

Nawtch-nawtch-cha

["To Have a Vision"]

BY UMEEK

For a long time, before the great changes took place, First Nations people had visions and consequently understood their place in the universe. It was understood that without a vision people perish, that without an understanding of place in the Creator's universe people perish, that without seeking the good powers the dark powers would prevail. These visions were understood in the heart and spirit and issued from the mouth in untold numbers of teachings. "Hawilh, love your people." "Always be kind one to another." "Be generous." "Feed your guests." "Pay respect to those who own land and resources for they help to sustain everyone." "Take to heart and practice all the good teachings, pray with thanksgiving every day, cleanse yourself regularly, seek for good spiritual power which will contribute to the wellbeing of the community." "Avoid evil."

Through these visions people knew that the Creator made all things to have sacred life. Therefore all life forms were treated with respect. Then everything changed. Newcomers came with new teachings, the chief of which might be expressed as "maximum exploitation of resources for maximum profit." Profit took precedence over people, communities, and environmental integrity. This single-minded teaching about profit has created an environmental crisis.

This crisis presents the obvious danger of continued destruction at the expense of planetary well-being, but it also presents an opportunity of creating a new vision. This new vision would do well to incorporate the best principles of ancient environmental wisdom now referred to as "traditional ecological knowledge." Ancient resource extraction strategies were guided by a profound respect for living ecosystems. Inherent in this principle is a demand for balance and harmony. Just as a genuine respect between human groups allows for a balance of power, a type of harmony between them, so too does genuine respect for living ecosystems allow for a balance of power and a type of harmony. While this kind of relationship between living entities cannot ensure life in perpetuity on planet Earth, it can ensure that life on planet Earth is not destroyed by human folly.

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