldview. They have shaped the person that I am today and they frame the person that I will become tomorrow. Next, we will look at some of the specific Wabanaki beliefs and practices and how they frame not only my worldview but the way that I walk upon the Earth.