Indigenous Messengers of God

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Indigenous Messengers of God
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bahaiteachings.org/series/indigenous-messengers-of-god

2014 – 2020

Note: The views expressed reflect individual perspectives and do not represent the official views of the Baha'i Faith.

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1. Na5ve American Messengers of God

March 7, 2014

Morning and night, I read the daily news to Nahzy, my dear wife of thirty years. When
politics gets too dismal, sometimes I read her news highlights from the world of science.
A short while ago, I read an “abstract” (summary) of a “perspective” (scientific editorial),
“Out of Beringia?” published online on February 28, 2014.
You may know “Beringia” as the Bering Land Bridge that once linked Siberia and
Alaska. This report details the “Beringian standstill” and the spread of Native American
founders from Siberia to Alaska, during what is called the “Last Glacial Maximum,” some
30,000–16,000 years ago.
What do the Baha’i Writings say, if anything, about this theory? Baha’i scriptures offer a
treasure trove of wisdom. The sheer wealth of these texts staggers the imagination:
• For Baha’u’llah, nearly 20,000 unique works have been identified, comprising over six
million words.
• For the Bab, over 2,000 unique works have been identified, comprising almost five
million words.
• For Abdu’l-Baha, over 30,000 unique works have been identified, comprising over five
million words.
That’s one big “Bible”!
In this ocean of Baha’i wisdom, there is a drop, a single “Tablet” from Abdu’l-Baha,
which has been called the “Tablet to Amir Khan.” It’s very short, and to the point. Here’s
an excerpt, in translation:

He is God! …
In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.
As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur'án it hath been revealed: "We will not chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger" (Q. 17:15)
Undoubtedly, in those regions, the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.

Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet to Amir Khan is remarkable, and unique in the history of religions, because it authenticates the appearance of Messengers of God — i.e. "culture heroes," "wisdom bearers," "Prophets of God" — to ancient North America. This is one good example of Baha'i universalism.
The "Tablet to Amir Khan" offers no names of any of these Native American Messengers of God. But we don't have to look far to find them. Let me give one example: Deganawida, "the Peacemaker."
Space does not permit me to say much about Deganawida here. You can read more about this great, pre-Columbian American in chapter 2 of Religious Myths and Visions of America.
There is a Baha'i prophecy regarding the future of Native Americans. In what has been characterized as the sole "specific racial prophecy in all of the Baha'i scriptures,"
'Abdu'l-Baha gives us this glimpse into the future:
Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. For … there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.
Perhaps this prophecy will become realized when both the ancient wisdom of the Native Americans is brought into scintillating harmony with Baha'i wisdom.
Here's a similar prophecy from an authentic text of Deganawida's teachings:
Thereupon Tekanawita [Deganawida] stood up in the center of the gathering place, and then he said:
First I will answer what it means to say, "Now it is arriving, the Good Message."
This, indeed, is what it means: When it stops, the slaughter of your own people who live here on earth, then everywhere peace will come about, by day and also by night, and it will come about that as one travels around, everyone will be related…

Now again, secondly I say, “Now it is arriving, the Power,” and this means that
the different nations, all of the nations, will become just a single one, and the
Great Law will come into being, so that all now will be related to each other, and
there will come to be just a single family, and in the future, in days to come, this
family will continue on.
Now in turn, the other, my third saying, “Now it is arriving, the Peace,” this means
that everyone will become related, men and also women, and also the young
people and the children, and when all are relatives, every nation, then there will
be peace… Then there will be truthfulness, and they will uphold hope and charity,
so that it is peace that will unite all of the people, indeed, it will be as though they

have but one mind, and they are a single person with only one body and one
head and one life, which means that there will be unity …
When they are functioning, the Good Message and also the Power and the
Peace, these will be the principal things everybody will live by; these will be the
great values among the people.
P.S. I’ll read the news to my dear wife, Nahzy, tonight — just like when she used read
me untranslated Persian Baha’i Writings some 30 years ago, when she first introduced
me to the Tablet to Amir Khan.

2. Quetzalcoatl, the “Plumed Serpent”

March 18, 2014

Native American Messengers of God also appeared in what is now Mexico, in the
southernmost part of North America.
Before returning to Deganawida, let’s look at one great “culture hero” (as
anthropologists say) who came before him: Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tollan. (His name
means “Our Young Prince, the Feathered Serpent.”)
Unquestionably, Quetzalcoatl is Mesoamerica’s most celebrated sage–sovereign. The
historical and religious saga of Quetzalcoatl has been recounted in pictorial histories,
oral historical tradition, narrative chants and epic poems, such as the Códice
Chimalpopoca, the Nahuatl Quetzalcoatl narrative.
Born in 1123 CE, Quetzalcoatl ruled over Tula, the Toltec capital, between 1153

and
1175 CE.
This enlightened emperor inaugurated the “turquoise age” (i.e. golden age) in ancient
Tollan, the archaeological site of Tula in the Central Highlands in the heart of ancient
Mexico. Toltec civilization flourished from approximately 950 to 1150 CE, before the
Mexica (“Aztec”) conquest.
A leading authority on Quetzalcoatl — Henry B. Nicholson, acclaimed as America’s
greatest scholar of the Aztec civilization — wrote Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and
Future Lord of the Toltecs. With a considerable degree of scholarly confidence,
Nicholson is utterly convinced that some degree of historicity attaches to Quetzalcoatl:
First, and most importantly, I believe that it is quite possible that there was an
“original” Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, an actual person who lived on this earth but who
later apparently became inextricably fused (and confused) with more than one
deity—and probably with later rulers as well. – p. 259.
Based on sacred indigenous traditions, Nicholson further relates what little is known
about Quetzalcoatl’s religious reforms: “Under his benevolent rule no human sacrifice
was permitted, only that of quail, butterflies, snakes, and large grasshoppers.” – p. 10.
Quetzalcoatl challenged the “sacrificial logic” and militarism of ancient Mexican culture,
by abolishing the entrenched practice of human sacrifice. Founding a functionally new
religion, Quetzalcoatl taught (and exemplified) prayer and penance. Upon this social
and moral foundation, Quetzalcoatl established a new, flourishing civilization.

Quite naturally, this incurred the wrath of powerful shaman–sorcerers, guardians of the
old religion. His arch-nemesis, Tezcatlipoca (“Obsidian Mirror”), tricked and shamed
Quetzalcoatl, and forced him into exile from Tollan, never to return. Or would he?
Yes. According to long-held prophetic tradition, Quetzalcoatl would one day return to
reclaim his throne and reinstate Tula as the state capital. David Carrasco, author
of Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec

Tradition,
writes:
In one of the amazing coincidences of history, the Cortes expedition arrived in the year 1519, known to the Aztecs as the year 1 Reed (ce acatl), which was the birthdate and calendar name of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl.
– David Carrasco, Daily life of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth, p. 216.
In the "Europeanization" of the Quetzalcoatl prophecy, Motecuhzoma (Montezuma,
1502–1520), the last Aztec emperor of Mexico, tragically mistook the Spanish conquistador, Hernán Cortés, for the return of Quetzalcoatl. The Conquest, a collision of
two worlds, would one day be reversed, according to the prophecy of Quetzalcoatl's
return.
At the core of the complex legend and mythology that surrounds him, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was once a historical figure:
Mesoamerica was clearly an area where a combined religious–secular leadership pattern had evolved to an unusually high degree. It provided an exceptionally favorable cultural climate for a gifted individual of high station to
make his historical mark on society. Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl may well have been such a person. I am not suggesting that we might be confronted here with a Mesoamerican Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus Christ, or Mohammed, for no comparable systematized body of religious doctrine seems to have stemmed from his life or teachings, but his impact on cult activities in Mesoamerica may
have been considerable.
– H. B. Nicholson, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs, p. 264.
This is a fair estimate of the cultural and religious importance of Quetzalcoatl. Yet the
absence of a "comparable systematized body of religious doctrine" — lost in the mists of
antiquity — does not mean that it didn't exist.
Like Deganawida, who came centuries later and who did leave behind laws and teachings, Quetzalcoatl stopped the unnecessary shedding of human blood (whether by
ritual or warfare), and promoted a fresh and vibrant civilization.

Popularly, although unofficially, Baha'is widely believe that Quetzalcoatl may well be
comparable to Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus Christ, or Mohammed. These same Baha'is
believe that Baha'u'llah represents the return of the spirit and power of Quetzalcoatl.
Like the metaphor of the "Feathered Serpent," Baha'u'llah refers to

each Prophet and
Manifestation of God as the “Royal Falcon”:
I am the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and revive the dead. I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way. I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty. I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird and start it on its flight.
– Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 169.
While respecting the ethics of representation, most indigenous Baha’is believe that
Baha’u’llah is the spirit of Quetzalcoatl revived — not by conquest, not by hegemonic or
triumphalistic appropriation, but by embrace, in a metaphysic of symbolism and synchronicity, of mediation and connection to the global metropolis, the new Tula.
The Resplendent Quetzal is crimson-breasted, with iridescent, emerald plumage that
shimmers with golden-green to blue-violet light in the sunlight.
Baha’u’llah, many
Baha’is believe, may be the return of the spirit and power of Quetzalcoatl for having
brought new teachings that restore the dignity of indigenous peoples, with respect for
their cultures and sacred traditions, while establishing a connection with the wider world,
in a true “unity in diversity” — where the Royal Falcon, as the Resplendent Quetzal,
radiates spiritual light in the cloud forests of purity and wisdom.

3. The Return of White Buffalo Calf Woman

March 22, 2014

Did the Native Americans have their own Prophets? Baha’is believe they did. Abdu’l-
Baha’s Tablet to Amir Khan declares that “the Call of God must have been raised in
ancient times” among the “people of America.” The “people of America” refer not just to
North America, but to the entire New World. The “Call of God” refers to the messages
raised by Messengers of God. Already we’ve covered two previous examples:
Deganawida of the Iroquois; and Quetzalcoatl of the Toltecs. Next: White Buffalo Calf
Woman. Arvol Looking Horse, 19th-generation Keeper of the Original Sacred White
Buffalo Calf Pipe of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nation of the Sioux, tells the sacred
story:

Nineteen generations ago the beautiful spirit we now refer to as Ptesan win-yan (White Buffalo Calf Woman) brought the Sacred C'anupa to our People. … Pte-san win-yan gifted us with the Seven Sacred Rites that still sustain our People today. The I-ni-pi (Purification ceremony), Wi-wanyang wac'i-pi (Sun Dance ceremony), Han-ble-c'i-ya (Vision Quest ceremony) Hun-ka kag'a (Making of a relative), Ta-pa kah'-g'o-ya (Throwing of the sacred ball) Wi-yan Is'-na ti (Womanhood ceremony), Na-g'i glu-ha (Keeping of the Spirit ceremony). … Before she left, Pte-san win-yan told the People [that] her Spirit would return to help us one day in times of great hardship, and that we would recognize her.

In 2005, Patricia Locke (1928–2001), whose Lakota name was Tawacin Waste Win ("She of Good Consciousness" or "Compassionate Woman"), was inducted into the U.S. National Women's Hall of Fame. A highly respected Lakota activist, Locke embraced the Baha'i Faith late in life, and in 1993, was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, as its first Native American woman member. 1993 marked the United Nations' "International Year of the World's Indigenous People." That same year, Patricia Locke attended the nine-day Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. She was part of a 55-member Native delegation. On the last day, the Native delegation presented a "Declaration of Vision" to the general assembly, calling on the world's religions to support the struggles of First Nations peoples. The Declaration proclaimed, in part:

We, as Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations, honoring our ancestors and our future generations, do hereby declare …

Our spiritual and physical survival continues to be threatened all over the hemisphere, we feel compelled to ask you to join us in restoring the balances of humanity and Mother Earth in these ways:

A. Acknowledgement of the myriad of messengers of the Creator, the Great Mystery, to the peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

B. Support in promoting, preserving and maintaining our Indigenous languages and cultures.

This clarion call for the world's recognition of "messengers of the Creator, the Great Mystery, to the peoples of the Western Hemisphere" includes the Baha'is as well. Now, the rediscovery of Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet to Amir Khan provides an

authoritative text on
which to base the principle of “Messengers of God to First Nations.” This principle is
explicit — the principals implicit. For example, in a Tablet to Ahmad Quli Khan,
Baha’u’llah declares: “Unto the cities of all nations He [God] hath sent His
Messengers.” – Gleanings, p. 145. This Baha’i universalism applies to the New World —
the Americas — as well as the Old World and the Third World. In 1994, David S. Ruhe,
MD (former member of the Universal House of Justice), stated, in a speech:

To the warring tribes 700–800 years ago there came an astonishing Prophet of
Peace — Deganawidah united five, later six, mutually hostile tribal groups in a
federal union based on democracy, the first in the Western Hemisphere. He
cemented this union with a “Great Law of Peace,” a constitution which
propounded one expansive human family. … And of course the Iroquois
foreshadowed, in their Longhouse of sky and earth, the planetary message of the
Bahá’í Faith for today.

– “A New Evolution: Religious Bonding for World Unity,” Journal of Baha’i
Studies 6.4 (1994/95): p. 45.

What about the return of White Buffalo Calf Woman? Another prominent Lakota and
Baha’i woman, Counsellor Jacqueline Left Hand Bull (interviewed by Patricia Locke in
1989) publicly stated her belief that Baha’u’llah was the “return” of White Buffalo Calf
Woman:

First of all our name Lakota means peace, amity – harmony – balance. We
perceive the universe as being interrelated and interconnected – that’s our most
significant prayer, mitakuye oyasin – “all my relations” … This world view is
sacred and is based on the teachings of the White Buffalo Calf Woman. This
Lakota world view meshes with the Baha’i world view. … So it’s not difficult for
me to reconcile the teachings of the White Buffalo Calf Woman and Baha’u’llah. I
see it — Baha’u’llah’s teachings — as the next step of Lakota ways. Only now we
take our place in the world community, with all Indian people united.

— Prophecy of Lakota
(http://bahai-library.com/newspapers/1995/000089.html)

Baha’u’llah wrote:

O peoples of the heavens and of the earth! … Be ye fair therefore in your

judgement concerning His upright Religion, for the love of this Youth who is riding
high upon the snow-white She-Camel betwixt earth and heaven; and be ye firm and steadfast in the path of Truth.*
— Tablets of the Hair (authorized translation; http://bahai-library.com/bahaullah_alwah_shaarat)
“White Buffalo Calf Woman” and “snow-white She-Camel” — similar symbols, same
spirit. Mitakuye oyasin.

4. The Return of Viracocha, the Prophet of the Incas

March 28, 2014

The supreme deity of the Incas — Ilya-Tiqsi Viracocha Pachayachachiq (“Ancient
Foundation, Lord, Teacher”) — incarnated and dwelled among men, as the Inca prophet
of God. Strange to say, Viracocha promised to return one day. That hope persists
among the descendants of the Incas to this very day.
Pedro Sarmiento de Gambo (1532–1592) was a highly accomplished explorer, naval
captain and royal cosmographer. Ordered by Don Francisco de Toledo, Viceroy of “the
kingdoms of Peru,” to write The History of the Incas (1572), Captain Sarmiento took
measures to ensure its authenticity and accuracy. So, in a public reading, on February
29 and March 1, 1572 he had his manuscript read, chapter by chapter, to an assemblage of forty-two knowledgeable Incas for their commentary and correction.
Sarmiento described the light-skinned Viracocha this way:
Be that as it may, in the end all agree that the creation of these people was the work of
Viracocha. They report that he was a man of medium height, white, and dressed in
white clothing, secured around his body like an alb, and [that] he carried a staff and a
book in his hands.
— Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, The History of the Incas, p. 51.
Now for Sarmiento’s account of Viracocha’s promise to return:
Returning to the subject of the fable, Viracocha continued his journey, carrying out his
deeds and teaching the people he created. In this way he arrived at the region where
Puerto Viejo and Manta now are, on the equator, where he was joined by his servants.

Wishing to leave the land of Peru, he spoke to those he had created, telling them of things that would befall them. He told them that people would come, some of whom would say that they were Viracocha, their Creator, and that they should not believe them. Moreover, in times to come, he would send his messengers to protect and teach them. This said, he and his two servants entered the sea, and they walked over the water, as if on land, without sinking. … These barbarians have this ridiculous fable of their creation, and they state it and believe in it as if they had actually seen it happen and take place. (pp. 54–55.)

The Incas evidently had a rich oral tradition, consisting of prayers, hymns, epic poems, drama, and songs — most of which was destroyed. In his celebrated work on Inca religion, Historia del Nuevo Mundo (1653), Father Bernabé Cobo preserves this Incan prayer:

O most happy, fortunate Creator, you have compassion on men and take pity on them! Behold your people here, your children, poor, unfortunate, whom you have made and given life; take pity on them and let them live safe and sound with their children and descendants; guide them in the ways of good health and let them not perceive or think about bad and harmful things; let them live for a long time and not die in their youth; let them eat and drink in peace.

– Inca Religion and Customs, p. 120.

In Part 3 of this series, we saw how, on November 8, 1519, Spanish Conquistador Cortés pretended to be the return of Topiltzin Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl, (which, translated, means “Our Prince One Reed Quetzalcoatl.”) On August 13, 1521, Cortés captured the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, the site of present-day Mexico City. Not long after, Francisco Pizarro, the Spanish conqueror of Peru, began his conquest. At first, Inca leaders explained Pizarro and his soldiers’ arrival as the return of Viracocha. The Inca elite soon realized that they were sorely mistaken.

Fast forward now to 450 years later, in August, 1975: the picture below, which has inspired my research on the return of Viracocha, is worth a thousand words:

This photograph was taken during the historic Quechua Baha'i "Tandanakuy," the International Quechua Baha'i Conference, held August 20–24, 1975, attended by Baha'is from Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. The entire conference was conducted in the Quechua language, the ancient tongue of the Inca Empire. The guest of honor was Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum (1910–2000), wife of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.

These Quechua Baha'is firmly believe that "Baha'u'llah is the return of Viracocha." What does this "return" mean? "Return" is not reincarnation, as Abdu'l-Baha explains:

If he [John the Baptist] was not Elias, why did Christ say that he was? The explanation is this: not the personality, but the reality of the perfections, is meant —that is to say, the same perfections that were in Elias existed in John the Baptist and were exactly realized in him. Therefore, John the Baptist was the promised Elias. In this case not the essence, but the qualities, are regarded.

— Some Answered Questions, p. 134.

Quechua Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah came in the spirit and power of Viracocha. In honoring and promoting Quechua language and culture, it can be said that Baha'u'llah is restoring dignity to the descendants of the Incas, devastated and oppressed for centuries.

It is in this sense that Baha'u'llah credibly may be said to be the "return of Viracocha."

5. Comparing the Teachings of Two Peacemakers

April 2, 2014

Deganawida, reverently referred to as the "Peacemaker," not only made peace among the warring nations of the Iroquois, but also brought ethical and moral teachings to the tribes.

Let's try an experiment: Why don't we compare the teachings of two Peacemakers, Deganawida and Baha'u'llah? Then we can determine, from two different points of view, whether the Baha'I teachings agree with those of the Peacemaker and, conversely, whether the Peacemaker's teachings resonate with those of Baha'u'llah.

Perhaps a better way is to ask is this: Can the Peacemaker's followers recognize the

harmony between Deganawida's teachings and Baha'u'llah's? And can Baha'is
recognize the harmony between Baha'u'llah's teachings and Deganawida's? Same
question, but from two different perspectives.
Okay. Let's begin our experimental comparison with one of the most celebrated
passages from Baha'u'llah, given in the form of advice to one of his sons:
Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy
neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the
poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver
of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech.
Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them
that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the
distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity
and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to
the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a
guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of
truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a
breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary
above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the
ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of
wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of
humility.
– Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 285.

Now let's take the very first teaching: Generosity. ("Be generous in prosperity.") What
does the Peacemaker teach about generosity? Consider this excerpt from the
Peacemaker's epic, Concerning the League:
Then Tekanawita' [Deganawida] said, "Who is helping you to guard the field?"
Thereupon the man came there, and then Tekanawita' said "Are you the person
who guards this field?" and the man answered, saying, "It is I, indeed, I am the
person who stands guard at night at the cornfield;" then Tekanawita' said, "How

do you do it, customarily?" and the man said, "This, generally, is how: when it just dawns, I am roaming about all over the field; sometimes I find corn cobs lying on the ground and I pick up as many as I can find. Then I take them back to the chief's house, and that is how we do it throughout the harvest. Actually everything is owned jointly, and when the task is done, the way our chief distributes it is in equal shares for them to receive it, all of the people in the settlement." Thereupon Tekanawita' said, "Now I understand what your work is, so this shall be your name, they will address you calling you Kanuhkwe'yotu' [Growing Corn Cobs] and that is what everyone will live by. This is what your work will be now, the newly arriving Good Message and the Power and the Peace.

– Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 193–196.

Now let's take the second teaching: Thanksgiving. ("thankful in adversity.") What does the Peacemaker teach about thanksgiving? Consider this excerpt from the Peacemaker's epic:

Thereupon Tekanawita' stood up, saying, "The Great Power came from the sky, and now it is functioning, the Great Power that we accepted when we reached consensus. So now our house has become complete. Now, therefore, we shall give thanks, that is, we shall thank the Creator of the earth, that is, he who planted all kinds of weeds and all varieties of shrubs and all kinds of trees; and springs, flowing water, such as rivers and large bodies of water, such as lakes; and the sun that keeps moving by day, and by night, the moon, and where the sky is, the stars, which no one is able to count; moreover, the way it is on earth in relation to which no one is able to tell the extent to which it is to their benefit, that is the people whom he created and who will continue to live on earth. This, then, is the reason we thank him, the one with great power, the one who is the Creator, for that which will now move forward, the Good Message and the Power and the Peace, the Great Law.

– Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 294-296.

These two teachings, by the Peacemaker and by the world's newest God-sent Peacemaker, are one in spirit.

If you have any doubt, just imagine a meeting between Deganawida and Baha'u'llah. They would honor and respect each other. If that is true, then shouldn't we

do likewise?
Let’s give thanks for these noble teachings. They are timeless. They ring true today, as they did in days gone by.

6. The Great Law of Peace

April 23, 2014

Halito! (Choctaw for “Hello!”)
Many people think of the United States Constitution as the “world’s oldest living constitution.” But the first democracy in the New World used an even earlier constitution. No career politician founded this historic democracy. It was founded by what anthropologists call a “culture hero” — or, according to Iroquois sacred tradition, by a Messenger of the Great Spirit.
The Iroquois tribes practiced this time-honored democracy religiously — quite literally, because they consider this way of governing sacred. It is still alive, albeit in attenuated form, among Iroquois Nations today.
You can feel an epic sense of legendary drama in reading Concerning the League, by John Arthur Gibson (translated from the original Onondaga by Hanni Woodbury in 1992). This is no ordinary book. It covers the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy by Deganawida — respectfully and reverently referred to as “the Peacemaker” — with the assistance of Hiawatha, the former cannibal, whom Deganawida converted to his new faith.
Legends are historically rooted and culturally bound. As such, Deganawida is not an ethnographic curiosity, but a living, cultural presence. The great overmastering fact in the history of the Iroquois is the dominance and centrality of the “Longhouse” tradition based upon the Deganawida epic. In that way, Concerning the League compares favorably with the sacred scripture of the world’s great religions and, as such, belongs to the pantheon of great world literature.
The Iroquois Confederacy began as the union of five Iroquois Nations, to which a sixth was later added. It eventually included a total of ten Nations at later points in history.
The Iroquois league of Nations first united the Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas

(as
“Elder brothers”) and the Oneidas and Cayugas (as “Younger Brothers”)
into the “Five
Nations.”
In 1714, the Five Nations became Six Nations by adopting the Tuscaroras, and,
in 1753,
the Confederacy incorporated the Nanticokes and Tuteloes, expanding the League
into
eight Nations. Evidence tells us that the Saponi and Conoy Nations were added
later,
enlarging the League into ten Nations, with the Delawares being given Iroquois
protection, but without formal adoption.

While his teachings on good governance have long been studied, Deganawida’s
ethical
and spiritual teachings have received scant attention. In the previous article,
we began
a comparison of the ethical teachings of “Two Peacemakers,” Baha’u’llah
and
Deganawida. We will continue that comparison and see how much the teachings of
these two Peacemakers really do have in common.
In ethical advice given to one of his sons, one of Baha’u’llah counsels
this:
“Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and
friendly face.”
We don’t have to look far to find comparable ethics in the teachings of the
Peacemaker:
Thirdly, this is what ‘Peace’ means: now it will stop, the massacre of
humans and
the scalping and bloodletting among themselves, specifically, among the people
of the various nations. Now as to that, it will end, the human slaughter,
because
the Great Spirit never planned for humans to hurt one another nor to slaughter
one another. So now it will end, the warpath, and everywhere it will become
peaceful; the different nations’ villages are as neighbours and as to the
localized
families and their children, what will happen is that they all will be very
close
relatives; and it will come to pass that they will become just like one family
which
will encompass every nation and every language. And this: when everyone can
travel from village to village, then it will end, the danger and terror, and
everything
will be peaceful, and they will rejoice by day and by night as the family
continues
on, there being no end to peace; that is what it means, the Great Law of Peace,
and everyone will be united; now I am finished.

– Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 105–108.
You will stop it because it is sinful for people to hurt one another; you especially,
for you are all relatives, and so it is necessary for you to be kind to one another,
as well as to other people, those you know, and those people you do not know;
and you should respect them equally—all of the people—you should be kind to everyone."
— Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 27–28.
No question about it — these ethical teachings are on a par with the great religions of
the world.
On March 9, 1961, the late Ruhiyyih Khanum (a.k.a. Mary Maxwell), prominent
Canadian Baha'i and beloved wife of Shoghi Effendi, wrote:
"I could see the American Indians straighten their shoulders when I asked their
forgiveness for the injustices my race had done them and when I praised their great past."
– Letter to the United States and Canada on Racism, 1961

Let's follow Ruhiyyih Khanum's example and do likewise.* Yakoke! (Choctaw for
"Thanks!")

- For a historic apology to Native Americans that also made history, please see:
- Video of Kevin Gover's speech, "Never Again" (Sept. 8, 2000), a formal apology
to Native Americans, on behalf of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.
(http://christopherbuck.com/video/Kevin_Gover_BIA_Speech.mpg)
"Never Again"
(http://www.bahai-library.com/pdf/b/buck_gover_never_again.pdf)

7. Two Great Peacemakers: Deganawida and Baha'u'llah

April 25, 2014

In 2010, the U.S. Mint issued its Native American $1 Coin, with a reverse design
featuring an image of the Hiawatha Belt with 5 arrows bound together, along with the
inscriptions UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, $1, HAUDENOSAUNEE and GREAT LAW
OF PEACE. (Haudenosaunee means "People of the Longhouse.") This coin honors the
Iroquois Confederacy, its unity and its highly-developed civilization – and it honors, by
extension, the teachings of the Iroquois prophet Deganawida.
Deganawida is a legend, not a myth. A legend forms around a historical core of facts.
The fullest account of Deganawida and Hiawatha (the former cannibal whom

Deganawida converted) is Concerning the League: The Iroquois League Tradition as
Dictated in Onondaga by John Arthur Gibson, translated by Hanni Woodbury (1992).
Deganawida and Hiawatha established the Iroquois Confederacy. Consider this statement from a Scientific American article on the Confederacy: “Five tribes of the
Iroquois confederacy were, from west to east, the Senecas, the Cayugas, the Onondagas, the Oneidas and the Mohawks. At the beginning of the 18th century their
power extended from Maine to Illinois and from southern Ontario to Tennessee. The
Tuscaroras became the sixth after being ousted by white settlers in the Carolinas.”
– James A. Tuck, “The Iroquois Confederacy,” Scientific American, Vol. 224, No. 2
(February 1971), pp. 32–42 [36].
According to the Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators, published by the National Museum of the American Indian, The Peacemaker Story, which explains how the Confederacy came into being, is “the civic and social code of ethics that guides the way”
for the Iroquois.
With that context in mind, let’s continue our comparison of the ethical teachings
of Baha’u’llah and Deganawida:
Baha’u’llah advises us to
“Be a treasure to the poor.”
Deganawida says:
You shall be a good person, and, especially, you shall be kind to all of the people,
not differentiating among them, the people who are wealthy, and the poor ones, and the good natured ones, and the evil ones who sin readily; all of them you shall treat kindly, and you shall not differentiate among them. And as to your own

fireside, never consider only yourself, you must always remember them, the old people, and the younger people, and the children, and those still in the earth, yet
unborn, and always you will take into account everyone’s well being, that of the
ongoing families, so that they may continue to survive, your grandchildren.”
– Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 698–700.
Baha’u’llah goes on to ask us to be
“an admonisher to the rich.”
In the same vein, Deganawida says:
“As to you, they have chosen you to work on the Great Law of Peace. This is your name, this is what they will call you: Shakokehe,’ which means, your

name,
that you will treat them all equally, the people of this group, and you will give
them the Good Message which they will accept, and that is what will save them
from trouble." Thereupon Deganawida said, "As to you, indeed, they have
chosen you to help with the League, and this is your name, this is what they will
call you: Sahawi, which means it is your work now that all of the families will be
established as a single house, to see that one will use it to live by, the power
which will be functioning for peace.
– Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 370–372.
Here, Deganawida admonishes the leaders of the Iroquois Confederacy, who were
typically among the rich and powerful.
Baha'u'llah asks humanity to be
"an answerer of the cry of the needy."
Deganawida says:
Moreover, at present it is young as the day is when the sun is rising and lights up
the earth; just as it causes warmth all over the earth for all the people, we will
help the people of every nation. And just as all of the many things grow on earth
and sustain the people, the newly arriving Great Law will come to shed light on
the minds of the people, the elders and the younger people, everybody, even the
children, and this is what you will work at: everyone shall become related to one
another, so that it will become a single-family consisting of every tribe; and they
will be kind to one another, all of the people; and this is what will unite them: the
Good Message, and the Power, and the Peace.
– Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 127–129.
Baha'u'llah asks all people to be
"a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge."

Deganawida says:
All Lords of the Five Nations Confederacy must be honest in all things. They
must not idle or gossip, but be men possessing those honorable qualities that
make true royaneh. [Literally, "Noble," i.e. Lord or Chief. – CB]
– Deganawida, in Arthur C. Parker, The Constitution of the Five Nations or
the Iroquois Book of the Great Law, p. 38.
These two Peacemakers, Deganawida and Baha'u'llah, brought universal ethical
teachings to humanity. Although their social laws are attuned to the
requirements of the

respective historical settings in which they lived, their ethical teachings coexist in
splendid, reciprocal harmony. Like a laser, their lights intensify each other.
We close with this prayer from the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address:
We gather our minds to greet and thank the enlightened Teachers who have come to help throughout the ages. When we forget how to live in harmony, they remind us of the way we were instructed to live as people. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to these caring Teachers. Now our minds are one.
– Qtd. in Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators, Preface.

8. Iroquois Confederacy (Six Na5ons) and World Federa5on (All Na5ons)

May 2, 2014

Did the Iroquois Constitution influence the United States Constitution?
Proponents say, “Yes.” Opponents say, “No.”
Among the proponents: Historians Bruce Johansen, Donald Grinde, Jr., Gregory Schaaf, J.N.B. Hewitt, Felix S. Cohen, Jack Weatherford, Oren Lyons, John C. Mohawk,
and Robert W. Venables, among others.
Among the opponents: Elizabeth Tooker, Erik M. Jensen, and Samuel B. Payne, Jr.,
among others.
Whether or not the “Iroquois influence thesis” is a proposition grounded in quicksand, on
October 4, 1988, during the 100th Congress, the U.S. House of Representatives passed
House Concurrent Resolution 331 (H.Con.Res. 331) onto the Senate by a vote of 408–
8. Then, on October 21, 1988, the Senate approved Senate Concurrent Resolution 76
(S.Con.Res.76, identical to H.Con.Res. 331), by unanimous voice vote. The joint resolution reads, in part:
Whereas the original framers of the Constitution, including, most notably, George
Washington and Benjamin Franklin, are known to have greatly admired the concepts of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy;
Whereas the confederation of the original Thirteen Colonies into one republic was influenced by the political system developed by the Iroquois Confederacy as were many of the democratic principles which were incorporated into the Constitution itself . . .
RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES (THE SENATE CONCURRING), That —
(1) the Congress, on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the signing of the United States Constitution, acknowledges the contribution made by
the Iroquois Confederacy and other Indian Nations to the formation and

development of the United States; . . .
Advocates of the “Iroquois influence thesis” point to anecdotal evidence. For instance, on March 20, 1751, Benjamin Franklin offered the example of the “Six Nations” of the

Iroquois Confederacy as a model for the union of the original thirteen colonies, which formed the United States of America on July 4, 1776:

It would be a strange thing if Six Nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming a scheme for such an union, and be able to execute it in such a manner as that it has subsisted ages and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies, to whom it is more necessary and must be more advantageous, and who cannot be supposed to want an equal understanding of their interests.

– Benjamin Franklin to Parker, Mar. 20, 1751, The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 4, pp. 118–119.

As further evidence, in 1744, Onondaga Chief Canasatego addressed the British colonists at the Treaty of Lancaster, and spoke of the power of unity in forging an alliance of confederate colonies:

We heartily recommend Union and a good Agreement between you our Brethren. Never disagree, but preserve a strict Friendship for one another, and thereby you, as well as we, will become the stronger.

Our wise Forefathers established Union and Amity between the Five Nations; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighbouring Nations.

We are a powerful Confederacy; and, by your observing the same Methods our wise Forefathers have taken, you will acquire fresh Strength and Power.

– “A Treaty Held at the Town of Lancaster . . . In June 1744,” in Cadwallader Colden, The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada, p. 200.

Okay. Instead of influence, let’s talk about confluence of ideas, by asking a broader question: “Are Deganawida’s ‘Great Law’ and Baha’u’llah’s ‘Most Great Law’ similar in principle?”

One leading proponent, Dr. Lee Brown (Cherokee, Director Institute of Emotional Health, Vancouver, BC), says “Yes:”

Those who have a knowledge of the Great Law can clearly hear the words of the Peacemaker echoing in the voice of Baha’u’llah. And that voice began to move upon the land in the form of Native Councils as it once did when the Peacemaker, as a young boy, left the camp of his Mother and Grandmother, in a carved white stone canoe and began his journey of speaking, teaching and bringing the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois.

Through the Law, the Peacemaker established peace among the Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy and through the Law, the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Baha'u'llah will
establish peace among all the Nations of the earth.

This yearning for peace, especially among Native people, so long assaulted by the bitter winds of colonialism, was felt again in the birthplace of the Peacemaker
in the hearts of Jim and Melba. They became the first Aboriginal ambassadors bringing this blessing to the Native world and to all humanity through their sacrifice and efforts. Jim and Melba had the knowledge of mind to the see the relationship between Baha'u'llah and the Peacemaker . . .
– Return to Tyendinaga: The Story of Jim and Melba Loft,
Baha'i Pioneers: Review (2013).
bahai-library.com/brown_watts_verge_tyendinaga
In 1873, Baha'u'llah proclaimed:
"O kings of the earth! The Most Great Law hath been revealed in this Spot, this
scene of transcendent splendor."
– The Most Holy Book, p. 49.
Dr. Brown has written a comparative legal study of Deganawida's "Great Law" and
Baha'u'llah's "Most Great Law." Dr. Brown's book awaits
publication. Let's hope that it
shows us how Deganawida's "Great Law" and Baha'u'llah's "Most Great Law" resound
in splendid harmonics, one with the other, despite being a world apart, in culture and
context.

9. Na5ve Messengers of God: One Baha'i Perspec5ve

July 30, 2014

One of the primary principles of the Baha'i Faith, expressed in many places in the
teachings, holds that God leaves no person or culture bereft of spiritual guidance:
God is kind to all; He is the giver of bounty to all alike, even as Jesus Christ has
declared that God "sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"—that is to say, the
mercy of God is universal. All humanity is under the protection of His love and favor, and unto all He has pointed the way of guidance and progress.
– Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 142.
So did God send Prophets and Messengers to the Native Americans and Native Canadians? Yes, according to their own sacred traditions, as kept by their respective
(and respected) Elders.

If you are interested in learning more about the heritage of The Great Peacemaker, who was responsible for bringing peace to the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee, “People of the Longhouse”) Nations, watch this video entitled “Peacemaker” courtesy of Historica Canada: https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/peacemaker.

But what do the Baha’i Writings have to say about that? Are they in harmony with Native American and Native Canadian perspectives?

Let’s explore these important questions by looking at the following brief “Tablet” from Abdu’l-Baha. These tablets, usually in the form of short written responses to questions posed by Baha’is, came from Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha, and often illuminate subjects not explicitly covered elsewhere in the Baha’i writings.

First, let me introduce the person who asked the questions about Messengers of God sent to America. During the time of Abdu’l-Baha, there was a Baha’i named Amir Khan Ahan. In Persian, “ahan” means “iron.” According to Dr. Iraj Ayman, Amir Khan owned a shoppe at the beginning of Naser Khosrow Street in Tehran. This store had a sign in front that read, “Maghazih Ahan.” (In Persian, “maghazih” means “shoppe.”) So Amir Khan’s store was called the “Iron Shoppe” (that is, a crafts shoppe and hardware store), which made him known in Tehran as Amir Khan-i-Maghazih Ahan. Renowned as an inventor, Amir Khan actually traveled to Russia, as well as to parts of Europe, where he sold some of his inventions. Amir Khan also met Abdu’l-Baha in the Holy Land.

Amir Khan received a famous tablet from Abdu’l-Baha in response to his questions asking for advice on which of several arts and crafts to pursue. Abdu’l-Baha advised

Amir Khan to concentrate on one pursuit and to perfect his mastery over that craft– otherwise his talent and energies would be spread too thin. Dr. Ayman, as a youth accompanying his father, met Amir Khan on a number of occasions. According to Dr. Ayman, Amir Khan was full of fascinating ideas and constantly making new devices and solving technical problems.

So here's a "provisional translation" of Abdu'l-Baha's "Tablet to Amir Khan," in full:

He is God!

O servant of God! You had complained about [your] inability to attain perfection in more than one craft (dar sanayi'-i muta'addidih). A multiple number of crafts cause [one's] perceptions to become scattered. Endeavor in one of these crafts and strive and exert yourself to attain perfection therein. This is better than having a number of crafts (all) remain in a state of imperfection.

In ancient times the people of America (ahl-i Amrik) were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.

As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur'an it hath been revealed: "We never chastise, until We send forth a Messenger." (Qur'an 17:15.)

Undoubtedly, in those regions, the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now. Transliteration: (al-battih dar an safahat niz dar azmanih-yi-qadimih vaqti nida-yi-ilahi buland gashtih va-lakin hal faramush shudih ast.)

I will supplicate God to confirm you in attaining perfection in one of the crafts.

And upon thee be greetings and praise.

We don't have access to the original letter, but based on internal evidence, it appears that Amir Khan had asked Abdu'l-Baha four questions:

1. How can one become more skillful in arts and crafts?
2. Did the ancestors of Native North Americans cross over the Bering Strait?
3. What is the fate of people who do not know of God's latest messenger?
4. Were Messengers of God sent to North America?

In the next article in this series, we will look at these questions in more detail.

For those who read Persian, the Tablet to Amir Khan is published in its entirety in Muntakhabátí az Makátíb-i-Hadrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá, volume 6 (Hofheim: Mu'assasi-yi Matbú'át-i-Bahá'í-i-Álmán, 161BE/2005), pages 177–178. (Courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami, PhD.) To download a copy of this Tablet in the original Persian, please

click the link at the end of this article.
In closing, I'd like to thank my dear wife of 30 years, Nahzy Abadi Buck, for introducing
me to Abdu'l-Baha's "Tablet to Amir Khan," shortly before we were married in North
Vancouver, British Columbia. It's one of the many reasons why I fell in love with her.
Printed version of Tablet to Amir Khan in Persian:
https://bahaiteachings.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/
Printed-version-of-the-Tablet-to-Amir-Khan-in-Persian.pdf
Facsimile of original Tablet to Amir Khan in Persian:
https://bahaiteachings.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/
Facsimile-of-original-Tablet-to-Amir-Khan-in-Persian-.pdf

10.Na5ve Messengers of God: Another Baha'i Perspec5ve

August 5, 2014

Men at all times and under all conditions stand in need of one to exhort them, guide them and to instruct and teach them. Therefore He hath sent forth His Messengers, His Prophets and chosen ones that they might acquaint the people with the divine purpose underlying the revelation of Books and the raising up of
Messengers, and that everyone may become aware of the trust of God which is latent in the reality of every soul.
– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 161.
In the Tablet to Amir Khan, which we discussed in the previous essay in this series, Abdu'l-Baha answers Amir Khan's four questions:
1. How can one become more skillful in arts and crafts?
2. Did the ancestors of Native North Americans cross over the Bering Strait?
3. What is the fate of people who do not know of God's latest Messenger?
4. Were Messengers of God sent to North America?
I asked Baha'i scholar Dr. Necati Alkan: "What is your independent understanding of
Abdu'l-Baha's answer to Amir Khan's fourth question?" Here's his fascinating answer:
Abdu'l-Baha says that the "Call of God" was raised in America in ancient times.
The Persian construct, nida-yi ilahi ("Call of God") uses two Arabic words (for
"Call" and "God"). The Arabic word for "call" is al-nida'.
As commonly used in the Baha'i Writings, the expression, the "Call of God"
almost always means a Revelation by God through a Prophet/Messenger (which Baha'is refer to as a "Manifestation of God").
In addition to this, the Qur'an says: "Every nation has its Messenger." (Q. 10:47a,
Arberry's translation.) This verse continues with: "Then, when their

Messenger
comes, justly the issue is decided between them, and they are not wronged.”
(Q.
10:47b, Arberry.) The very next refers to a future event: “They say, ‘When
will this
promise be, if you speak truly?” (10:48, Arberry.) This verse clearly
indicates that
Messengers of God will come after Muhammad.
In Baha’i interpretation, the Bab and Baha’u’llah appeared. So why should
God
not have sent a Prophet/Messenger also to the Native American/Native Canadian
“nations” (peoples)?

Besides, according to Abdu’l-Baha, only 28 Prophets are mentioned in the
Qur’an by name. There are Prophets that the Qur’an does not mention by
name,
such as Zoroaster. This being the case, we cannot exclude Prophets/
Messengers sent to other “nations.”
Lastly, there is a statement by Baha’u’llah in his Commentary on the Sura
of “The
Sun.” (A “Sura” is a chapter of the Koran, which has 114 Suras.)
Baha’u’llah
states that every nation on earth has been enlightened by one of these
“Suns,”
i.e. Prophets of God.
Based on a combination of the above statements by Baha’u’llah,
Abdu’l-Baha
and the Qur’an, and since we also know that there were more than one
“nation” (meaning a “people,” rather than a political state), the more
likely
interpretation is that Abdu’l-Baha refers to more than one Manifestation of
God
sent to North America.
Then I asked Dr. Alkan: “You know of my interpretation, which is that
Abdu’l-Baha was
telling Amir Khan that God sent Prophets and Messengers to the indigenous
peoples of
North America. Would you have arrived at the very same conclusion? In other
words, do
you read this text in much the same way?” He said:
Abdu’l-Baha’s statement in the Tablet to Amir Khan is unambiguous. Who else
than Prophets or Messengers can raise the “Call of God?”
As the Qur’an (which, although not a Baha’i scripture, provides important
background to Baha’i terminology), says: “O believers, respond to [the Call
of]
God and the Messenger when He calls you unto that which will give you life.”
Here, the “Call of God” is spoken through the Messenger of God, who serves

as
God's mouthpiece or interlocutor with humankind.
As I just explained above, we can interpret the "Call of God" raised in America as
referring to at least one Messenger/Prophet of God in that region–and probably
more, since there were a number of Native American and Native Canadian "nations."
In a way, it's quite revolutionary because we could add (unofficially) at least
another Manifestation of God to the Ones that exist in the Baha'i Faith. We are
seeing something quite dramatic unfolding before our very eyes.
I asked Dr. Alkan: Since Abdu'l-Baha does not identify any Native American Messenger
of God by name, is there a way that you can apply for Baha'i criteria (or "proofs") to the
following passage by the "Peacemaker" (Deganawida, the Iroquois Prophet)? And does
this sound like the "Call of God" to you, speaking personally, as a Baha'i?
Thereupon Tekanawita [Deganawida] stood up in the center of the gathering
place, and then he said, "First I will answer what it means to say, 'Now it is
arriving, the Good Message.' This indeed, is what it means: When it stops, the

slaughter of your own people who live here on earth, then everywhere peace will
come about, by day and also by night, and it will come about that as one travels
around, everyone will be related. …
Secondly, I say, 'Now it is arriving, the Power,' and this means that the different
nations, all the nations, will become just a single one, and the Great Law will
come into being, so that now all will be related to each other, and there will come
to be just a single family, and in the future, in days to come, this family will
continue on.
Now in turn, the other, my third saying, 'Now it is arriving, the Peace,' this means
that everyone will become related, men and also women, and also the young
people and the children, and when all are relatives, every nation, then there will
be peace as they roam about by day and also by night. … When they are
functioning, the Good Message and also the Power and the Peace, moreover,
these will be the principal things everybody will live by; these will be the

great
values among the people.”
– Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 36–41.
Dr. Alkan answered “Yes. It sounds to me that the Peacemaker did raise the “Call of God” in “ancient times” (that is, in the “pre-contact” era before the Europeans came to America). “It rings true. It fits Abdu’l-Baha’s description in the Tablet to Amir Khan perfectly. There’s no question that Deganawida’s teachings are profound. They resonate powerfully with Baha’i teachings. They are in harmony. They echo each other.”

11.Na5ve Messengers of God: One Na5ve Baha’i’s Perspec5ve

August 18, 2014
Co-author: Paula Bidwell

In the preceding two articles, we’ve introduced and discussed a very interesting short work by Abdu’l-Baha, which we have referred to as the Tablet to Amir Khan. Amir Khan had asked Abdu’l-Baha about Indigenous Messengers of God sent to North America (and, by implication, to the Americas). Now we’d like to offer a Native American Baha’i perspective on this fascinating document, quite unique in the history of religions for the principle it enunciates—that God has repeatedly sent prophets and messengers to First Nations peoples.
This is nothing new to indigenous people, of course. Their very cultures and sacred traditions came from these extraordinary individuals, whom Western anthropologists have often referred to as “culture heroes”—a term that scarcely does justice to these great wisdom bearers. Instead of seeing the messengers as minor figures, we need to give these interlocutors of the Great Spirit the honor and recognition that they deserve within the broader context of the world’s spiritual history.
Now I’d like to introduce my esteemed colleague, Paula Bidwell, author of Many Messengers of God, A Native American Perspective: Deganawidah The Peacemaker (http://bahai-library.com/bidwell_many_messengers). Of mixed Indian blood—Cherokee, Shawnee, Delaware and Seneca—Paula also has Northern Italian ancestors from

Barga Lucca. Her Shawnee grandfather, Johnny Gibson, named her into the Deer Clan
as “Welapama” (Bringer of Hope and Joy). Later, she lived on the Cheyenne River
Sioux reservation in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, where she found the home and people
of her heart. During this time the tribe gave her another name: “Kagnigapi
Winyan” (Chosen Woman). In later life, Paula discovered her
great-grandfather, Abeyah
Young, was a Lakota from the Rosebud Sioux reservation. In the 1990’s she was
acknowledged as a “Wicaglata” (Woman Singer) on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation.
So let’s both take a look at Abdu’l-Baha’s answer to this important
question: “Did the
ancestors of Native North Americans cross over the Bering Strait?”:
In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions,
close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been
said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.

Chris: I’d suggest Abdu’l-Baha simply says here that others (i.e. “it hath been said”)
have claimed “that crossing had occurred”—and that Abdu’l-Baha does not take a
definitive position on the Bering Strait migration theory personally.
Paula: I agree–by saying “it hath been said,” we can understand Abdu’l-Baha as simply
stating that others have said it. I don’t think he appears to be sympathetic to the idea—I
think he simply recognizes what others have said and nothing more. But, the next
sentence seems definitive: “There are other signs which indicate communication.”
Chris: Do you think that sentence means Abdu’l-Baha is summarizing the scientific
evidence of the day for the Beringia land bridge theory?
Paula: I don’t know—but in a mystical sense, I think he went beyond the understandings
of the day. It seems he did this frequently—probably one of the reasons Baha’is call
Abdu’l-Baha the “Mystery of God.” That being said, I believe he gives us something to
continue to look into here, and allows for a progressive understanding from the present
into the future with new scientific findings.
Also, Abdu’l-Baha uses the word “communication” and not “crossing.”

He could have
easily said there are other signs which indicate crossing. But the word he chose is
“communication,” and even if the communication occurred because of people crossing
the Bering land bridge, this slight change in wording leads one to remember that
communication involves more than one group of people. It is an exchange not only in
the material world, such as a physical crossing might be limited to, but also an
exchange in intellectual, spiritual and creative worlds.
Chris: Briefly, Paula, why is the Bering Strait hypothesis so controversial among Native
Americans and Native Canadians? (See, e.g., Ward Churchill’s article, “Bering Strait
Theory,” which offers a Native American perspective.)
Paula: Each Tribe and Nation has their specific place of origin on the North American
continent. So, the theory that we originated in Asia opposes our sacred stories and
traditions. Unfortunately, we are seldom given any credibility for our traditional
knowledge. We are frequently dismissed as adhering to an ignorant and superstitious
worldview, as opposed to the presumably superior Western scientific method. This issue
raises concerns for many Indigenous Americans.
Although, another way of looking at this issue is that our traditions are not dogmatic or
literal. I believe that many American Indians would be able to reconcile our ancient
knowledge with the natural evidence being discovered today, such as we arrived here
20,000 or more years ago. Why shouldn’t both be true? In my language God is called
“the Great Mystery.” Thus, we don’t always understand the world.

12.Manifest Des5ny and Na5ve American Religion

August 20, 2014
Co-author: Paula Bidwell

You must attach great importance to the Indians, the original inhabitants of America.
…
– Abdu’l-Baha, Tablets of the Divine Plan, pp. 31–32.
Many Native Americans—and many indigenous people all over the world—have

become Baha'is. Their unique spiritual history, passed down through thousands of generations, enriches and enlightens Baha'i communities in Indian nations, on reservations, reserves and in urban areas, as well. Since Baha'is believe that no human culture has gone without guidance from God, this set of articles has endeavored to explore the continual revelation of religious truth to all peoples, with a focus on the Native American messengers of God. This article continues the conversation, which began in the previous essay, between Christopher Buck and Paula Bidwell about those messengers.

Paula: Did the ancestors of Native Americans migrate across the Bering land bridge? I don't know. I do believe the bigger concern, the major historical issue, begins with Manifest Destiny and ties in with the economic, political and social uses of the Bering Strait theory.

Manifest Destiny is a complex term and has been used in many ways from a variety of sources. Yet, many of us, especially Native Americans, understand it to mean the God-given right to take what is found, conquer and remake it into the world image of the Anglo-American colonizer. This was also known as the Indian Removal. The colonizers used the term Manifest Destiny to justify slavery of both African Americans and Native Americans. To make this matter worse, some historic records justify this with the belief that Native Americans and African Americans had no souls, and were the same as animals to be killed or tamed as needed.

And then, along comes the Bering Strait theory—which created the argument that American Indians were not indigenous to the land, and thus had no more right to the land than the European settlers/colonizers. Some people used the theory to justify the theft of land, attempted genocide and numerous massacres of Native people.

What worsens an already difficult and tender situation is the often-repeated statement that Native Americans need to get over the past. This past includes the songs and stories of our places of origin. And to make matters worse, according to the

United

Nations 2012 investigation into the violations of Native American human rights, the past
is not over yet. All of this adds to the controversy and emotional upset felt by so many
Native American Indians over the Bering Strait theory. This complex issue has many
interwoven threads, both in history and the world we live in today.
Chris: How have you personally, speaking as a Native American (Cherokee, Shawnee,
Delaware, Seneca and Lakota) Baha'i, come to terms with this part of Abdu'l-Baha's
Tablet to Amir Khan?
Paula: My first awareness was that Abdu'l-Baha did not say the Bering crossing
happened in only one direction. He did not say that the American continent had no
inhabitants—in fact, in another place in the Baha'i writings, The Tablets of the Divine
Plan, he calls Indians "the original inhabitants of America." He did not say that Asians
were the only ones doing the crossing. I then realized the most important point was
where he stated, "it hath been said," meaning others have said it.
After this, the next sentence became of even greater importance to me: "There are
other signs which indicate communication." This is a definitive statement. I saw an
importance in the fact that Abdu'l-Baha used the word "communication" rather than
crossing. Communication involves more than one person or place. Communication can
be the exchange of ideas and materials—tangible and intangible—between peoples.
I remember stories of our people from times long past, of those who left the Tribe
traveling to distant places and returning many years later with new medicines,
techniques and awareness. Also, during these times, language may not have posed
such a barrier to communication, since Native peoples had a separate but universal
language throughout North and South America. Threads of this language still exist
today. So, the word "communication" was a big key for me toward unlocking my initial
and painful response to the mention of the Bering Strait.

13.Deganawida Converts Hiawatha: From Cannibalism to Compassion

September 13, 2014

For those of you who have followed this series of essays on Native American messengers of God, you're already familiar with Deganawida, the Peacemaker. The name, Deganawida, is considered by the Haudenosaunee (the "People of the Longhouse," better-known to non-Natives as the Iroquois) as too sacred to say aloud.
Instead, they refer to this great Native American Messenger of God respectfully as the
"Peacemaker."
Together with Hiawatha, the Peacemaker established the great League of Peace, uniting the "Five Nations" of the Mohawks, Oneidas, Cayugas, Onondagas, and Senecas.
One of the most famous episodes in the traditional Haudenosaunee cycle of sacred
stories describes the Peacemaker's encounter with a cannibal, about to eat his victim:
After Tekanawita [Deganawida] had departed in that direction he came to a house belonging to a cannibal who had his house there. Then Tekanawita went close to the house. Then, when he saw the man coming out, departing, sliding down the hill to the river, and dipping water, thereupon Tekanawita hurriedly climbed onto the house to the place where there was a chimney for the smoke to escape; he lay down on his stomach and looking into the house he saw that the task of breaking up meat and piling it up had been completed.
Then the man returned, and he was carrying a drum of water in it. Thereupon he poured it into a vessel, put meat into the liquid, and hung the vessel up over the
fire until it boiled. Moreover, the man watched it, and when it was done, he took
down the vessel placing it near the embers. Thereupon he said, "Now indeed it is
done. Moreover, now I will eat." Thereupon he set up a seat, a bench, thinking
that he will put it on there when he eats. Thereupon he went to where the vessel
sat, intending to take the meat out of the liquid, when he saw, from inside the vessel, a man looking out.
Thereupon he moved away without removing the meat, and sat down again on the long bench, for it was a surprise to him, seeing the man in the vessel. Thereupon he thought, "Let me look again."
Thereupon he, Tekanawita, looked again from above where the smoke hole was, again causing a reflection in the vessel, and then the man, standing up again,

went to where the vessel sat, looked into the vessel again, saw the man looking out, and he was handsome, he having a nice face. Thereupon the man moved away again and he sat down again on the long bench, and then he bowed his head, pondering and thinking, "I am exceedingly handsome and I have a nice face; it is probably not right, my habit of eating humans. So I will now stop,

from
now on I ought not kill humans anymore."
– Concerning the League, pp. 78–83.
In this account, the cannibal remains unnamed. But, in the 1899 Gibson-Hewitt version,
the Peacemaker names the cannibal "Hiawatha," as also in the famous English version
of the epic, White Roots of Peace, by Paul Wallace, first published in 1946.
While the subject matter is grisly, the episode is as edifying as it is charming, especially
for its insight into human nature. For we see that the cannibal believes the image
reflected in his kettle, while simmering over the fire, is his very own reflection—male
vanity, raw and uncooked. But he actually sees the image of the Peacemaker, looking
down from above, as he peers through the smoke hole of the cannibal's dwelling.
The cannibal makes the connection between himself and his hapless victim when he
sees the Peacemaker's reflection. The cannibal finally "gets it," as he realizes and
appreciates the humanity of his victim, his intended repast. No longer an object, the
victim becomes a subject. Through this exquisite ruse, the Peacemaker teaches the
cannibal a life-transforming message—to recognize the humanity of all people.
Thinking he is looking at himself, the cannibal suddenly sees himself within the social
mirror of the world around him–a sad moment and a sudden enlightenment.
It took a Native Messenger of God to help the cannibal make this mental and emotional
breakthrough. By seeing the humanity of others, the cannibal becomes human, and
humane. The cannibal suddenly progresses from narcissism to compassion, from
animal to angel, from sinner to saint.
Your hearts must be pure and your intentions sincere in order that you may
become recipients of the divine bestowals. Consider that although the sun shines
equally upon all things, yet in the clear mirror its reflection is most brilliant and not
in the black stone.
– Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 92.

14.In Spiritual Mabers, Handsome is as Handsome Does

September 15, 2014

In the preceding essay in this series, we learned the story of Deganawida, the

Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Peacemaker and prophet, in his deeply symbolic encounter
with a cannibal. In the story, the Peacemaker causes the cannibal to see the
Peacemaker's reflection, which awakens him to his humanity and the humanity of
others.
Just as the Peacemaker taught the cannibal, Baha'u'llah also draws us from narcissism
to compassion in this powerful aphorism:
O Son of Man! Deny not My servant should he ask anything from thee, for his
face is My face; be then abashed before Me.
– Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words, p. 30.
Here, Baha'u'llah speaks primarily with the voice of God. What Native American
tradition calls "the Great Spirit," Baha'u'llah refers to as "the
Great Being." Even the
Great Being is unselfish, as Baha'u'llah teaches in this remarkable
passage:
The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value.
Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to
benefit therefrom. If any man were to meditate on that which the Scriptures, sent
down from the heaven of God's holy Will, have revealed, he would readily
recognize that their purpose is that all men shall be regarded as one soul, so that
the seal bearing the words 'The Kingdom shall be God's' may be stamped on
every heart, and the light of Divine bounty, of grace, and mercy may envelop all
mankind. The One true God, exalted be His glory, hath wished nothing for
Himself. The allegiance of mankind profiteth Him not, neither doth its perversity
harm Him. The Bird of the Realm of Utterance voiceth continually this call: 'All
things have I willed for thee, and thee, too, for thine own sake.'
– Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 162.
In the Oneida version, recited by Chief Robert Brown, the Peacemaker tells a Mohawk
chief—to whom he gives the name, "Two Matters" (a former cannibal)—of compassion
for one's human brothers and sisters:
Now I will tell you what message the Creator sent with me of what there will be
on earth. He intended everyone to have a good mind on the earth you travel. He
thought there would be reasons. First, he intended all the people should be

having peaceful thoughts in their minds. Then love will come from that. If their
thinking is not peaceful, then they will not have love. And if they do have

love,
then from it will come compassion; and if they have no love, then they won't have
any compassion. Each and every one of you has the power. Whatever power you have comes from what you have thought. Then that comes from a good mind. He intended you all to be helping each other. You people should not be arguing."
– Kayanla'kó, The Great Law, pp. 29–31.

These powerful, metaphorical stories, so similar to the scriptural proverbs in the
Western religious traditions, gently advise human beings to love one another, to kindly
treat one another as equals, and to unite. That message, consistent throughout all of
the revelations given by God to humanity, forms the essential spiritual core of all Faith.

The next time you look in the mirror, you will be "exceedingly handsome" if, and only if,
you behold the "face of God" –the reflection of divine qualities–in the eyes of your fellow
human beings. Handsome is as handsome does.

15.God Has Sent Messengers to All People

October 2, 2014
Co-author: Paula Bidwell

Continuing our conversation about Native American messengers of God and the indigenous Faiths they brought, let's take a look at how the Baha'i teachings answer the
question, "Were Messengers of God sent to North America?" Here's Abdu'l-Baha's
response to that important question:

Undoubtedly, in those regions, the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.

Chris: Paula, do you agree that, here, Abdu'l-Baha takes a definitive position on this
question, not only by answering in the affirmative, but emphatically by using the
intensifying adverb, "undoubtedly"?

Paula: First, I would like to comment on the "Call of God" which "hath been forgotten
now." This is another of those points I had to work on. My immediate response was we
Native Americans have not forgotten the call of God, or our messengers of God. In
working through this I came to the realization that the statement "it hath been forgotten
now" is not just in reference to Native Americans—it is a universal

statement for all of humanity:

… the Manifestations of His Divine glory and the Day Springs of eternal holiness have been sent down from time immemorial, and been commissioned to summon mankind to the one true God. That the names of some of them are forgotten and the records of their lives lost is to be attributed to the disturbances and changes that have overtaken the world.

– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 174.

After I read this passage from the Baha'i writings and realized we were not singly being pointed out, this lost its emotional hold on me. I then realized I myself did not know the name of the Manifestation or the sacred Message, prior to White Buffalo Calf Woman. I only knew some of the previous Indigenous Manifestations of God and Messages through ceremonies and songs.

But yes, in Abdu'l-Baha's answer the use of the adverb, "undoubtedly" strikes me as a definitive position. And there is huge importance in this, toward bringing about recognition of our Native Messengers of God. This is a much-needed step toward healing the past.

The history of religious and spiritual persecution of Native Americans is entrenched in murder, massacre and forced assimilation. Most people don't realize that, while the rest of the population of the United States enjoyed religious freedom, Native Americans were denied this basic right. It was not until 1978 that we received a partial freedom of religion. This has created a wound far deeper than most can imagine, and denying our Sacred Messengers makes this wound even deeper.

Chris: So is it your understanding that Abdu'l-Baha states messengers of God were sent to Native Americans, Native Canadians and Native Mexicans (long before there were any borders separating the United States, Canada and Mexico) and, most likely, to the indigenous peoples of the Americas (including Central and South America) as well?

Paula: I find it illogical to think or believe otherwise.

Chris: Here's my last question: Since the indigenous peoples of the Americas have long

believed that the Great Spirit, down through the centuries, has sent wisdom teachers to
guide them, then why is this statement by Abdu'l-Baha so significant to you, as a
Cherokee, Shawnee, Delaware, Seneca and Lakota Baha'i?
Paula: I am stunned and hurt by how frequently people have told me they cannot accept
the fact that Native peoples had messengers/manifestations of God. This kind of
thinking perpetuates the antiquated, racist idea of Native people as soulless heathens in
need of salvation. This to me represents an unconscious sense of superiority. How
many years will it take to arrive at the equality of the human race and unity in diversity?
Even without Abdu'l-Baha's Tablet to Amir Khan, many other Baha'i writings tell us God
has sent messengers to all people. So let's close with those beautiful quotes:
God hath raised up Prophets and revealed Books as numerous as the creatures
of the world, and will continue to do so to everlasting.
– The Bab, Selections from the Writings of the Bab, p. 125.
Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers.
– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 145.

16.White Buffalo Maiden: Sacred Rites, Dances, Songs, Values

March 5, 2015
Co-author: Kevin Locke

O people of the earth! By the righteousness of the One true God, I am the Maid of
Heaven begotten by the Spirit of Bahá, abiding within the Mansion hewn out of a
mass of ruby, tender and vibrant; and in this mighty Paradise naught have I ever
witnessed save that which proclaimeth the Remembrance of God…
– The Bab, Selections From the Writings of the Bab, p. 54
For the first time on bahaiteachings.org, we introduced our readers to White Buffalo
Maiden in The Return of White Buffalo Calf Woman (Part 3). Today we'll discuss that
fascinating subject with Kevin Locke, the famed Lakota Hoop Dancer and Baha'i.
[Buck] Kevin, can you tell us how you have come to know, first-hand, the teachings of
White Buffalo Maiden?
[Locke] I don't have any title. I am not a chief. I am not what non-Native people might

think of as a “medicine man.” Even though I consider myself a world citizen, I do have a strong connection to the Lakota part of my heritage, especially the language and culture, music, dance, etc.
I can say for certain that my involvement in the Lakota spiritual heritage led me directly to the revelation of Baha’u’llah, founder of the Baha’i Faith. I have been involved in the Lakota spiritual heritage for well over 40 years. So I was able to learn first-hand from the older generation of tradition keepers, many of whom spoke only the Lakota language, and hardly a word of English!
[Buck] Who is White Buffalo Maiden? Why is she so important?
[Locke] To anthropologists, White Buffalo Maiden was a Lakota “culture hero.” For the indigenous people here in South Dakota, White Buffalo Maiden is the one who, long ago, delivered my people, the Lakota, from their wretched condition of darkness, despair, poverty and remoteness—and summoned them to arise to become noble grandchildren of the “Heavenly Grandfather” above.
Unquestionably, White Buffalo Maiden is the single most important and sacred being to have ever appeared among the Lakota.

[Buck] Is it true that Native Americans generally disdain that pet phrase, “culture hero,” so commonly used by anthropologists in the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in connection with the romantic notion of the “noble savage?”
[Locke] Yes. Such disdain is more than general. I’d say it’s universal, among my people.
[Buck] In addition to being Lakota, and preserving and honoring the sacred heritage of White Buffalo Maiden—the sacred rites, dances, songs and values that the Maiden brought and taught—you are also well-known as a Native American Baha’i. From that perspective, who would you say that White Buffalo Maiden is, in Baha’i terms?
[Locke] Speaking personally as a Native American Baha’i, White Buffalo Maiden could be thought of as a holy soul, a divine being, an emissary from God, perhaps even a Prophet or Manifestation of God. That was the belief of my late mother, Patricia Locke.

[Buck] In addition to sacred rituals, did White Buffalo Maiden bring spiritual principles
and social laws?
[Locke] Yes. White Buffalo Maiden brought spiritual teachings, sacred rites, social laws,
and prophecies—just as the prophets and founders of all great Faiths do. Since my
Lakota ancestors had no written language, these teachings were embedded in sacred
songs. Each sacred rite is emblematic of a spiritual principle or social law. Each and
every time the sacred rituals are performed, doing so invokes spiritual principles and
evokes ideal social relations—transporting the practitioner to that sacred point which
connects this world with the world beyond.
[Buck] Are White Buffalo Maiden's sacred teachings symbolized by the rituals themselves?
[Locke] Yes. The teachings are communicated through the rituals. For instance, the
woman's coming of age ceremony involves the Buffalo Dance. The problem arises
when the language falls into disuse. Then the dance becomes disconnected from its
symbolic meaning and the efficacy is lost.
[Buck] Are the sacred principles also enshrined in the sacred songs traditionally
attributed to White Buffalo Maiden?
[Locke] Yes. Even though the lyrics are terse, they are laden with layers of meaning.
[Buck] You and I had previously talked about the "Four Songs" and the "Seven Sacred
Rites" ascribed to White Buffalo Maiden—as famously described in Joseph Epes
Brown's bestselling 1953 book, The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven
Sacred Rites of the Oglala Sioux.
You told me that this traditional Lakota song was never traditionally intoned on the flute.
In other words, the traditional "Song of the White Buffalo Maiden," which is attributed to
White Buffalo Maiden herself, is a vocal composition only. What you have done is to

compose, on the flute, an instrumental version, to honor the Maiden. Can you play for
us "Song of the White Buffalo Calf Maiden" ("I Am Walking")?
[Locke] Sure. Listen to Song of the White Buffalo Maiden

(http://www.amazon.com/Song-White-Buffalo-Maiden-Walking/dp/B000QWQ4WK).
[Buck] In our conversations, you have told me that, in English, people refer to these as
"prayer songs." Here's one version/translation of this well-known Lakota
"prayer song":

Song of the White Buffalo Maiden

Niyán thanínyan with visible breath

mawáni ye I am walking
oyáte wan this nation (this Buffalo Nation)
imáwani I walk toward
na and

ho´thanínyan my voice is heard

mawáni ye I am walking

niyán thanínyan with visible breath

mawáni ye I am walking
walúta wan this scarlet relic
imáwani ye (for it) I am walking

[Locke] I first heard this song from Joseph Flying Bye, who, as a youth, had attended
sun dances conducted by One Bull (nephew of Sitting Bull).
My personal interpretation is that the Maiden here is likening her message or
dispensation to the onset of spring. "Breath" (thanínyan) more properly means "visibly,
plainly, clearly, without concealment." In this sense the "breath" is the divine holy
waftings from the unseen realm, as is the Maiden's voice. The "visible" part is the effect
of this heavenly wafting upon the collective heart of the "Buffalo Nation" (as the Lakota
are also known), analogous to the transformation from winter into spring.
In fact, the "Buffalo Nation" is the original name of my people, because of their
dependence upon the buffalo for physical sustenance. The Maiden made it known that

the people no longer needed to depend upon the buffalo alone, but that
"Grandfather" (the "Great Spirit," or "God") would provide. She named the people;
"Lakhóta." This has been translated as "allies," "friends," "peace"—but really refers to
compliance with the divine order or will.
"Walúta" is translated here as "scarlet relic." It has also been translated as "something

red, ancient and sacred." It refers to the sacred pipe that the Maiden brought which, in turn, represents the Covenant between White Buffalo Maiden and the Buffalo Nation and, more generally, the Messenger of God, such as Baha'u'llah for this day and age, and the people for whom the Messenger has come.

17.Want Peace? Teach the Children First

March 6, 2015

A small child who has been taught to think universally can talk with the learned.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, p. 95.
Around the world, Baha'is teach children in neighborhood classes. Children come first.
Or at least they should. Jesus offers a perfect example of this priority, saying:
Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.
– Matthew 19:14.
Not only do children come first, but they can be the first to learn something new. Parents may not be so receptive to new teachings—even though parents often become receptive to new ideas when they hear them from their children.
It's one great way to change the world, teaching children first.

Deganawida, the Iroquois prophet known as the Peacemaker (Tekanawita?), used this wise approach when he first proclaimed his teachings to little children. These teachings were new. No one had heard them before:

Thereupon, as to Tekanawita?, this is what happened: When the children began walking around, and more especially, when they played, some of the children repeatedly quarreled, and they wanted to fight. Thereupon Tekanawita? prevented them, saying, "You will stop it because it is sinful for people to hurt one another; you especially, for you are all relatives, and so it is necessary for you to be kind to one another as well as to other people, those you know and those people you do not know; and you should respect them equally—all of the people—you should be kind to everyone.

Thereupon the children were amazed at what Tekanawita? was saying. . . .
To their further surprise and and astonishment, the Peacemaker continued by giving the

children the sacred message meant more for their parents than for the children themselves:

As to the children, the ones with Tekanawita?, when he gathered them together, he spoke to the children, saying, “Now you will listen well: Now it is arriving, the

Good Message, also the Power and the Peace. Moreover, now it will stop, the way in which matters are proceeding here on earth beneath the sky, such that they cause pools and streams of human blood to flow. Moreover, when it stops, and when all the people are kind to one another, people of the same kind, then it
will stop, human beings killing one another and also scalping one another, then all are relatives, they becoming brothers, the men, and all the women becoming sisters in future days to come, so that families will continue on.

Thereupon the children were surprised at what they heard him say, Tekanawita?. Now the children were doubly amazed. Then they did something more amazing: they transmitted their amazement to their parents. And so the story goes on to say: Thereupon the children went home and when they arrived at their destination, they repeated the things he had spoken about, Tekanawita?. When the old people were informed, they said, “Now, indeed, we hear them with amazement, these kinds of words.”
“This we have never heard about, that someone might say, ‘Good Message,’ nor
for someone to say, ‘Power,’ nor for someone to say, ‘Peace,’ nor for someone to
say, ‘they are relatives, all of the people,’ nor for someone to say, ‘the men, all of
them are brothers,’ nor for someone to say, ‘the women, they are all sisters’, also
‘the children, they are all siblings’, nor for someone to say, ‘pools and flowing
streams of human blood will now cease to exist; from now on there will be peace
and in the future days to come families will be ongoing.” Also there was great
amazement at the kinds of words he used to speak in front of the children.
– Concerning the League, pp. 27–33.
Baha’u’llah also brought a message of peace and power.
One hundred years ago, Baha’u’llah, Founder of the Baha’i Faith, proclaimed in
clear and unmistakable language, to the kings and rulers of the world, to its
religious leaders, and to mankind in general that the long-promised age of world
peace and brotherhood had at last dawned and that He Himself was the Bearer
of the new message and power from God which would transform the prevailing
system of antagonism and enmity between men and create the spirit and form of
the destined world order.

– Baha’i World Centre, Proclamation of Baha’u’llah, p. ix.
If peace is a formula, then children are part of the equation. Baha’u’llah teaches:
We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the
child. To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon

you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. Well is it with him who
deferreth thereto.

We ask of God that He will assist each and every one to obey this inescapable command that hath appeared and been caused to descend through the Pen of the Ancient of Days.
– A Compilation on Baha’i Education, p. 2.
And so two great Peacemakers, Deganawida and Baha’u’llah, each taught: Children
first and foremost. If you are a mother or father with young children, consider trying out
a Baha’i children’s class in a nearby neighborhood. Your children will learn about
virtues, morals and manners, strengthening the foundation of their moral character and
adding to their personal and social success.
In the process, your children will learn how to become peacemakers, as Jesus said:
Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. – Matthew 5:9.

18.The Power and the Great Power Bring Peace

March 25, 2015

We’ll need great power to bring about a Great Peace.
Peace begins with a message–principles, plans and promises; followed by the power to
implement the message–especially the willpower of powerful leaders, finally culminating
in peace.
In this series, we learned of Deganawida’s gospel of “the Good Message and the Power
and the Peace” which unified five (and later six) warring Iroquois nations into the Great
League of Peace. (“Iroquois” is the French name for the Haudenosaunee, or “People of
the Longhouse.”)

Where does “the Power” to build peace come from? According to Deganawida, the
Iroquois “Peacemaker,” the Power first comes from “the one with great power, the one
who is the Creator”:

Thereupon Tekanawita? stood up, saying, “The Great Power came from up in the
sky, and now it is functioning, the Great Power that we accepted when we
reached consensus. . . . Now, therefore, we shall give thanks, that is, we shall
thank the Creator of the earth, that is, he who planted all kinds of weeds and all
varieties of shrubs and all kinds of trees; and springs, flowing water, such as
rivers and large bodies of water, such as lakes; and the sun that keeps moving
by day, and by night, the moon, and where the sky is, the stars, which no one is
able to count; moreover, the way it is on earth in relation to which no one is able
to tell the extent to which it is to their benefit, that is the people whom he created
and who will continue to live on earth. This, then, is the reason we thank him, the
one with great power, the one who is the Creator, for that which will now move
forward, the Good Message and the Power and the Peace; the Great Law.
– Deganawida, Concerning the League, pp. 294–296.

Although the power for peace originates with the Creator, Deganawida said, peace also
requires the consensus of world leaders.

Baha’u’llah, world peacemaker, similarly speaks of the “Great Being” and world peace:

The Great Being, wishing to reveal the prerequisites of the peace and tranquillity
of the world and the advancement of its peoples, hath written: The time must
come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing

assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth
must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such
ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world’s Great Peace amongst
men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the
sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among
themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly
arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer
require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their
realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will

ensure
the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. We fain would hope that the kings and rulers of the earth, the mirrors of the gracious and
almighty name of God, may attain unto this station, and shield mankind from the onslaught of tyranny.
– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 165.
These are powerful words. The "Great Being" calls upon the "Great Powers" to bring
about "the world's Great Peace" by consensus. That can, must, and will happen,
according to Baha'i teachings.
If the two Peacemakers–Deganawida and Baha'u'llah–could meet, how would they
regard each other? With profound respect:
It is clear and evident to thee that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause
of God, Who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendour. Wherefore, should one of these Manifestations of Holiness proclaim saying: "I am the return
of all the Prophets," He verily speaketh the truth.
– Baha'u'llah, The Book of Certitude, pp. 153–154.
Many Native American and Native Canadian Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah is the
return of Deganawida, as he himself foretold:
If at any time through the negligence and carelessness of the lords, they fail to
carry out the principles of the Good Tidings of Peace and Power and the rules and regulations of the confederacy and the people are reduced to poverty and great suffering, I will return.
– Deganawida, quoted in Arthur Caswell Parker's The Constitution of the Five Nations, Or, The Iroquois Book of the Great Law, p. 105.
If Baha'u'llah is indeed the return of Deganawida, this does not mean the reincarnation
of Deganawida. Rather, it is the renewal of the essential teachings of the first

Peacemaker, whose teachings are reaffirmed and universalized by the second Peacemaker.
The first Peacemaker came to unite five warring nations. The second Peacemaker came to unite all nations in peace.
Both Peacemakers brought the same message. Although their respective laws and practices are distinct, yet they share a similar purpose and a kindred spirit.

That being
so, these practices can be reciprocally respected, honored, and performed, preserving
thereby the best of both traditions.
Baha'u'llah came not to replace, but to unify, to widen the circle, and to honor previous
Peacemakers, past and present. The two Peacemakers are one in spirit, one in principle, kindred in practice.
Deganawida did not bring about peace alone. Hiawatha and Jigonsaseh (the "Peace
Queen") assisted him. Together, even this "peace trio" needed the acceptance of tribal
leaders to bring about peace.
Baha'u'llah cannot magically bring about peace. But, together with those who accept his
message, who put Baha'i principles of justice and unity into practice, and who network
with all those dedicated to peace-building the world over, then, in good time, peace will
come.
We must have faith that this can happen. It will happen, if we dedicate ourselves to "that
which will now move forward, the Good Message and the Power and the Peace; the
Great Law," as Deganawida, the great Peacemaker taught, in his message not only for
the Haudenosaunee, but for all nations.
In principle, turning to the timely teachings of Baha'u'llah also returns to the ancient
teachings of Deganawida, still practiced today by many of the "People at the
Longhouse." Deganawida's name means "Two Rivers Flowing Together." The teachings
of Deganawida and Baha'u'llah are also "Two Rivers Flowing Together."

19.White Buffalo Maiden's Sacred Songs

January 18, 2016
Co-author: Kevin Locke

…Man is dual in aspect: as an animal he is subject to nature, but in his spiritual or
conscious being he transcends the world of material existence. His spiritual powers,
being nobler and higher, possess virtues of which nature intrinsically has no
evidence; therefore, they triumph over natural conditions. These ideal virtues or
powers in man surpass or surround nature, comprehend natural laws and
phenomena, penetrate the mysteries of the unknown and invisible and bring them
forth into the realm of the known and visible.

– Abdu’l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 81.

Kevin and I had a fascinating hour-long conversation that inspired a question, based on this sacred Lakota tradition:

A council was called and two young men were selected to go in quest of buffalo and other game. They started on foot. When they were out of sight, they each went in a different direction, but met again at a place which they had agreed upon. While they were planning and planning what to do, there appeared from the west a solitary object advancing toward them. It did not look like a buffalo; it looked more like a human being than anything else. They could not make out what it was, but it was coming rapidly.

Both considered themselves brave, so they concluded that they would face whatever it might be. They stood still and gazed at it very easily. At last they saw that it was a beautiful young maiden. She wore a beautiful fringed buckskin dress, leggings, and moccasins. Her hair was hanging loose except at the left side, where was tied a tuft of shedded buffalo hair. In her right hand she carried a fan made of flat sage. Her face was painted with red vertical stripes. Not knowing what to do or say, they hesitated, saying nothing to her…

While she was thus speaking to the young men, one of them had impure thoughts. A cloud came down and enveloped this young man. When the cloud left the earth, the young man was left there—only a skeleton. The Maiden commanded the other young man to turn his back toward her and face in the direction of the east, then to start for home. He was ordered not to look back.

– Isna´la-wica´(“Lone Man”) translated by Robert P. Higheagle, qtd. in Frances Densmore, Teton Sioux Music (1918), pp. 64–65.

(Chris): Kevin, you told me that the two scouts who met White Buffalo Maiden were actually one person, and that the scout who “had impure thoughts” about the heavenly Maiden actually represented the “animal nature,” while the scout with the spiritual nature had the bounty of receiving White Buffalo Maiden’s teachings.

(Kevin): From my reading of the Baha’i Writings, I began to ponder certain points about the narrative of the coming of White Buffalo Maiden (“White Buffalo Woman” or “White Buffalo Calf Woman” or “White Buffalo Calf Maiden”): The people were starving. The starvation was a direct result of the people’s having fallen away from the Sacred Teachings, Laws and Covenant resulting in internal strife, conflict and

disunity leading to
disastrous imbalance with the physical world. I began to wonder how the surviving scout
could have been influential enough to fulfill the White Buffalo Maiden's command to
convene an assemblage to hear the Maiden's Sacred Teachings, Laws and Covenant if
the tribe was so disunified.
My personal conclusion was that, even though the narrative explicitly states there were
two scouts, these two scouts really symbolize the dual nature in man. One represents
the part in all of us that longs to soar into the spiritual realms — our eternal ascendant
nature. The other scout symbolizes the ego, the insistent self — the part of us that is
appetitive, materialistic and continually ensnares us in the trappings and desires of this
fleeting mortal life.
When this one scout came into contact with White Buffalo Maiden — the embodiment of
all that is heavenly and holy — the Maiden's celestial presence conquered and subdued
his lower nature and galvanized and transformed his spiritual reality, empowering him to
fulfill the Maiden's command to convene the gathering that would hear and respond to
her message. Without this transformation, this one scout would have been impotent and
powerless.
(Chris): Do the sacred songs traditionally said to have been given by White Buffalo
Maiden enshrine Lakota spiritual teachings?
(Kevin): Yes. Even though the lyrics are terse, they are laden with layers of meaning.
The songs don't have names. But one can identify them by the context in which White
Buffalo Maiden sang them:
1. Song of the White Buffalo Maiden.
2. Pipe Loading Song.
3. Prayer Song.
4. Four Directions Song.
I heard this ordering of the songs in the 1970s at a gathering of Medicine Men convened
by Sinté Glešká University held in St. Francis on the Rosebud Reservation. I have never
heard this ordering repeated or affirmed by anyone else or at any other time.

It should

be emphasized that, although some may ascribe certain songs directly to White Buffalo
Maiden (as in the above four songs), generally people agree that all of the "wakhán
olówan" (Sacred Songs) are inspired and reflective of the spiritual dispensation
associated with the Maiden.
(Chris): In our first article, you interpreted some of the sacred teachings enshrined in
the "Song of the White Buffalo Maiden." Can you comment on the wisdom and
principles set forth in the "Pipe Loading Song"?

Pipe Loading Song

Kholá, léchel echún wo!
Kholá, léchel echún wo!
Kholá, léchel echún wo! aéj
Héchanun kin, nithúnkašila
wanníyang ú kte ló. aéj új
Friend, do it in this way.
Friend, do it in this way.
Friend, do it in this way.
When (if) you do that, your Grandfather
will come to see you.

Hóchoka wanží ogná ílotake cin,
míksuya opági yo! aéj
Héchanun kin, táku ehé kin,
iyéchetu kte ló. aéj új
If you sit down inside the sacred circle/altar.
Remember me.
When you do that, then the things you say
will come true.

Channúnpa wanží yuhá ílotake cin,
míksuya opági yo! aéj
Héchanun kin, táku yachín kin,
iyéchetu kte ló. aéj új
If you sit down with a pipe.
Remember me.
When you do that, then the things you want
will come true.

Kholá, léchel echún wo!
Kholá, léchel echún wo!
Kholá, léchel echún wo! aéj
Héchanun kin, nithúnkašila
wanníyang ú kte ló. aéj új

Friend, do it in this way.
Friend, do it in this way.
Friend, do it in this way.
When (if) you do that, your Grandfather
will come to see you.

[The above transcription that I am using here is in SLO Standard Lakota Orthography, a
writing system (developed by the Lakota Language Consortium) that represents each
phoneme accurately and consistently.]
(Chris): I'm curious as to the true meaning of this remarkable promise, "When you do
that, then the things you want will come true."
(Kevin): This song is a wonderful expression of the Sacred Teachings, Laws and Covenant articulated by the White Buffalo Maiden. These spiritual teachings transformed the people to the extent that White Buffalo Maiden renamed them. Formerly the people (who were my ancestors) called themselves "Pte Oyáte" ("Buffalo
Nation") or "Ikcé Oyáte" or ("Common People"). White Buffalo Maiden renamed them
"Lakhóta" and commanded them to follow "Lakhól Wichóh'an." In other words, "the
People of Peace." Not the peace that occurs because of the cessation of war, but the
peace and order we observe in the natural world which is a manifestation of spiritual
reality; the Message that would enable humankind to reflect heavenly beauty, balance
and harmony. In her song, White Buffalo Maiden exhorts the people to behave, act, and
do things in this essentially sacred way.

20.The Fourth Answer: Recognizing Na5ve Spirituality

August 9, 2016

This series of essays on "Native American Messengers of God" began with a reference
to Abdu'l-Baha's "Tablet to Amir Khan" in Part #1. Recently, a reader pointed out to me
that, in Part 9 of this series ("Native Messengers of God: One Baha'i Perspective"), I
had promised to write about Abdu'l-Baha's answers to Amir Khan's four questions.
It turns out—my apologies—that I only followed up on two of the questions so far.
Question #2 was addressed in Parts #11 and #12 ("Native Messengers of God: One

Native Baha'i's Perspective" and "Manifest Destiny and Native American Religion"). I
wrote about Question #4 in Parts #10 and #15 ("God Has Sent Messengers to All People" and "Native Messengers of God: Another Baha'i Perspective").
To remedy this oversight on my part, let me insert the hypothetical four questions in
those places within the "Tablet to Amir Khan" where Abdu'l-Baha apparently responded
to each question:

TABLET TO AMIR KHAN
He is God!
[Question #1. How can one become more skillful in arts and crafts?]
[Answer] O servant of God! You had complained about [your] inability to attain perfection in more than one craft. A multiple number of crafts cause [one's] perceptions to become scattered. Endeavor in one of these crafts and strive and exert yourself to attain perfection therein. This is better than having a number of
crafts (all) remain in a state of imperfection.
[Question #2. Did the ancestors of Native North Americans cross over the Bering Strait?]
[Answer] In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it
hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.
[Question #3. What is the fate of people who do not know of God's latest Messenger?]

[Answer] As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur'an it hath been revealed: "We never chastise, until We send forth a Messenger." (Qur'an 17:15.)
[Question #4. Were Messengers of God sent to North America?]
[Answer] Undoubtedly, in those regions, the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.
By way of commentary, here are some further thoughts on the four implied questions
posed by Amir Khan to Abdu'l-Baha:
1. It's better to perfect one art (or craft), than to dabble in several.
2. The Bering Strait hypothesis is a theory with evidence. (But, as the native writer
Paula Bidwell has pointed out, it's not the theory itself that's the problem, but
rather the misuse of the theory.)
3. In principle, with knowledge comes spiritual responsibility.
4. The "call of God" clearly refers to "Messengers of God."
"Forgotten" is a matter of
degree to which the teachings of those Teachers have been lost or neglected.

What about the implications of each of Abdu'l-Baha's answers to these four questions?
Here are my thoughts along those lines:
1. Perfecting one skill is preferable to being "a jack of all trades and master of none," as the saying goes.
2. Scientifically, the Bering Strait migration theory may prove to be right or wrong, depending on where the evidence leads. Politically and socially, it may prove to be right or wrong, depending on how the theory is used or misused in relation to the indigenous peoples of the New World. Abdu'l-Baha didn't give a definitive answer to this question—instead, it seems he left the matter to scientific investigation, which is still ongoing and not yet definitive.
3. In the "Information Age," Question #3 has little bearing today, since most of the Earth's people have access to information about the teachings of the prophets.
4. Abdu'l-Baha's apparent confirmation of the past existence of Native messengers of God has profound implications for the present and future.
In the final question, what are those implications? One is recognition and respect for Native American and Native Canadian spirituality. Here, the principle of "parity" is important. "Parity" (equal status) is not only necessary spiritually, but socially, economically, and politically (in terms of Native "sovereignty" or a "nation-to-nation" relationship). Think of "parity" as "on a par with."

Take the example of the Baha'i Community of Canada. Here is an excerpt from their 1993 statement, "Submission of the Canadian Baha'i Community to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples":
Aboriginal cultures have been distinguished by a worldview best characterized as spiritual in nature. It is significant that Aboriginal leaders and members of Aboriginal communities at the grass roots refer so frequently to the Creator and to the human spirit when they approach the discussion of social problems. Failure to appreciate the gap between this approach to social reality and that of the dominant culture explains much of the misunderstanding and injustice between the Aboriginal peoples of this country and the dominant majority

culture.
…
The Aboriginal peoples have been among the most intensely affected victims of the dominant social forces operating in ignorance, or in systematic neglect, of spiritual principles fundamental to human happiness and the common weal. …
It has been the failure to apply spiritual principles and moral standards to the
relationship between Canada's Aboriginal peoples and the population of the immigrants and their descendants that lies at the heart of the most disturbing problems now faced by our country. And moral standards take their authority from
God, the Creator.
Furthermore, the existence in Aboriginal communities of strong systems of religious belief and practice represent important resources for social development that must not be overlooked. The survival among Aboriginal peoples of an evident religious inclination and spiritual aspiration must be supported and encouraged at official as well as informal levels in whatever programs and policies are recommended by the Commission.
This statement, made on behalf of the Baha'i Community of Canada to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (an agency of the Government of Canada), is remarkable for its recognition of Native Canadian spiritual "systems" as "important
resources for social development."
The Tablet of Amir Khan was occasioned by four simple questions—but the answer to
Question #4 has profound social implications in all four sacred directions.

21.Has God Sent Prophets to Every Culture?

January 26, 2017

Has God sent prophets and messengers to every culture and civilization? Scholars, writers and theologians have asked this question for centuries. At its core, the
question presupposes other important ones: Do the religions of indigenous cultures
count? Just because indigenous faiths don't necessarily have written scriptures or
histories, do they still matter? Should we recognize those indigenous belief systems
alongside the so-called major world religions?
The Oxford English Dictionary defines "deduction" as the logical process of "inference
by reasoning from generals to particulars." Through the process of deduction, the
Baha'is teachings allow us to deduce that God must have sent messengers and prophets to all nations, including the Americas, as this passage from Baha'u'llah clearly

indicates:
Unto the cities of all nations He [God] hath sent His Messengers, Whom He hath commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of abiding security, the Seat of eternal holiness and transcendent glory. … Ages rolled away, until they attained
their consummation in this, the Lord of days.
– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 145.
A similar statement exists in Baha'u'llah's "Commentary on the Sura of 'The Sun'" (or
"Commentary," for short). In this Commentary, Baha'u'llah explains the meaning of Sura
(Chapter) 91 of the Quran, which begins with this oath: "By the Sun and his (glorious)
splendour." The title "Baha'u'llah" means the "Glory of God" or the "Splendor of God." In
other words, Baha'is believe, Baha'u'llah is the spiritual Sun or messenger for this day
and age.
According to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah "explains the
sura of 'The Sun' should not be interpreted literally" (Dawn of a New Day, pp. 79–80).
Shoghi Effendi has provided this authorized translation of the following passage from
Baha'u'llah's "Commentary on the Sura of 'The Sun'":
Know assuredly that just as thou firmly believest that the Word of God, exalted be His glory, endureth for ever, thou must, likewise, believe with undoubting faith
that its meaning can never be exhausted. They who are its appointed

interpreters, they whose hearts are the repositories of its secrets, are, however,
the only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom. …
How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a
man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the
capacity of those who hear it."
Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace.

– Ibid., pp. 175–176.
In an article previously published in the series, Necati Alkan wrote:
Lastly, there is a statement by Baha'u'llah in his Commentary on the Sura of "The Sun." …Baha'u'llah states that every nation on earth has been enlightened by one of these "Suns," i.e. Prophets of God.
From the two statements cited above, we can deduce that "Unto the cities of all nations" necessarily must include the Americas. Since the Americas were inhabited by indigenous peoples prior to pre-Columbian "contact," we can further deduce that Baha'u'llah's statements logically and necessarily include Native messengers of God within this universal perspective.
Let's now look at two corraborating verses of the Quran, the holy book of Islam:
Indeed, We sent forth among every nation a Messenger.
– Quran 16:36.
Every nation has its Messenger.
– Quran 10:47.
How do these scriptures compare to other statements by Abdu'l-Baha to the effect that all of the Prophets of God have come from the East?
"In the books of the Prophets," He [Abdu'l-Baha] again asserts, "certain glad-tidings are recorded which are absolutely true and free from doubt. The East hath ever been the dawning-place of the Sun of Truth. In the East all the Prophets of God have appeared … The West hath acquired illumination from the East but in some respects the reflection of the light hath been greater in the Occident. This is specially true of Christianity. Jesus Christ appeared in Palestine and His teachings were founded in that country. Although the doors of the Kingdom were first opened in that land and the bestowals of God were spread broadcast from its center, the people of the West have embraced and promulgated Christianity more fully than the people of the East."
– quoted by Shoghi Effendi in The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 75.
Here, Abdu'l-Baha uses the well-known history of Christianity to make the point that, even though it originated in the East, Christianity had its biggest historical impact in the West. In the same way, the Baha'i Faith, which also originated in the Middle East, is expected to have its greatest future impact in the West, especially in America.

This is a
persuasive and inspiring argument from history.
From these passages in the Baha'i writings, we know several truths: (1) World religions,
by and large, have come from the East. (Just open any standard textbook on world
religions, and this will become perfectly obvious, although a number of texts do include
indigenous religions.) (2) The fact remains that indigenous religions have existed
everywhere throughout human history as well. (3) According to Baha'i belief, all true
religions derive from the same source—revelations from God, conveyed through a
progressive series of prophets and messengers. (4) Therefore, we can resolve this
apparent contradiction on a higher plane of understanding: While it is true that the major
world religions have all come from the East, the fact remains that many indigenous
religions appeared in the Americas and elsewhere.
Applying the Baha'i teaching of progressive revelation, indigenous religions, in their
pure form, were of divine origin. The time has come for this truth to be acknowledged
and respected.

22.Two Spiritual Suns: Deganawida and Baha'u'llah

January 31, 2017

All life on Earth depends upon the sun. This single fact explains why the sun functions
as a metaphor and symbol in the scriptures of all world religions.
In the same way, the Baha'i teachings say, all spiritual life on Earth depends upon the
spiritual sun:
…the Sun of Truth hath risen above the earth's horizons: tell of the blowing of the
spirit of life into the body of the world.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 92-93.
Deganawida, the founder of the Haudenosaunee, commonly called the Iroquois
Confederacy, said essentially the same thing:
Moreover, at present it is young as the day is when the sun is rising and lights up
the earth; just as it causes warmth all over the earth for all the people, we will
help the people of every nation. And just as all of the many things grow on

earth
and sustain the people, the newly arriving Great Law will come to shed light on the minds of the people, the elders and the younger people, everybody, even the children, and this is what you will work at: everyone shall become related to one
another, so that it is what will unite them: the Good Message, and the Power, and
the Peace.
– Deganawida, the Peacemaker, Concerning the League, pp. 127–129.
Here Deganawida, the Peacemaker, compares the "Great Law"—that is, "the Good
Message, and the Power, and the Peace"—to the sun.
The Baha'i writings not only use this spiritual metaphor of the sun, but clearly explain its
significance. Here's one example: In the previous article in this series, we referred to a
passage from Baha'u'llah's "Commentary on the Sura of The Sun." Here is a provisional
translation of that passage:
On another level, furthermore, it ["the sun"] denotes the Prophets of God and His
intimate associates, for such are the very "suns" of His Names and of His Attributes amongst His creatures. Indeed! Were it not for them, no one would have been irradiated by the Lights of deep knowledge, just as is evidenced by the fact that every religious community, among the religious communities of the earth, hath been irradiated by a "sun" among these resplendent "suns."

– Baha'u'llah, "Commentary on the Sura of The Sun," provisional translation by Stephen Lambden (http://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/1511).
The translator, Stephen Lambden, explains that this passage is a universalism, and that
every faith-community and every world religion, including every indigenous religion, is
included in this universalism. Religions traditionally look to their founders or other
important figures as their sources of enlightenment. This passage, moreover, talks
about all religions—whether known or unknown, whether recognized world religions or
lesser-known indigenous religions. Religion is religion. Truth is truth. A rose is a rose in
whatever soil it grows.
Historically, literate cultures have typically regarded oral cultures as "primitive" or
somehow less "civilized." It is time to discredit that prejudice. The Baha'i writings offer

this perspective: “Civilization” has material and spiritual dimensions. A materially-
advanced civilization may be morally uncivilized, as Baha’u’llah explains:

In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a
source of evil. Consider the civilization of the West, how it hath agitated and
alarmed the peoples of the world. An infernal engine hath been devised, and hath
proved so cruel a weapon of destruction that its like none hath ever witnessed or
heard. The purging of such deeply-rooted and overwhelming corruptions cannot
be effected unless the peoples of the world unite in pursuit of one common aim
and embrace one universal faith.

– Baha’u’llah, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 69.

Some have found it hard to accept that an indigenous religion may be favorably
compared to a recognized world religion. Of course, there are a wide variety of
indigenous religions, making it impossible to speak of them except in the most general
terms. Suffice it to say that, indigenous religions have served as the primary source of
spiritual cultural values for the peoples they serve. The time has come for some of these
traditions to be widely known and respected. Society stands to be enriched thereby.

Reciprocal recognition and respect is a “golden rule” of interfaith dialogue. It is easy to
recognize and respect those “world religions” that we see in standard textbooks of world
religions. But you probably will not see the Peacemaker’s teachings in world religion
textbooks. There may be exceptions, of course. But Deganawida’s “Great Law”—
although widely recognized and respected among Native Americans and Native
Canadians—has yet to be “canonized” as a recognized world religion.

Yet many Baha’is have begun to recognize Deganawida, the Peacemaker, as a spiritual
sun, and his teachings as a source of enlightenment.

Imagine the power and synergy of mutual, reciprocal recognition and respect, between
the members of the world’s “major” Faiths and the practitioners of indigenous religions,
if we mutually recognized each sun of every revelation.

This “Native Messengers of God” series has focused on the Peacemaker, White Buffalo
Maiden, Quetzalcoatl, and Viracocha as prime examples of such wisdom bearers.

These spiritual suns have often been referred to by anthropologists as

“culture
heroes”—but what if they’re prophets of God, in the same way as Christ
and Buddha
and Baha’u’llah?
The Baha’i teachings are for the present and future. Indeed, certain of the
Baha’i
teachings predict the future—not as a crystal ball, but as foresight based on
profound
insight. There is, in fact, a special Baha’i prophecy regarding indigenous
Americans.
Since many Native peoples in the Americas have already responded to the sun of
Baha’u’llah and become Baha’is, this vision of the future, called the
“sole racial
prophecy” of the Baha’i Faith, is already coming true:
Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. … Likewise,
these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that
they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.
– Abdu’l-Baha, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 33.
Baha’is look forward to the day when the followers of the “Two
Peacemakers”—
Deganawida and Baha’u’llah—will enjoy increased contact, to their mutual
benefit and
reciprocal enlightenment. Even though Baha’is regard the Baha’i Faith as
the latest
teaching that God has conveyed to humanity, it may well be that Native peoples
will
increasingly find illumination in the Baha’i teachings—and may further
illuminate certain
of the Baha’i teachings by virtue of the deep and profound environmental
relationship
that indigenous peoples, guided by their spiritual “suns,” have with Mother
Earth.

23.White Buffalo Calf Woman: Messenger of God

March 12, 2018
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In the next two installments of Native American Messengers of God, Chris Buck
interviews Kevin Locke, Lakota world citizen educator, about White Buffalo Calf
Woman,
the Lakota prophet.
[Chris] Kevin, let me ask you about these Lakota sacred verses:

Channúnpa wanží yuhá ílotake cin, míksuya opági yo!
aéj Héchanun kin,
táku yachín kin,
iyéchetu kte ló. aéj új
If you sit down with a pipe.

Remember me.
When you do that,
then the things you want will come true.

What is meant by this promise, “When you do that, then the things you want will come true?” Do the Lakota people understand this promise as spiritual, material, or both?

[Kevin] The buffalo represents the physical necessities of life. White Buffalo Calf Woman—and the sacred pipe she brought—symbolizes the inner spiritual requirements for heavenly life and fulfillment.

[Chris] Can Lakota Baha’is participate in this sacred song and ceremony? And can this sacred song, and the one in our previous article, be recited at Baha’i devotional gatherings, and in public Baha’i events?

[Kevin] Currently this is a matter of individual opinion. There is no authoritative guidance that I am aware of. I personally am the ninth lineal descendant “pipe holder” in my family. Receiving this, through my mother, Patricia Locke, in 1970, was the impetus to my long and slippery spiritual journey, up to today.

[Chris] Based on your sacred office and role as a “pipe holder,” my sense is that you are exercising this sacred trust in widening the circle of Lakota and Baha’i spirituality—dual

traditions you continue to live by and to teach. In your personal opinion, is it good for Baha’is and others to recognize White Buffalo Calf Woman as a messenger of God?

[Kevin] Yes, of course. If White Buffalo Calf Woman was sent to the Lakota people by the Creator, how could we not recognize her as a messenger of God, according to this clear teaching by Baha’u’llah? The Baha’i teachings say that God sends every society a holy messenger:

Give ear, O My servant, unto that which is being sent down unto thee from the Throne of thy Lord, the Inaccessible, the Most Great. There is none other God but Him. He hath called into being His creatures, that they may know Him, Who is the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers, Whom He hath commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of

abiding security, the Seat of eternal holiness and transcendent glory.
– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, pp. 144–145.

Think about this: entire civilizations flourished before the largest holocaust in the history of humankind, which was the decimation of North American Indian tribes and of other indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, which took place here in the Western Hemisphere. Before that genocide, the indigenous peoples of the Americas had built some of the most populous cities on earth. There were entire civilizations that flourished before the so-called "discovery" of the Americas and the brutal conquests that followed.

As a result of this colonization—under the pretext of "civilizing" and converting indigenous peoples to Christianity—countless lives were lost. Then, among the indigenous peoples who had survived the original conquests, a further ethnic cleansing and genocide (cultural as well as physical) took place, under the evil and catastrophic doctrine of "Manifest Destiny."

Consider—before all this had happened, could these civilizations have arisen and flourished without divine guidance? I don't think so! According to Baha'u'llah—and according to Abdu'l-Baha, in his Tablet to Amir Khan about which you have written in this "Native Messengers of God" series—God has sent messengers to all nations throughout history. Sad to say, much of the knowledge and records of these indigenous sacred traditions were lost.

Even so, in my personal opinion, I am utterly flabbergasted that people continue to be oblivious to the spiritual heritage of this land. It is plain as day, bright as sunlight, clear as moonlight. Just my own very personal opinion.

24.Recognizing and Respec5ng the Sacred Lakota Tradi5ons

March 13, 2018
Co-author: Kevin Locke

This essay continues Chris Buck's interview with Lakota world citizen educator Kevin Locke, who explains why the Baha'i concept of progressive revelation applies

equally to
indigenous religious traditions.
[Chris] In the news today, Kevin, I read a BBC story: “Sprawling Mayan network
discovered under Guatemala jungle” (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-
america-42916261, February 2, 2018), in which it is now thought that millions more
indigenous peoples had lived and flourished in pre-conquest Guatemala than previously
estimated.
The Lakota were, and are, among “the cities of all nations” to whom God
“hath sent His
Messengers,” as Baha’u’llah wrote. Baha’is understand that the Creator
sends every
civilization a prophet, a guide to goodness and spiritual growth.
Since Lakota sacred tradition identifies White Buffalo Calf Woman as first and foremost
among these messengers of God sent to the Lakota people, then we can fairly deduce
that White Buffalo Calf Woman was a prophet of God. Who else could she be? So, let
me ask you this: Would a wider recognition of White Buffalo Calf Woman as a
messenger of God be an important, even necessary, part of the Baha’i and Lakota spirit
and social dynamic?
[Kevin] Yes. Baha’u’llah explains what these messengers were empowered to do. So, in
this sense, White Buffalo Calf Woman was “commissioned to announce unto men
tidings of the Paradise of His good pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of
abiding security, the Seat of eternal holiness and transcendent glory,” as Baha’u’llah
wrote in his tablet about progressive revelation and the relatedness of all the
messengers of God. This is what White Buffalo Calf Woman was sent to do. This is
what she did.
If the Lakota people are to be seen as equals, as they should be, then reciprocal
respect for their spiritual traditions is very important. There is no harm in doing so. Great
good can come of this mutual respect and recognition, if everyone recognizes and
respects these Lakota sacred traditions.
[Chris] Is respect for Lakota sacred traditions by Baha’is and everyone else consistent
with these passages from the Baha’i writings?

… consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship, to proclaim that which the Speaker on Sinai hath set forth and to observe fairness in all matters. They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with
joy and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations. Blessed are
such as hold fast to the cord of kindliness and tender mercy and are free from animosity and hatred.
– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, pp. 35-36.
It is permitted that the peoples and kindreds of the world associate with one another
with joy and radiance. O people! Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of
friendliness and fellowship. Thus hath the day-star of His sanction and authority shone
forth above the horizon of the decree of God, the Lord of the worlds. –
Ibid., p. 22.
[Kevin] Absolutely. It's good that you've pointed this out. All the more reason for Baha'is,
and all people for that matter, to recognize White Buffalo Calf Woman as a messenger
of God—just as it's important for the Lakota people to learn about Baha'u'llah! If both
Baha'u'llah and White Buffalo Calf Woman were here today, they would respect one
another, wouldn't they? If so, why can't we do likewise?
[Chris] If so, is recognition of the best of Lakota spirituality a good way to promote the
unity of religions?
[Kevin] Yes, of course. Let me quote Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, who my late mother,
Patricia Locke, interviewed in 1989:
Patricia Locke: How do you as a Lakota woman reconcile your culture and the Baha'i Faith?
Left Hand Bull: First of all our name, "Lakota," means "peace, amity, harmony,
balance." We perceive the universe as being interrelated and interconnected.
That's our most significant prayer: "Mitakuye oyasin" ("All my relations"). We
understand this relatedness in fours: the four directions, the four winds, the four
elements of life (fire, water, air and earth), the four colors (red, black/blue, white
and yellow), that are symbolic of the four races of humankind. This worldview

is
sacred and is based on the teachings of the White Buffalo Calf Woman.
This Lakota worldview meshes with the Baha'i world view. The same Creator that
sent Moses and Jesus also sent the White Buffalo Calf Woman and Baha'u'llah,
the prophet founder of the Baha'i Faith. So it's not difficult for me to reconcile the
teachings of the White Buffalo Calf Woman and Baha'u'llah. I see it—
Baha'u'llah's teachings—as the next step of Lakota ways. Only now we take our
place in the world community, with all Indian people united.

From my mother's perspective, and from mine, that's exactly what Baha'u'llah meant
when he taught the unity of all Faiths:
O ye that dwell on earth! The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the
cause of enmity or dissension. In the eyes of men of insight and the beholders of
the Most Sublime Vision, whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding
and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already
been revealed by the Pen of Glory. – Baha'u'llah, Tablets of
Baha'u'llah, p. 220.

25.White Buffalo Calf Woman, The Peacemaker, and Baha'u'llah

January 29, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In 1992, Iroquois Chief Jacob ("Jake") Thomas, a respected
"faith-keeper" and
interpreter of Haudenosaunee culture, took the unprecedented step of reciting the
"Great Law of Peace."
The Chief recited those sacred teachings of Deganawida, the Peacemaker in English,
first in January, 1992 (over five days) and then in September, 1992 (for nine days).

For further information on Deganawida, the Peacemaker, here is a link to the following
article: Christopher Buck, "Deganawida, the Peacemaker." American Writers: A
Collection of Literary Biographies. Supplement XXVI. Edited by Jay Parini. Farmington
Hills, MI: Scribner's Reference/The Gale Group, 2015. Pp. 81–100. https://
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_Deganawida_the_Peacemaker._American_Writers._Supplement_XXVI_2015_

An estimated 2,000 people—including many non-Iroquois—attended the second event.

These events attracted media coverage across Canada. Then again, in the summer of 1994, Chief Thomas repeated the event. Responding to criticism, Chief Thomas, offered this justification:

I think the white man needs to understand. It isn't that he's going to take the law and use it himself. … They already did! The thirteen colonies already took the Great Law for their so-called Constitution. So what should we be afraid of? … If they want to learn it, they have a right to. That should have been done 500 years ago, to study and respect the [Iroquois] Confederacy. Maybe we wouldn't have the problems we have today if they would have studied our people, and [would now] understand and honor and respect [us].

– quoted by Michael K. Foster in "Jacob Ezra Thomas: Educator and Conservator of Iroquois Culture," Histories of Anthropology Annual 2005, p. 227.

Here's an excerpt from the spiritual teachings of Deganawida, the Peacemaker, from "Concerning the League," recited by Chief John Arthur Gibson in 1912:

Thereupon [Deganawida] stood up in the center of the gathering place, and then he said, "First I will answer what it means to say, 'Now it is arriving, the Good Message.' This indeed, is what it means: When it stops, the slaughter of your own people who live here on earth, then everywhere peace will come about, by day and also by night, and it will come about that as one travels around, everyone will be related. … Now again, secondly, I say, 'Now it is arriving, the Power,' and this means that the different nations, all the nations, will become just a single one, and the Great Law will come into being, so that now all will be related to each other. Now in turn, the other, my third saying, 'Now it is arriving, the Peace,' this means that everyone will become related, men and also women, and also the young people and the children, and when all are relatives, every nation, then there will be peace as they roam about by day and also by night. … When they are functioning, the Good Message and also the Power and the Peace, moreover, these will be the principal things everybody will live by; these will be the great values among the people."

– Concerning the League: The Iroquois League Tradition as Dictated in

Onondaga, by John Arthur Gibson (newly elicited, edited and translated by Hanni Woodbury in collaboration with Reg Henry and Harry Webster, on the Basis of A A Goldenweiser's manuscript), Winnipeg: Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics, 1992, pp. 36–41.

Christopher Buck and Kevin Locke carry on their ongoing spiritual conversation about indigenous Messengers of God and their relationship to the teachings of the Baha'i Faith:

Q: In light of the above passage, Kevin, let's broaden the scope of our discussions on indigenous Messengers of God. First, would you agree that—in addition to Baha'u'llah and White Buffalo Calf Woman—Deganawida, the Peacemaker, was another Messenger of God?

A: This morning I re-read "Concerning The League," the English translation of the Onondaga account of the mission of Tekanawita [Deganawida] and pondered these two statements from the Baha'i writings:

Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers, Whom He hath commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of abiding security, the Seat of eternal holiness and transcendent glory.

– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 145.

Undoubtedly in those regions [America] the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times …

– Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to Amir Khan (authorized translation; https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-tablets-extracts-talks/169212878/1#341827961).

Despite the fact that "Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers" and that Abdu'l-Baha, in the Tablet to Amir Khan, assures us that the Divine Call has been raised in North America, most Americans are oblivious to the spiritual heritage of this land!

So, before I answer, let me first ask you a question: Is there an official Baha'i definition of "Messenger of God"?

Q: Yes, I think so. Bear in mind that the Baha'i teachings often speak of "Manifestations of God." But this term is unfamiliar to the public—which is why we have been using "Messengers of God" instead. So "Messengers of God" and "Manifestations of God" are

equivalent terms, as you know, simply indicating God's prophets and educators. For a good definition, please take a quick look at this official Baha'i website: Manifestations of God (https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/revelation/manifestations-god). Below, I've highlighted the main points, in bullet-point format. A Manifestation or Messenger of God:

- Cultivates humanity's spiritual, intellectual and moral capacities.
- Exerts an incomparable influence on the evolution of human society.
- Has a distinct individuality and a definite mission.
- Educates the souls of men, and refines the character of every living man.
- Is a light-bringer of the world.
- Releases a fresh outpouring of spirit into creation, with a universal effect.
- Is a new "sun" that appears and shines "upon the worlds of spirits, of thoughts and of hearts."
- Releases new forces that, over time, increasingly permeate human affairs, providing the main impulse for the further development of consciousness and society.
- Provides the guidance necessary for humanity's social and spiritual evolution.
- Acts as a skilled physician, with a complete grasp of the nature of the body of humanity.
- Prescribes the appropriate cure for the ills of the world—one that best meets the requirements of the time in which the Messenger of God appeared.

So, based on the official definition and criteria listed above, do you agree that White Buffalo Calf Woman meets these criteria—and also Deganawida, the Peacemaker, as well?

A: Yes. One of my mother's [Patricia Locke's] great concerns was the general lack of awareness about the holy souls that appeared on our half [the Western Hemisphere] of the planet. Of the hundreds of known North and South American Messengers, perhaps a representative few could be identified and described, such as Tekanawita/The Peacemaker in the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) sacred tradition, and Ptehincala Ska Win/White Buffalo Calf Woman in the Lakota sacred tradition, and Sweet Medicine

(“Arrow Boy”) in the Cheyenne sacred tradition.
Q: Would you say that the sacred teachings of the Peacemaker, White Buffalo Calf
Woman, and Baha’u’llah are all from God? Do they each come from the same divine
Source?
A: Yes. They are all clearly about ennobling, spiritualizing and raising the people from a
debased state to a heavenly condition. The messages of both White Buffalo Calf
Woman and Tekanawita/The Peacemaker burst with universal themes that align
perfectly with Baha’u’llah’s message to the world today. But one can see that they are
attuned to the exigencies of those particular local kindreds and eras.
Q: This is fascinating, illuminating and important! How do the sacred teachings of the
Peacemaker and White Buffalo Calf Woman compare to those of Baha’u’llah?
A: Both Tekanawita’s and White Buffalo Calf Woman’s messages are 100% about
establishing and broadening the Covenant—that eternal agreement between the
Creator and the creation. But they are very different in that White Buffalo Calf Woman’s
message is concerned with the overarching, basic provisions regarding laws of prayer,
fasting, coming of age, making of relatives, etc., and Tekanawita’s message is about
creating a divine administrative order, a system of just human governance. Both
messages have similar themes: transformation, reconciliation, divine virtues,
sacredness of fire, tree symbolism, succession of divine authority, etc.
Q: So if that’s the case, would you also agree that that these two indigenous spiritual
traditions—the Lakota and Haudenosaunee spiritual heritages—are perfect examples of
the Baha’i teaching the “oneness of religion”?
A: Yes, definitely.
Q: I consider Concerning the League to be a holy book—a sacred text that should be
recognized alongside the scriptures of the great world religions. Do you agree?
A: Absolutely! I have always considered it a miracle that the Haudensaunee (Iroquois)
were able to hold these priceless traditions intact throughout the horrendous colonial
and post-colonial genocidal campaigns. We should all be grateful that they have
preserved such a priceless global spiritual heritage. The Haudenosaunee sacred
narratives—among all the Native American spiritual traditions—are perhaps the most
accessible to Euro-American sensibilities and could serve as a point of entry to the

universe of indigenous spiritual heritage.
Dedicated to the late, former member of the Universal House of Justice, David S. Ruhe,
M.D. (d. 200 5), who wrote, in a paper presented at the Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial
Lecture, at the 18th Annual Bahá'í Studies Conference, August 13, 1994, at Harvard
Law School:
To the warring tribes 700–800 years ago there came an astonishing Prophet of Peace—Deganawida united five, later six, mutually hostile tribal groups in a federal union based on democracy, the first in the Western Hemisphere. He cemented this union with a "Great Law of Peace," a constitution which propounded one expansive human family…. And thus, in God's Plan, with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson as perceptive mediators, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution were vital steps (after the War of Independence [1775–1783]) toward realizing in America the Iroquois concept of the primacy of
individual rights as superior to property and power. And of course the Iroquois foreshadowed, in their Longhouse of sky and earth, the planetary message of the Bahá'í Faith for today.
– David S. Ruhe, M.D., "A New Evolution: Religious Bonding for World Unity," Journal of Bahá'í Studies 6.4 (1994–1995): 45–57 [45].

26.When Indigenous Beliefs and the Baha'i Faith Meet

February 5, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Welcome back to the ongoing conversation about indigenous prophets and Messengers
of God between Baha'i authors Christopher Buck and Lakota artist Kevin Locke.
Q: Would it be a good thing, Kevin, in your view, if Lakota and Haudenosaunee people
were to investigate the teachings of Baha'u'llah? Would doing so add or subtract—
enrich or detract—from their own sacred traditions?
A: I just co-wrote an entire book on this subject, Chris, called Arising.
It's the story of my
own quest for meaning as a young Lakota man, and it tells how I first encountered the
Baha'i Faith—and how its spiritual principles fit so perfectly with Lakota beliefs. The
Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, explained how Baha'u'llah came to
connect and unite all of the spiritual traditions and enable us to discover the true nature
and reality of all the previous Messengers:
The Revelation, of which Baha'u'llah is the source and center, abrogates

none of
the religions that have preceded it, nor does it attempt, in the slightest degree, to
distort their features or to belittle their value. It disclaims any intention of dwarfing
any of the Prophets of the past, or of whittling down the eternal verity of their
teachings. It can, in no wise, conflict with the spirit that animates their claims, nor
does it seek to undermine the basis of any man's allegiance to their cause. Its
declared, its primary purpose is to enable every adherent of these Faiths to
obtain a fuller understanding of the religion with which he stands identified, and
to acquire a clearer apprehension of its purpose. It is neither eclectic in the
presentation of its truths, nor arrogant in the affirmation of its claims. Its teachings
revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but
relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final. Unequivocally and
without the least reservation it [the Baha'i Faith] proclaims all established
religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their
functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind.
– Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 57–58.
Q: Excellent answer! In this remarkable passage, let me illustrate how this statement
may apply to the Lakota and Haudenosaunee sacred traditions, as being among "all
established religions." So, if we substitute "the Lakota and Haudenosaunee sacred
traditions" in place of "all established religions," we get this result:

Unequivocally and without the least reservation it [the Baha'i Faith] proclaims [the
Lakota and Haudenosaunee sacred traditions] to be divine in origin, identical in their
aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in
their value to mankind.
Suppose I were to ask the very same question—but the other way around: Would it be a
good thing if Baha'is—and our other interested readers—were to investigate the
teachings of White Buffalo Calf Woman and Deganawida, the Peacemaker?
A: Yes. That said, Chris, White Buffalo Calf Woman and Deganawida, the

Peacemaker,
are simply representative of the myriad Messengers who have appeared in this half of
the world.
Q: Now I have a question regarding what Chelsea Horton has called the “sole racial
prophecy” in the Baha’i Faith:
Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. … Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.
– Abdu’l-Baha, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 32.
Kevin, according to your understanding of this remarkable Baha’i prophecy, will the
indigenous population of America “enlighten the whole world” purely by virtue of
becoming Baha’is and being enlightened by the Baha’i teachings? Or will there be a
synergy between the indigenous spiritual heritages and the Baha’i teachings—once
they connect, interact, and intermix—such that there will be a powerful new perspective
that will be offered to the world at large? Is this “light upon light”? Or a compound
enlightenment, as it were?
A: My understanding is that this is a “conditional prophecy” based on the quality of
response to the Divine Summons from Baha’u’llah. In order to fulfill it, spiritual
champions must arise, much as so wonderfully described by Chief John Arthur Gibson
in “Concerning the League.”
Q: In your view, Kevin, why should Baha’is—and our other interested readers—respect
sacred indigenous traditions, such as the Lakota and Haudenosaunee spiritual
heritages, and recognize White Buffalo Calf Woman or Deganawida, the Peacemaker,
as Messengers of God?
A: If Baha’is and others recognize White Buffalo Calf Woman or Tekanawita
[Deganawida, the Peacemaker] as Messengers of God, then doing so affirms the “three
onenesses” the Baha’i Faith teaches—the oneness of God, the oneness of all religions,
and the oneness of humankind. That enriches our sense of sacred history—it would be
an unthinkable breach of respect and protocol to do otherwise!

Q: Do you agree that there needs to be “parity” and reciprocal recognition

and respect,
as between Baha'is and the peoples of the Lakota and Haudenosaunee spiritual heritages?
A: Yes.
Q: What can Baha'is contribute to the advancement of the Lakota and Haudenosaunee
peoples, if invited to do so? What do the Baha'i's potentially have to offer?
A: It seems that the Baha'i community is finally at the stage where human resources are
being developed that will be able to effectively carry the Baha'i study circles—known to
Baha'is as the institute process—to Indigenous communities, both rural and urban.
When that occurs, along with devotional gatherings, children's classes, junior youth
empowerment groups, community service projects and social action, as well as
dialogue and public discourses on important social issues, it will have a significant
impact.
For more information on the life and teachings of Deganawida, the Peacemaker, see:
Christopher Buck, "Deganawida, the Peacemaker." American Writers: A Collection of
Literary Biographies. Supplement XXVI. Edited by Jay Parini (Farmington Hills, MI:
Scribner's Reference/The Gale Group, 2015), pp. 81–100.
https://www.academia.edu/
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_Deganawida_the_Peacemaker._American_Writers._Supplement_XXVI_2015_

27.White Buffalo Calf Woman's Spiritual Message

February 12, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

The Lakota Prophet and Messenger of God, White Buffalo Calf Woman, like all the
Creator's Messengers, brought spiritual and moral teachings to her people.
Those profound teachings, largely unknown outside of Lakota indigenous culture until
fairly recently, have enormous resonance, commonality and concord with the spiritual
traditions of other Faiths and belief systems. As the Baha'i teachings affirm, the moral
and spiritual principles of all great religions have a single underlying foundation:
Let us strive with all our powers to unite the East and West so that the

nations of
the world may be advanced and that all may live according to the one foundation of the religions of God. The essentials of the divine religion are one reality, indivisible and not multiple. It is one.
– Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 42.
With that unity in mind, Baha'i authors Christopher Buck and Kevin Locke recently
talked extensively about the relationship between the Baha'i teachings and the
indigenous Lakota spiritual teachings of White Buffalo Calf Woman. Their conversation
continues here:
Q: In the narrative by the Lakota statesman, scholar and singer Lone Man (Lakota/Teton
Sioux name: Isna´ la-wica´)—recorded in 1911 (along with 18 songs, recorded on a wax
cylinders) at the Standing Rock Reservation, Fort Yates, North Dakota—I have identified
the following ten primary, positive ethical and moral teachings of White Buffalo Calf
Woman:
1. Possess "great respect and reverence toward sacred things."
2. Live as "belonging to one family."
3. Be "always very faithful to promises."
4. "Cease hostilities against other nations."
5. "Administer help to the sick."
6. "Comfort others in time of sorrow."
7. Show "kindness toward every living creature on earth."

8. "Remember the dead."
9. "Love your children dearly."
10. "Above all, lead pure lives."
– Frances Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin,
Vol. 61 (1918): 1–561 [see pp. 65–66]. https://archive.org/details/tetonsiouxmusic00lcdens/page/n5.
Kevin, I'd like to ask, did I get these right? There are more teachings, but these seemed
to stand out in Lone Man's narrative. If so, would you please comment on each of White
Buffalo Calf Woman's "Ten Commandments" (my term, if that's okay)? Were you raised
with these sacred values, morals and ethics?
A: First of all, the book you cite, "Teton Sioux Music," is the reason why the Baha'i Faith
was established at Standing Rock! Audrey Reynolds—the first Baha'i who moved to

Standing Rock—received a copy of “Teton Sioux Music” as a youth (I have that original
copy), and noted that Frances Densmore’s informants hijacked the narrative by insisting
that the account of White Buffalo Calf Woman’s appearance and teachings must come
first, because they are foundational to everything—and that Lone Man would give the
account. (Densmore explains this in the introduction, in fact.)
Audrey Reynolds was so moved by this account and the spiritual nature of all the
narratives in “Teton Sioux Music” that it eventually led her to the Baha’i Faith, and she
went directly from the first Baha’i World Congress in London in 1963 to Standing Rock!
Her husband, Jonathan Reynolds, is still alive and can give many more details. The way
in which “Teton Sioux Music” outlines and fleshes out so many of these Ten
Commandments is amazing. The title you give here is ingenious and inspired!
Q: Thanks, Kevin. Here’s the way I understand it from a Baha’i perspective: every Faith
gives essential moral and spiritual guidance to its followers, and to the civilizations of
the time, as well. Each of the founders of those Faiths bring commandments, principles
and laws that encourage humanity to love one another, to establish peace and respect
the sacredness of life. The Baha’i teachings put it this way:
The divine Manifestations have been iconoclastic in Their teachings, uprooting
error, destroying false religious beliefs and summoning mankind anew to the
fundamental oneness of God. All of Them have, likewise, proclaimed the
oneness of the world of humanity. The essential teaching of Moses was the law
of Sinai, the Ten Commandments. Christ renewed and again revealed the
commands of the one God and precepts of human action. In Muhammad,
although the circle was wider, the intention of His teaching was likewise to uplift
and unify humanity in the knowledge of the one God. In the Bab the circle was
again very much enlarged, but the essential teaching was the same. The Books
of Baha’u’llah number more than one hundred. Each one is an evident proof

sufficient for mankind; each one from foundation to apex proclaims the essential
unity of God and humanity, the love of God, the abolition of war and the divine
standard of peace. Each one also inculcates divine morality, the manifestation of
lordly graces— in every word a book of meanings. For the Word of God is
collective wisdom, absolute knowledge and eternal truth.

– Abdu’l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 154.
A: Yes, Chris, that collective wisdom reflects itself in every holy Faith, including the
Lakota beliefs. So in the next essay in this series, let’s look at White Buffalo Calf
Woman’s spiritual commandments, and see how they fit this Baha’i concept of the
oneness of all religion.

28.The Ten Commandments of Lakota Life

February 19, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

It turns out that other Faiths beyond Judaism and Christianity contain ten
commandments for living a spiritual life—including the Lakota belief system brought by
White Buffalo Calf Woman.
In this continuation of the BahaiTeachings.org conversation between authors
Christopher Buck and Lakota Baha’i Kevin Locke, we learn more about those
commandments and their relevance to daily life in the modern world:
Q: Kevin, can you elaborate on White Buffalo Calf Woman’s “Ten Commandments?”
Would you please comment on each? How do the Lakota people put White Buffalo Calf
Woman’s “Ten Commandments” into practice and keep them alive today?
A: Here’s what I know, having been born and raised in the Lakota sacred tradition—and
having later become a Baha’i, while walking both the Lakota and Baha’i pathways as
one:
1. Possess “great respect and reverence toward sacred things.” The
Lakota do differentiate between the sacred and the mundane. The appearance
and message associated with White Buffalo Calf Woman is the flash point.
Everything takes on meaning and becomes sacred in the context of her
revivifying and renewing message and presence. Each ceremony associated
with White Buffalo Calf Woman’s teachings invokes her divine presence,
whereby participants are mystically and spiritually transported to that sacred,
placeless and timeless realm, sanctified from this world.
The sacred pipe that White Buffalo Calf Woman brought is the symbol and
touchstone of her dispensation and through it all things are made sacred. Her
teachings and ceremonies recreate and invoke her holy manifestation from the
sacred, heavenly realms to this physical semblance of reality. As a part of the
“Prophetic Cycle,” moreover, White Buffalo Calf Woman foretold the appearance
of Thunkašila / Grandfather (Baha’u’llah) — as the one Who will bring the sacred
and mundane together and lead all the peoples of the world to the “Red

Road.”
2. Live as “belonging to one family.” The most important phrase associated with
White Buffalo Calf Woman is “mitákuye oyás’in,” which means “all my relations.”
Every prayer and benediction is solemnized with this testimony affirming the

relatedness of all things physical, spiritual, living or dead, animate or inanimate. It
is the affirmation that all things are of God and therefore interrelated.
3. Be “always very faithful to promises.” In the Lakota oral tradition, the spoken
word is paramount. It is intensified and imbued with power and potency.
Throughout the northern plains, one can find hand shapes deeply etched on
granite boulders wrought by the ancient holy ones. Prayers and pledges are
made by fitting one’s hand within these ancient petroglyphs and intoning one’s
prayers and invocations. The boulders bearing these ancient petroglyphs stand
throughout eternity and bear witness to one’s sincerity throughout these worlds
and all the worlds beyond. This is symbolic of the belief that all of creation bears
continual witness to all of one’s words and deeds. In a famous song regarding
the omniscience of creation, the eagle from the apex of the physical realm says;
“ognáš mayágnaye kiló” = “Don’t you dare try to deceive me!”
4. “Cease hostilities against other nations.” One of the devotional practices
ordained by White Buffalo Calf Woman is the Hunká or Hunkákiciyapi = “The
Making of Relatives.” Through visions and divine guidance, it was originally
instituted to solemnify enduring peace between the Lakota and Arikara, two
formerly mortal tribal enemies. The Hunká is also called the “Corn Dance”
because the corn represents the seed of faith that is planted, then sprouts,
grows, flourishes and matures—the fruit of which is the peace and holy love
planted in the hearts of the formerly rival and mutually averse nations. This “Corn
Dance” ceremony represents the Divine Will for peace and reconciliation
between hostile nations and factions.
5. “Administer help to the sick.” The hoop of holiness and love—demarcated
through the teachings of White Buffalo Calf Woman—represents wholeness and
well-being in which all are interconnected and interrelated by bonds of love and
concern. No one can be excluded or left out of this hoop. Any who are sick or
ailing must be attended to and restored to wholeness and well-being.
6. “Comfort others in time of sorrow.” One of the expressions of White

Buffalo Calf
Woman's injunction to be loving and compassionate is wašígla wolwíchak'u =
"Feeding the Mourners." This involves the compassionate and magnanimous act of one group endeavoring to release an individual or family from their grief by hosting a public feast and gathering to condole and to officially entreat the mourners to put aside their mourning and bring their heart and soul back in to the
community. This "Feeding the Mourners" ceremony involves prayers, speaking words of comfort and condolence, presenting gifts, offering food and love to mend the broken-hearted. This type of expression pervades the traditional Lakota culture and is the direct result, expression and enactment of White Buffalo
Calf Woman's divine counsel.

7. Show "kindness toward every living creature on earth." A devotional song associated with White Buffalo Calf Woman states:

"Thunkášila wanmáyanka yo! Makháta táku wakhán mayák'upi cha, henáke
thanínyan ye che thanínyan yaúnkte. Lehápi cha létu nunwé"
– in English it means "Grandfather behold me! All sacredness upon the earth you
have bestowed upon us. Through all of these Your holiness is revealed to us. This you have ordained. Thus it shall be."

The kindness shown toward everything on earth results from the understanding that everything is a physical manifestation of spiritual reality, exemplifying the
truth that both the seen and the unseen, the physical and spiritual worlds are the
handiwork of the one Creator, Whose laws pervade the entirety of His creation. Thus everything in this physical world is a counterpart of something in the spiritual realms. Kindness, respect, reverence and awe are accorded everything in this world which, in reality, is a portal to ineffable, divine mysteries.

8. "Remember the dead." "Wanági Gluhápi" = "Keeping of the Soul," one of the
devotional practices established by White Buffalo Calf Woman, is the symbolic keeping of a departed loved one's spirit in order to draw the physical and spiritual
worlds together in the heart of the people. This devotional practice prescribes that the family of the departed loved one dedicate a year or several years, or even a lifetime to perform good deeds and virtuous, magnanimous acts in the name of the loved one in order to further their progress on the path to eternity.

9. "Love your children dearly." The Hunká (= "Making of Relatives" or "Corn
Ceremony" mentioned in #4 above) especially involves children. A family who

wishes divine blessings to descend upon their child will identify an individual from
a foreign community to become a godparent for their child. Thus the child
becomes the axis of love around which the enduring spiritual peace, amity and
accord is created. The child becomes “hokšíchanlkiyapi” = “a child whom they
use for a heart,” often understood as “beloved child.” The solemnizing act is the
Corn Dance, in which it is the child who represents the corn which, when
nurtured and treated tenderly—receiving the spiritual equivalent of rain, sun, and
gentle breeze (all symbolic of the manifestations of love that must needs be
shown the child)—will grow and its fruit will bring nourishment and blessings to
the people.
10. “Above all, lead pure lives.” Perhaps the most important admonition of White
Buffalo Calf Woman was to moral rectitude and to lead pure, upright lives. At the
same time the principle of cleansing and transformation was also enjoined.

Q: This is profound! I hear White Buffalo Calf Woman’s voice enthrall, echo, resound
and reverberate in this clarion call of Baha’u’llah:
The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and
until its unity is firmly established. This unity can never be achieved so long as
the counsels which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass
unheeded. …
One righteous act is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to
cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. …
Be pure, O people of God, be pure; be righteous, be righteous …. Say: O people
of God! That which can ensure the victory of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, His
hosts and helpers on earth, have been set down in the sacred Books and
Scriptures, and are as clear and manifest as the sun.
– Baha’u’llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, pp.
286–287.

29.Connec5ng, Unifying and Fulfilling Indigenous Spiritual Tradi5ons

February 26, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Have you ever wondered about the “forgotten” religious and spiritual traditions—the
ones lost in the mists of time?
The Baha’i teachings recognize and honor those traditions: “Undoubtedly in those

regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been
forgotten now." – Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to Amir Khan. The Baha'i writings also say:
The Reality of the divine Religions is one, because the Reality is one and cannot
be two. All the prophets are united in their message, and unshaken. They are like
the sun; in different seasons they ascend from different rising points on the
horizon. Therefore every ancient prophet gave the glad tidings of the future, and
every future has accepted the past.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 29.
Abdu'l-Baha led the Baha'i Faith from 1892 to 1921. During this time, much of the
sacred indigenous religious lore was forcibly "forgotten" as a matter of official U.S.
government policy:
In his Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on October 10, 1882
Commissioner Hiram Price planted a seed that would forever alter the course of
United States government policy concerning American Indian religious freedom:
"Civilization is a plant of exceedingly slow growth," Price wrote, "unless
supplemented by Christian teaching and influences" (Prucha 1990:157). The
following year Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller took up the torch lit by
Price. In his Annual Report on November 1, 1883 Teller spoke of "a great
hindrance to the civilization of the Indians, viz., the continuance of old heathenish
dances, such as the sun-dance, scalp-dance, &c. These dances … ought … to
be discontinued, and if the Indians … are not willing to discontinue them, the
agents should be instructed to compel such discontinuance" (Prucha 1990:160).
As a result of this push to "civilize" the American Indian by means of suppressing
their distinct spiritual practices and traditions American Indian religious freedom
was outlawed by the government in 1883. The ban was not officially lifted until
the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978.
The effects of the influential 1928 Merriam Report nearly a half century later
gradually led to the demise of the ban on American Indian religion and ritual,

anticipating the 1934 Wheeler-Howard Act, popularly known as the Indian
Reorganization Act (Prucha 1990:219–225). Although traditional spiritual
practices were apparently observed and maintained in secret during the crucial
transition period from the initial ban in 1883 until after the Merriam Report in

1928, a great amount of religious knowledge was lost as the older generations of
Lakotas passed on and the younger generations were raised in a hybrid milieu in which the ever-present and inescapable shadow of colonialism, Christianity, and other non-traditional beliefs and values constantly loomed.
– David Posthumus, Transmitting Sacred Knowledge: Aspects of Historical and Contemporary Oglala Lakota Belief and Ritual, Indiana University, 2015, pp. 427–428.
As for the role of the Lakota holy messenger White Buffalo Calf Woman, David Posthumus noted:
Perhaps White Buffalo Woman originally provided the model of not only the intermediary but also the method by which religious knowledge is passed on and practitioners trained, namely, the master-apprentice model. According to Edward Curtis (1908:56–60), White Buffalo Woman instructed Thathánka Nážin (Standing Buffalo) on both the Sacred Pipe and the ceremonies, who then passed that knowledge down to the next generation. In any case whether the original model was provided by the symbol of the Four Winds or White Buffalo Woman, the religious concept of the intermediary is ancient, significant, and pervasive.
– p. 125, n. 72.
As in the previous four BahaiTeachings.org articles, the conversation between authors
Christopher Buck and Lakota artist Kevin Locke continues:
Q: Kevin, would you please comment on the above? Do you agree that what is "forgotten"—or suppressed, lost, etc.—may be "remembered," or at least partially
preserved and restored?
A: It is accurate to state that most surviving U.S. indigenous peoples, under the
genocidal government-sponsored campaign of extermination and eradication, were forced to succumb to the juggernaut of acculturation and colonization, and were thus
stripped of their ancestral spiritual heritage.
So, in a sense, one could definitely say that many were forced to "forget" their own
spiritual traditions.
However, many heroic souls went to great extremes to safeguard and keep alive the
spiritual traditions, dedicated to "never forget"—but instead to fortify and perpetuate the
sacred ways.

Despite relentless Euro-American pressure, many of the indigenous languages were
kept alive and proved to be an impenetrable safeguard to the erasure of spiritual ways
and knowledge.

My mom's [Patricia Locke's] uncle was selected to be a tradition-bearer by the older
Lakota generations during the early reservation period. At the same time he was forced
to attend school. Since school was interfering with his true education, he concocted a
plan to continue his studies.
Despite the Reservation's truancy officers continually chasing him down and escorting
him to school, he was eventually banned from attending all schools. Not a single
teacher could be found who would take him.
He did it by collecting rattlesnakes, toads, slugs, hornet's nests, spiders, etc. and
secretly placing them in the teachers' drawers and closets! He became so expert at this
that he was quite famous and banned from all schools in the region.
Because of his determination, he learned, preserved, and taught complete Lakota
ceremonial knowledge throughout his life, until his passing in the mid-1980s.
Q: Since sacred Lakota teachings, to varying degrees, may have been lost, what are
the implications for interfaith relations between the Baha'i and Lakota faith communities?
A: Most Lakota, out of necessity, have become expert syncretists—people comfortably
able to fuse and unite different cultures and spiritual traditions. It would be wonderful to
have more involvement between these faith communities on serious topics of discourse!
Q: Do you agree that Baha'is should recognize and respect indigenous spirituality, as
part of the Baha'i teachings of the "oneness of religion," peace among religions, etc.? In
so doing, what part of Lakota religious tradition is harmonious with Baha'i beliefs and
practices?
A: Yes, I agree that Baha'is—and all people—should be cognizant and respectful of the
spiritual heritage of any land where they reside, and realize that anything good, beautiful
and sacred in every culture is derived from the same Source.
Q: Understood. So let's think about practical steps that everyone, including Baha'is, can
take in exploring more of the divine echoes that reverberate in the sacred teachings of
White Buffalo Calf Woman, Deganawida, the Peacemaker, and Baha'u'llah.
A: The Lakota, Haudenosaunee and Baha'i sacred traditions, each in their own

ways
can, and should, enrich one another. That would be a good thing. This, as I understand
it, may be one possible meaning of this important statement by Shoghi Effendi, the
Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, who wrote:

Therein lies the strength of the unity of the [Baha'i] Faith, of the validity of a
Revelation that claims not to destroy or belittle previous Revelations, but to connect, unify, and fulfill them.
– Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 22.
As Baha'is, including people of goodwill and compassion everywhere, we all need to do
what we can to connect, unify and fulfill these beautiful spiritual traditions.

30.Sweet Medicine: Cheyenne Messenger of God

March 5, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

To learn more about the indigenous Messengers of God in the Americas, BahaiTeachings.org continues Christopher Buck's interview with Lakota Baha'i, Kevin
Locke.
Q: Earlier, Kevin, we talked about the "Ten Commandments" of White Buffalo Calf
Woman:
1. Possess great respect and reverence toward sacred things.
2. Live as belonging to one family.
3. Be always very faithful to promises.
4. Cease hostilities against other nations.
5. Administer help to the sick.
6. Comfort others in time of sorrow.
7. Show kindness toward every living creature on Earth.
8. Remember the dead.
9. Love your children dearly.
10. Above all, lead pure lives.
– Frances Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music," Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin,
Vol. 61 (1918), pp. 65–66.
https://archive.org/details/tetonsiouxmusic00lcdens/page/
n5.
First, to explain the origins of these spiritual teachers, and their teachings, let's look at a
passage from Baha'u'llah:
It is clear and evident to thee that all the Prophets are the Temples of the Cause
of God, Who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe with

discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith. Such is the unity of those Essences of being, those Luminaries of infinite and immeasurable splendour.

– Baha'u'llah, The Book of Certitude, pp. 153–154.

Q: Kevin, do you agree that, if the teachings of all three of these Messengers of God compare favorably, then that's good evidence that they were sent by the same "Great Spirit," or "Great Being," God? That White Buffalo Calf Woman, Deganawida, the Peacemaker, and Baha'u'llah "are the Temples of the Cause of God," that all three Messengers of God "have appeared clothed in divers (diverse) attire," are "abiding in the same tabernacle," are "soaring in the same heaven," are "seated upon the same throne," are "uttering the same speech," and are "proclaiming the same Faith"?

I myself have envisioned these three Messengers in conversation!

A: Of course, I would answer "Yes!" to all these questions. These are the exact same questions I asked myself 45 years ago, leading up to becoming a Baha'i.

I find it fascinating that you have envisioned these Messengers in conversation.

According to the narratives I've heard, the Cheyenne Messenger of God—Sweet Medicine—attended a convocation of all the divine Messengers and was bade by the Chief of them all (Baha'u'llah?) to sit beside him and receive the message that he was to deliver to his people. A book called Sweet Medicine by Peter Powell is on my reading list. I wonder if this convocation is recounted there?

Q: These are among Sweet Medicine's sacred laws and teachings, as told by Cheyenne tribal historian John Stands in Timber, and recorded by anthropologist Margot Liberty, a collaborative effort:

Many centuries ago the prophet and savior Sweet Medicine came to the prairie people. Before his birth the people were bad, living without law and killing one another. But with his life those things changed. Indians are often called savages, and it was true of the Cheyennes at first, but not after Sweet Medicine's time. …

"Listen to me carefully, and truthfully follow up my instructions," Sweet

Medicine
told the chiefs. “You chiefs are peace makers. Though your son might be killed in
front of your tepee, you should take a peace pipe and smoke. Then you would be
called an honest chief. You chiefs own the land and the people. If your men, your
soldier societies, should be scared and retreat, you are not to step back but take
a stand to protect your land and your people. Get out and talk to the people. If
strangers come, you are the ones to give presents to them and invitations. When
you meet someone, or he comes to your tepee asking for anything, give it to him.
Never refuse. Go outside your tepee and sing your chief song, so all the people
will know you have done something good.”
As closely as I can put it, that is what he told them. And the chiefs did keep it in
their minds. When I was a boy they used to go up on a hill near camp and talk to
the people about all the laws Sweet Medicine had taught so long ago. There
were many of them. The Cheyennes were not supposed to marry too young or to

anyone related to them; they have forgotten that today. They were not to take
anything by force, from another person, or use it without permission, or to say
bad things about others, especially the leaders or chiefs. They were to take pride
in their bodies and the way they appeared, to keep clean and stay healthy. …
I learned the laws from my grandfather.
– John Stands In Timber and Margot Liberty, Cheyenne Memories, pp. 27, 44–45.
Kevin, would you comment, please?
A: It is clear from the above testimony that Sweet Medicine adjured the people to rise
above their earthly, materialistic tendencies and to set their sights on that which is
heavenly and eternal—that is, to forego the ephemeral and transitory things of life.
Surely this guidance is from a heavenly source. Sweet Medicine became the conduit for
these blessings and guidance that would bring them into alignment with the will of
Maheo (the Cheyenne word for God) and enable the Cheyenne peoples to prosper in
this world and the worlds to come.
Early on, the Cheyenne and Lakota became the closest of allies and sealed their sacred
bond through the exchange of prayer songs which are used today in remembrance of

the Divine Beings—Sweet Medicine and White Buffalo Calf Woman, who rescued their
peoples from starvation and degradation and promised the Day of light and unity that
would bring them to all abundance and bounty.
Q: Thanks for introducing me to this divine messenger named Sweet Medicine, Kevin.
As you know, I have a PhD in the academic study of religion—so that means that I'm
supposed to know quite a bit about world religions. But I later realized that all of my
graduate training—for which I am very grateful—taught me virtually nothing about
indigenous religions in the Americas. That's one reason why I thank you for expanding
my consciousness.
I also taught world religions for several years as a university professor. One of the
justifications for teaching world religions at state-funded institutions—without running
afoul of First Amendment restrictions in the U.S. Constitution—is to promote what
scholars call "spiritual literacy." Do you agree that people in general, who are interested
in religion—and Baha'is in particular—would do well to acquaint themselves with the
indigenous messengers of God that we have so far presented, in furtherance of their
own "spiritual literacy"?
A: When one studies the historical record, one finds that virtually all of early European
chroniclers, including Columbus, testified to the moral superiority of the Indigenous
people. From whence does that moral compass originate? What is the Source of all
goodness? Morality? Spirituality? I believe that we are at the dawning edge of a

collective spiritual coming of age when we can acknowledge and celebrate
the stupendous heavenly heritage of this side of the planet.

31.Recognizing and Respec5ng Indigenous Messengers of God

April 1, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In this continuing series of articles, we're learning about the Indigenous Messengers of
God from the Western Hemisphere—the Prophets who taught native tribal

peoples.
The Baha'i teachings say that all peoples have received guidance from the Creator
"from time immemorial":
… the Manifestations of [God's] Divine glory and the Day Springs of eternal holiness have been sent down from time immemorial, and been commissioned to summon mankind to the one true God. That the names of some of them are forgotten and the records of their lives lost is to be attributed to the disturbances
and changes that have overtaken the world.
– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 174.
So what impact did those spiritual Messengers have on native peoples? In the previous
essay, Kevin Locke said:
When one studies the historical record, one finds that virtually all of early European
chroniclers, including Columbus, testified to the moral superiority of the Indigenous
people. From whence does that moral compass originate? What is the Source of all
goodness? Morality? Spirituality? I believe that we are at the dawning edge of a
collective spiritual coming of age when we can acknowledge and celebrate
the stupendous heavenly heritage of this side of the planet.
Q: Kevin, this raises a valid point, worth pondering, giving pause for thought. The
answers to your rhetorical questions are obvious: the Source of goodly ethical and godly
moral teachings must come from God, the Great Spirit, or the Great Being,
as Baha'u'llah wrote:
Men at all times and under all conditions stand in need of one to exhort them, guide them and to instruct and teach them. Therefore He hath sent forth His Messengers, His Prophets and chosen ones that they might acquaint the people with the divine purpose underlying the revelation of Books and the raising up of
Messengers, and that everyone may become aware of the trust of God which is latent in the reality of every soul.
– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 161.

Here, "at all times and under all conditions" sounds quite universal! The specific
teachings of any Messenger of God also contain universal precepts and principles. Do
you agree?
A: Yes, of course I agree. In fact, I think the following call for recognition of the
Indigenous Messengers of God has great importance:

Acknowledgement of the myriad of Messengers of the Creator, the Great Mystery, to the peoples of the Western Hemisphere. – “Declaration of Vision:
Toward The Next 500 Years.” Turtle Quarterly (Fall/Winter 1994), p. 8. (Presented
at the 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago.) http://ili.nativeweb.org/dovision.html

Q: In this “Indigenous Messengers of God” series, we have presented several Messengers for the benefit of a wider audience. Our readers may wonder why, given
the fact that BahaiTeachings.org primarily presents information on the Baha’i Faith,
which recognizes a number of Messengers of God as part of the world’s religious
history and the world’s social and spiritual evolution—Krishna, Abraham, the Buddha,
Moses, Zoroaster, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, the Bab, and Baha’u’llah.
Kevin, could you please comment on the purpose of our featuring several Indigenous
Messengers of God, such as Deganawida, the Peacemaker (Haudenosaunee/Iroquois),
White Buffalo Calf Woman (Lakota), Sweet Medicine (Cheyenne), Quetzalcoatl (Toltec/
Maya), and Viracocha (Inca), in this “Indigenous Messengers of God” series?

A: This quote by President John F. Kennedy is probably more true now than ever:

For a subject worked and reworked so often in novels, motion pictures, and television, American Indians remain probably the least understood and most misunderstood Americans of us all.

– President John F. Kennedy, quoted in Alvin M. Josephy, editor, The American Heritage Book of Indians, p. 7.

President Kennedy’s insightful comment serves as an entry point for the need to
increase our collective understanding of Indigenous American spirituality. This “spiritual
literacy” can best be gained through recognition and understanding of the Messengers
of God who appeared and guided the Indigenous peoples of this land.

Q: So where do we go from here? Do we all now have a golden opportunity to recognize and respect the Indigenous Messengers, including their teachings, the universal values they represent, and their practices in Indigenous community life today?
What good outcomes can come of this? Why is this subject significant and important?
What potential results can be realized? What do you envision, especially based on key
Baha’i texts?

A: The fulfillment of this oft-quoted Prophetic promise from Abdu’l-Baha

makes the
enlightenment of the whole world contingent on the quality of Indigenous responses to
the Baha'i revelation:
Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. … these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will
become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 33.
For me, this remarkable quote raises a fundamental question of paramount importance:
What is it that uniquely distinguishes "these Indians" that they should have such a
special promise assigned to them? In addition to centuries of unparalleled persecution,
suffering and genocide, the Indigenous peoples of this hemisphere have been bequeathed with a rich spiritual heritage, through a host of divine Messengers of God,
who, long ago, planted precious seeds of faith that will blossom and effloresce in the
light of this new day.
Q: How do you see this happening? If you had a crystal ball and could see into the
future, what would your vision of the fulfillment of Abdu'l-Baha's prophecy be?
A: Other than to say that it will be unspeakably glorious, I cannot discern the future or
even venture to guess what it might be. From my perspective, one way to realize that
glorious future is through a rapid expansion of the Baha'i institute process. For the most
part, the Indigenous peoples are the only rural-based populations left in the Western
Hemisphere, and souls will need to be raised up and trained to reach out from their
urban enclaves to meet the challenges of rural communities—especially the next
generations, the children and youth.
Q: How can the Baha'i institute process help promote spiritual and social development
and well-being within Indigenous communities? Can you give an example from your
personal experience? What about Baha'i initiatives in working with children and youth
as well?
A: Sure—here's a brief description of that institute process:
It [the training institute] strives to engage the individual in an educational process

in which virtuous conduct and self-discipline are developed in the context of service, fostering a coherent and joyful pattern of life that weaves together study,
worship, teaching, community building and, in general, involvement in other processes that seek to transform society. At the heart of the educational process
is contact with the Word of God, whose power sustains every individual's attempts to purify his or her heart and to walk a path of service with "the feet of
detachment".
– The Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly,
19 April 2013.

For me, this process is all about individual, community and societal spiritualization and
transformation. Interestingly, the Indigenous Ngöbe-Buglé (Guaymi) people of Panama
are perhaps the most notable exemplars of the progress and results of this institute
process, which has helped them grow and develop rapidly and sustainably.
Q: Interesting—and inspiring! So how do we get from here to there? After recognizing
and respecting the spiritual heritage and legacy bequeathed by the "myriad of Messengers of the Creator, the Great Mystery, to the peoples of the Western Hemisphere," what next?
A: Perhaps we will begin to recognize those "myriad of Messengers of God," for their
intrinsic worth—and will enhance the awareness that we, as their spiritual descendants,
have special obligations and duties to fulfill in this hemisphere.

32.Quetzalcoatl and Indigenous Spiritual Truth

April 8, 2019

Let's revisit the case of Quetzalcoatl, known as the "Plumed Serpent," the spiritual
Messenger who taught the Toltec and Mayan peoples in what is now Mexico.
One Baha'i writer and scholar includes Quetzalcoatl in his list of potential Indigenous
Messengers:
Native American Baha'is are confident that their cultures received divine guidance—the Baha'i texts assure us that all people have—and speculate whether Deganawidah, the White Buffalo Calf Woman, Quetzalcoatl, Wiracocha and other spiritual teachers were Manifestations [of God] or Prophetic figures.
– Robert H. Stockman, The Baha'i Faith: A Guide For The Perplexed, p.
38.
The Baha'i teachings clearly say that God leaves no civilization bereft of spiritual

guidance, that the Creator sends humanity a divine Messenger "in every age and cycle"—so what's the evidence for Quetzalcoatl being one of those divine Messengers? Abdu'l-Baha gave us the criteria:

… the proofs of the validity and inspiration of a Prophet of God are the deeds of beneficent accomplishment and greatness emanating from Him. If He proves to be instrumental in the elevation and betterment of mankind, He is undoubtedly a valid and heavenly Messenger.

– Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 366.

The significance of Quetzalcoatl's contributions to civilization demonstrates that divine guidance was, and is, universal in nature and scope. Indigenous spiritual traditions, in their finest forms, can—and arguably should—be recognized and respected as God-inspired not only by Baha'is, but by all spiritually minded and open-minded people.

The historical "Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl"—which means "Our Young Prince, the Feathered Serpent"—was known in Toltec, Mayan and Aztec culture as the son of the great god Quetzalcoatl, their creator and fertility deity. Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl founded and ruled the ancient city of Tollan Xicotitlan (also known as Tula), capital of the Toltec empire between 900–1100 CE in Mexico, near the present-day city of Tula de Allende.

In his definitive survey of the various traditions surrounding Quetzalcoatl—Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs—Henry B. Nicholson, professor emeritus of anthropology at UCLA and acclaimed as America's greatest scholar of the Aztec civilization, we learn the following facts regarding the life of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl:

(1) Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was conceivably a genuine historical figure prominently involved with an early stage of Toltec history; (2) if so, he later seems to have become blended and, occasionally, to some extent confused with certain supernatural personalities, particularly an ancient fertility/rain/wind/creator deity, Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl; (3) possibly the son of an important early conqueror, Mixcoatl/Totepeuh, he assumed the secular and sacerdotal leadership of a vigorous group of Nahua-speakers established at Tollan; (4) while in power, he appears to have introduced or presided over the introduction of significant

cultural innovations, especially in the religious sphere but also in other aspects of the culture; (5) due to circumstances that are obscure but which may have primarily involved opposition to his religious doctrines, a conflict developed in Tollan to such proportions that Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was forced to leave, probably with a sizable number of followers; (6) heading generally in a southeastward direction, with a possible stopover in Cholollan, he reached the Gulf Coast and either moved further eastward, disappeared, or died; (7) the suggestion that "the" Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl of Tollan actually led a group into northern Yucatan and established a new political capital there, Chichen Itza, has often been made and is certainly conceivable, although an alternative hypothesis invoking different leaders bearing the names Kukulcan, Quetzalcoatl, Nacxit, etc., as titles seems more likely; (8) in addition to his religious role, which is stressed in the sources from both Central Mexico and northern Yucatan, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl appears also to have functioned importantly as a political leader/ consolidator and was best remembered by the Toltec-connected dynasts of Highland Guatemala as the dispenser of all valid political authority; (9) the evidence for a widespread belief in his eventual return to reclaim his power, which might have significantly influenced Motecuhzoma II of Mexico Tenochtitlan —who apparently was considered to be the direct dynastic successor of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl—during his initial dealings with Cortés, is quite strong. – p. 291.

More importantly, Quetzalcoatl abolished the long-standing religious practice of human sacrifice, and instead taught "sacrificing only serpents, birds, and butterflies" (p. 46)—or, in another account, "quail, butterflies, snakes, and large grasshoppers " (p. 10). This great and notable achievement distinguishes Quetzalcoatl as a spiritual leader, although the abhorrent practice was reinstituted after his death. Quetzalcoatl was opposed by the "demons" or "sorcerers" (tlatlacatecollo, "man-owls"), who repeatedly tried, through deception and coercion, to persuade Quetzalcoatl to sacrifice human beings (p. 42).

The figure of the historical Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl looms large in the national consciousness of Mexico. In Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition, author David Carrasco similarly concluded:

Quetzalcoatl is usually portrayed as a ’sacred human being,’ by which we mean
that his life manifests the presence, again and again, of divine and celestial forces and appearances which determine and drive his destiny toward an archetypal model.
– p. 79.
Carrasco also concluded that:
Quetzalcoatl inaugurated a golden age of ancient Mexican civilization. Of the greatness and prestige of Quetzalcoatl, it has been said: “Truly with him it began
—truly from him it flowed out, All Art and Knowledge.
– Ibid., p. 85.
Nicholson also noted the well-known prophecy that Quetzalcoatl would one day return,
another significant indication that his people considered him a divine Messenger.
In fact, so strong was the Indigenous belief in Quetzalcoatl’s return that the Spanish
conquistador, Hernán Cortés, was tragically mistaken by Motecuhzoma II as the return
of Quetzalcoatl, when they first met on November 8, 1519 in Tenochtitlán, ancient
capital of the Aztec empire, as Professor Nicholson points out:
… he [Quetzalcoatl] was still expected even then. When the Spaniards arrived, it
was believed that it was he returning. The Zapotec revolt of 1550 was caused by a report that their god, “che haveva da redimerli,” had appeared. It is then
pointed out that Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was born on the sign One Cane (Acatl) and that the year of the Spanish arrival commenced on that sign—from which the
belief arose that the latter were their gods, since TQ [Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl] had
prophesied that a bearded nation would come to subject them.
– Henry B. Nicholson, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl: The Once and Future Lord of the Toltecs, p. 65.
This belief that Cortés was the return of Quetzalcoatl had disastrous consequences, for
Cortés conquered the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan on August 13, 1521. So why should
anyone continue to believe in the return of Quetzalcoatl?
The belief that Baha’u’llah was the return of Quetzalcoatl was popularized in 1971 by
Tony Shearer, author of Lord of the Dawn: Quetzalcoatl and the Tree of Life, and then
again in 1974 by Vinson Brown, author of Voices of Earth and Sky: The Vision Life of

the Native Americans and Their Culture Heroes (illustrated by Tony Shearer). But for
Baha'u'llah to be identified as the return of Quetzalcoatl, the mission counts most, not
the person. Quetzalcoatl is further proof of Indigenous spiritual truth—as is Baha'u'llah's

new revelation, which has already begun to rejuvenate and revivify the Indigenous
populations and First Nations peoples throughout the Americas.

33.Australian Aboriginal Iden5ty and the Baha'i Faith

April 15, 2019

In 2017, a research article in the journal Nature showed that Aboriginals, the Indigenous
peoples of Australia, have inhabited the continent for at least 65,000 years:
The settlement of Madjedbebe around 65ka … sets a new minimum age for the
human colonization of Australia and the dispersal of modern humans out of Africa
and across south Asia.
– Chris Clarkson et al., "Human occupation of northern Australia by 65,000
years ago," Nature, Volume 547, 20 July 2017, p. 310.
This new evidence, found at an ancient rock shelter in Kakadu National Park, means
that Australian Aboriginal culture and spiritual traditions have been around for a very
long time—perhaps the longest unbroken cultural heritage on Earth.
The Baha'i teachings emphasize the spiritual capacity of native peoples in bringing
together all peoples:
Exert yourselves with heart and soul so that, perchance, through your efforts the
light of universal peace may shine and this darkness of estrangement and enmity
may be dispelled from amongst men, that all men may become as one family and
consort together in love and kindness, that the East may assist the West and the
West give help to the East, for all are the inhabitants of one planet, the people of
one original native land and the flocks of one Shepherd.
– Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 469.
So what can happen when Baha'is and Aboriginals encounter each other? The result
might surprise you. Let me introduce Australian Aboriginal Baha'i Henry James "Banjo"
Clarke, who wrote firsthand about the first time he met Baha'is:
I am still Aboriginal and always will be, that's the main thing I always try to put

across. I still have my Aboriginal identity. … Years of being a Baha'i has helped me a lot. … I think that if Aboriginals studied the Baha'i Faith they'd come back to their real selves again, because the Baha'i Faith is so like the Aboriginal way of life. The Baha'i writings say that in the future humankind will be so sensitive that no one anywhere in the world will be able to sit down to a meal if they know that somewhere in the world a person is starving. Aboriginal feelings are like those writings. We feel united with everyone.

– Banjo Clarke, as told to Camilla Chance, Wisdom Man, pp. 214, 216.

After a lifetime of enduring painful prejudice at the hands of white Australians, you can imagine Banjo Clarke's surprise when he first encountered the Baha'is:

Then that day came. In July 1975 the biggest change of my life happened when I encountered the Baha'i religion. A small group of Baha'i people visited us Aboriginals at the Framlingham Mission. … One of the Baha'is I've met that day, Camilla, became my closest friend from that day on.

Very soon afterwards I was in Warrnambool Base Hospital. I get pneumonia regularly because I worked in the bluestone quarry—I think its proper name is basalt—for years and years. Another couple of Aboriginals, Lloyd and Albert, were in my hospital room too. While we were there, people got to speak with us who had never talked with Aboriginals before. And Camilla brought her little children to visit us, and sat with us giving her presence. …

And Camilla's little girl Ruth came to see us too and played her ukulele, and the staff thought that was great—they used to stand around and watch her play. Things like music, which the hospital people hadn't thought of before, draw people together. There is no question of black or white—a child was singing to make us better, make us feel well. …

It was something different, meeting these Baha'i people. They didn't say much, but felt deeply. You was treated as more than equal. You was treated as somebody special—special because you was Aboriginal. We'd never heard them sort of words before. All we'd heard was that Aboriginals were no good. Yet here I was, listening to this little girl saying, "You're special because you're Aboriginal. You've got a beautiful culture." And I thought, What more could anyone want, when a little girl like that's speaking?

– Ibid., pp. 2–3.

Banjo Clarke further recalled:
Life is never easy for Aboriginals fighting for their survival and their integrity. But
then we met the Baha'i people what [who] respected us for trying. …
These people seemed to understand Aboriginal principles, but they didn't know
what I realized—that their principles was the same as Aboriginal ones! They were
as close as they could be. …
A lot more Aboriginals joined the [Baha'i] faith like me, and I never looked back
since. Joining the faith has strengthened me and helped me face the struggles of
modern life which Aboriginals find themselves in.
– Ibid., pp. 180–182.

Watch a video of Banjo Clarke here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YB5c9ZrDKF8
So what about the Aboriginal spiritual traditions? These, like most tribal cultures, vary by
region:
Within European popular writing about Aboriginal mythology it has been common
for one theme or another to dominate more complex representations of
Indigenous cultural practice. This role has been played by concepts derived
originally from specific cultural localities: the Dreaming or Alcheringa from central
Australia, the Rainbow Serpent from the north, and … the south-eastern All-
Fathers: Baiame in New South Wales, Bunjil in Victoria, and Nurrundere in South
Australia. Other concepts, such as "The Land, Our Mother" or the nameless
"Great Spirit" invoked by David Unaipon, have a more diffuse origin.
– Hilary M. Carey, "'The Land of Byamee': K. Langloh Parker, David
Unaipon, and Popular Aboriginality in the Assimilation Era," Journal of
Religious History, Volume 22, No. 2, June 1998, pp. 202–203.
Of these Aboriginal sacred traditions, "Bunjil in Victoria" may have been the Indigenous
tradition most familiar to Banjo Clarke, who was born on the Framlingham Mission (or
Aboriginal Station), near Warrnambool in South-Western Victoria, Australia. The
Framlingham Mission was established in Girai wurrung territory bordering
the Gunditjmara/Gurndidy/Dhaurwurd-Wurrung people—the Indigenous Australians of
the Kulin nation. Banjo Clarke confirmed this heritage:
My grandfather Frank, who survived the massacre, was born into the Killitmurer
Gunditj—or Framlingham—clan of the Kirrae Whurrong tribe. His tribal name is
secret. Kirrae Whurrong means "blood speech," but our people were also
sometimes known as Wirngill Gnatt Tallingannong or "koala language speakers."
– Banjo Clarke, as told to Camilla Chance, Wisdom Man, Chapter 4.

One Aboriginal narrative from that sacred tradition recounts a sacred origin story about
Bunjil, the eaglehawk man, the creator who shaped the land, who fashioned bark carvings of people into which he then breathed life, who gave his people weapons for
hunting and digging sticks for gathering food:
Many years ago this land that we now call Melbourne extended right out to the ocean. Port Phillip Bay was then a large flat plain where Boon Wurrung hunted kangaroos and cultivated their yam daisy.
But one day there came a time of chaos and crises. The Boon Wurrung and the other Kulin nations were in conflict. They argued and fought. They neglected their
children. They neglected their land. The native yam was neglected. The animals were killed but not always eaten. The fish were caught during their spawning season. As this chaos grew the sea became angry and began to rise until it covered their plain and threatened to flood the whole of their country.

The people went to Bunjil, their creator and spiritual leader. They asked Bunjil to
stop the sea from rising. Bunjil told his people that they would have to change their ways if they wanted to save their land. The people thought about what they
had been doing and made a promise to follow Bunjil. Bunjil walked out to the sea,
raised his spear and directed the sea to stop rising. Bunjil then made the Boon Wurrung promise that they would respect the laws.
The place the Kulin then chose to meet as a means of resolving these differences is where … Parliament is now located. [Victoria] The Kulin nations
met here regularly for many thousands of years. They debated issues of great importance to the nation; they celebrated, they danced. …
Today Melbourne is the great multicultural city of the world and this special place
continues to carry forward the spirit of our tradition. This land will always be
protected by the creator, Bunjil, who travels as an eagle, and by Waarn, who protects the waterways and travels as a crow. Bunjil taught the Boon Wurrung to always welcome guests, but he always required the Boon Wurrung to ask all visitors to make two promises: to obey the laws of Bunjil and not to harm the children or the land of Bunjil.
As the spirit of my ancestors lives, let the wisdom and the spirit of generosity
which Bunjil taught us influence the decisions made in this meeting place.
– Boon Wurrung elder Carolyn Briggs, “Boon Wurrung Story,” told at a special Reconciliation Assembly of the Parliament of Victoria, 31 May 2000, during National Reconciliation Week. http://www.yarrahealing.catholic.edu.au/stories-voices/index.cfm?loadref=87

Are there any prophecies regarding the return of Bunjil, the Aboriginal Messenger? We'll explore that question in the next essay in this series, and learn why Banjo Clarke, the "Wisdom Man," would agree that the teachings of Baha'u'llah profoundly resound with Bunjil's laws, and that those teachings represent a true return.

34.Bunjil the Aboriginal Deity and Why You Should Learn More About Him

April 21, 2019

On the wings of the royal Falcon, I caught a glimpse of the Aboriginal Eagle—and I beheld the relationship of those two great birds. Let me tell you what I saw.

In the previous essay in this series, we met Banjo Clarke—an Australian Aboriginal elder—and his autobiography, Wisdom Man, dedicated "To the future of my people."

We also learned about "Bunjil," the creator deity of Banjo Clarke's sacred Aboriginal tradition. Bunjil, known as a sky-being, is similar to other Aboriginal spiritual Messengers Daramulan and Baiame. Bunjil is a common Aboriginal title of respect for the wise, which may be freely rendered as "Elder." Thus Banjo Clarke can also be understood as Bunjil or Elder Clarke.

Personally, though, I claim absolutely no expertise on Australian Aboriginal sacred traditions. I am an outsider, looking in. That said, I have gotten a glimpse of the great beauty of those traditions and their relationship to the radiance of the Baha'i teachings, so I hope this essay will inspire Aboriginal people and others to explore any and all connections, resonances, harmonics as well as differences between Aboriginal spirituality and Baha'i beliefs. Like all of the world's true Faiths and belief systems, they are connected—they each encourage us to soar in "the unbounded realm:"

The mass of the people are occupied with self and worldly desire, are immersed in the ocean of the nether world and are captives of the world of nature, save those souls who have been freed from the chains and fetters of the material world and, like unto swift-flying birds, are soaring in this unbounded realm. They are awake and vigilant, they shun the obscurity of the world of nature, their highest wish centereth on the eradication from among men of the struggle for

existence, the shining forth of the spirituality and the love of the realm on high,
the exercise of utmost kindness among peoples, the realization of an intimate and close connection between religions and the practice of the ideal of self-sacrifice. Then will the world of humanity be transformed into the Kingdom of God.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 281-282.
If you visit the Aboriginal Cultural Center of the Melbourne Museum in Carlton, Victoria,
Australia, you'll meet Bunjil at an exhibit called "Bunjil the eagle is our creator" a video

of an installation that features the "Flight of Bunjil"—a "kinetic sculpture": https://
museumsvictoria.com.au/article/bunjils-wings. This fascinating exhibit demonstrates
how the sacred figure of Bunjil the eagle—symbolizing all sacred Aboriginal wisdom and
knowledge—now inhabits, or enchants, the popular culture of Australia, as the several
graphics displayed here demonstrate:
https://www.veniceclayartists.com/flight-of-bunjil.
To a certain extent, this represents the growing appreciation for all things Indigenous in
Australia. Given this recognition of sacred Aboriginal tradition by way of an educational,
contemporary museum cultural exhibit, it is neither far-fetched, nor a stretch of the
imagination, for us to appreciate what this sacred tradition has to offer—as well to
acknowledge and respect the many resonances between Bunjil and Baha'u'llah.
Consider the following passage from the Baha'i teachings:
The Great Being saith: The Tongue of Wisdom proclaimeth: He that hath Me not is bereft of all things. Turn ye away from all that is on earth and seek none else
but Me. I am the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and revive the dead. I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way. I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty. I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird and start it on its flight.
– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 169.
Here, Baha'u'llah is symbolized by the royal Falcon, the noble, soaring spirit of the age.
In a very similar way, Bunjil becomes the ancestral wedge-tailed eagle. Sacred Aboriginal traditions about Bunjil, the Creator, provide meaning, spiritual identity and a
moral compass for the Aboriginal peoples of southeastern Australia. Local Aboriginals

attribute the invention of their arts and crafts and institution of their social organization to
Bunjil, who is more often spoken of, and invoked, as “Our Father.”
If you want to view an original depiction, go to Bunjil’s Shelter, formerly known as
“Bunjil’s Cave,” in the Black Range Scenic Reserve, near Stawell, in Victoria, Australia.
In late 1981, the Aboriginal origin of the site was scientifically established by scanning
electron microscopy analysis. This sacred site features Aboriginal rock art, with a red-
and-white painting of Bunjil, the “Eaglehawk,” depicted in a human form rather than as a
bird of prey. This is the only ancient rock-art painting of Bunjil now known.
Then, listen with your heart to this sacred song, an Aboriginal dirge said to be inspired
by Bunjil:

Wenberi’s Song

We go all!
The bones of all
Are shining white.
In this Dulur land!
The rushing noise
Of Bunjil, Our Father,
Sings in my breast.
This breast of mine

It is said that the spirit of Bunjil enters the heart of the singer who performs this sacred
song. Bunjil, then, represents wisdom and knowledge, just as every divine Prophet and
Messenger does:
Bunjil was the sky-being for the Kulin nation and the Wotjobaluk in Western
Victoria. Bunjil meant eagle-hawk and was considered an old, benign father of all
the people, who had two wives and a son by the name of Binbeal, who was the
rainbow. He lived on earth but moved to the sky in a whirlwind where he has
been ever since, watching the Kulin. … He was the creator of the earth, trees,
and men, and his name stood for wisdom or knowledge. Before he went to live in
the sky, Bunjil taught men the use of nets, canoes, and weapons. This emerging
differentiation between the human and the environment and the objectification of
order in the human alone is also typical of sky-beings in other districts of South-
East Australia.

– Hans Mol, The Firm and the Formless: Religion and Identity in Aboriginal Australia, pp. 18–19.

Of course, when we learn about these sacred spiritual traditions, we have to distinguish between respect and belief. Aboriginal sacred traditions should be respected, even honored, but not necessarily believed, disbelieved or culturally appropriated, since they were meant for a particular Indigenous group at a particular time. Given that understanding, which the Baha'i teachings clarify, we can each discover, recognize and respect the wisdom and beauty in every spiritual tradition, and thereby realize their interconnected oneness:

From the days of Adam until today, the religions of God have been made manifest, one following the other, and each one of them fulfilled its due function, revived mankind, and provided education and enlightenment. They freed the people from the darkness of the world of nature and ushered them into the brightness of the Kingdom. As each succeeding Faith and Law became revealed it remained for some centuries a richly fruitful tree and to it was committed the happiness of humankind.

– Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 51.

35.What Does the Aboriginal Rainbow Serpent Symbolize?

April 28, 2019

If you live in Australia today, or visit that wonderful continent anytime soon, you'll probably see a rainbow serpent—not a real serpent, but a universal symbol. You'll undoubtedly notice artwork, window stickers and even music festivals that depict the Rainbow Serpent—an Aboriginal representation of the Creator. How did that ancient symbol become so widespread there, and what does it mean?

One Aboriginal Baha'i named Philip (Guburu) Obah, an elder of the Wadja people of North Queensland, recently re-published a book entitled, The Baha'i Faith: An Australian Aboriginal Perspective (2002/2017). Previously, in a Gallup interview, Mr. Obah explained the "Rainbow Serpent":

Everything has a spirit to the aborigines who believe the air, rocks, trees, language, law and culture and art all come from the Creator.

The aborigines believe that a rainbow serpent was God's Messenger, teaching moral and spiritual laws. Obah said these laws also helped the aborigines adapt to harsh Australian environments. However, Christian missionaries in Australia

saw it differently.
“In the Bible the serpent was evil because it tempted Adam and Eve,” Obah said.
“They thought the aborigines were worshipping the devil.”
“God appeared to Moses as a burning bush,” Obah said. “If God could appear to
Moses as a burning bush, surely he could appear to us as a rainbow serpent.”
Obah also addressed the aboriginal oral tradition, which is often seen as being inferior to a written tradition. He argues that just because it’s not written in the
Bible doesn’t mean it never existed.
– Heather Armstrong, “Aborigine man bridges gap between cultures, religions,” 2001. http://bahai-library.com/newspapers/2001/062901.html
So who, or what, is the “Rainbow Serpent?” Traditions associated with the Rainbow
Spirit are said to be the longest continuous mythological tradition in the world. In 1987,
three archaeologist/anthropologists summed up the importance of the Rainbow Serpent
this way:

Today, the Rainbow Serpent enjoys renewed popularity as a uniting symbol for Aboriginal people … It is also popular for non-Aboriginal people as a dramatic
subject in bark or paper paintings or as a powerful symbol for those following New Age philosophies.
– Paul S. C. Taçon, Meredith Wilson and Christopher Chippindale, “Birth of the Rainbow Serpent in Arnhem Land Rock Art and Oral
History,” Archaeology in Oceania, Volume 31, No. 3, October, 1996, p. 103.
A complex welter of myths and stories are associated with the Rainbow Serpent, which
vary greatly, depending on tradition and locality. They represent a message of unity and
peace to Aboriginals and, in a wider sense, in Australian popular culture today. The
Rainbow Serpent has taken on a powerful symbolism that represents not only an ancient belief but a present-day worldview—that like the multiple colors of the rainbow,
we are united. The Baha’i teachings explain the symbol of a rainbow in a very similar
way:
Regarding the rainbow, this rainbow is the Covenant of God and the Testament of the Merciful One. The lights of the Kingdom and the heavenly illumination emanated from this rainbow. This rainbow is the sign of the removal of the wrath
of God from all the people and the sign of prosperity, tranquillity, universal

peace,
the oneness of humanity, and the unity of the world of man.
– Abdu'l-Baha, from a tablet translated in about 1907, Star of the West, Volume 5, p. 226.

With the spiritual symbol of the Rainbow Serpent, the Aboriginal God of creation has, in a sense, been re-created. After surveying and analyzing 107 rock paintings depicting the Rainbow Serpent in a wide variety of images, the authors concluded as follows, regarding the unifying power and significance of the Rainbow Serpent among Aboriginals today:

The Rainbow Serpent has been used to define the nature of human existence for at least 4000–6000 years; it has become a symbol of the creative and destructive power of nature. … Both Lewis (1988) and Taylor (1990) have shown how the Rainbow Serpent image acts to bring together and unite neighbouring or more diverse groups of Aboriginal people by emphasising their common origins, shared heritage, and there being an aspect of rainbowness in all of us. Restricted ceremonies like Kunabibi reaffirm this. So do the [Aboriginal] creation stories themselves. In this sense, the Rainbow Serpent can be considered a symbol of integration and, ultimately, peace. … Perhaps the Rainbow Serpent emerged not only to define and describe the nature of a changing universe, along with the position of humans within it, but also to bring people together, to unite them behind a shared symbol, experience and common cause. The fact that rock art depictions of Rainbow Serpents are found at hundreds of prominent, accessible locations near or at camp sites throughout Arnhem Land [the five regions of the Northern Territory of Australia] reinforces this interpretation. Its presence there would have acted as a constant reminder of similarity between humans, rather than difference, as well as of intimate relationship to particular landscapes and other creatures.
–Paul S. C. Taçon, Meredith Wilson and Christopher Chippindale, "Birth of the Rainbow Serpent in Arnhem Land Rock Art and Oral History," Archaeology in Oceania, Volume 31, No. 3, October, 1996.

The Rainbow Serpent represents an Aboriginal perspective on the divine spirit and creative power manifest in all creation. So pervasive is the Rainbow Serpent in Aboriginal tradition, that respecting and honoring what their tradition represents is an important bridge between all things Aboriginal and the Baha'i Faith. As Banjo Clarke explained:

I think that if Aboriginals studied the Baha'i Faith they'd come back to

their real
selves again, because the Baha'i Faith is so like the Aboriginal way of life. The
Baha'i writings say that in the future humankind will be so sensitive that no one
anywhere in the world will be able to sit down to a meal if they know that
somewhere in the world a person is starving. Aboriginal feelings are like those
writings. We feel united with everyone. Sometimes we get terrible feelings
because we know something terribly bad is happening. And we start to cry as if
somebody was telling us—but nobody is telling us. We can feel it. Aboriginals
can't explain them things, and it's frightening too. You don't know if it's going to
be yourself or somebody close to you, so you wait patiently for the message. The
warning makes you able to bear it.
It's still like that. White people have got these things, but a lot of them don't care
for these things any more. But these feelings inside of them will govern them in
the future. Like in the Baha'i writings.
– Banjo Clarke, Wisdom Man, pp. 214, 216–217.
Rather than being an Indigenous Messenger of God, the Rainbow Serpent may instead
represent a Indigenous message from God. A rainbow, by its very nature, is a spectrum
of colors, displayed in splendid array across the sky after a cleansing and refreshing
rain shower.
In this way, the Rainbow Serpent represents not only Aboriginals, but also peoples of all
hues, tints and tones of skin—and what lies within their hearts and souls—throughout
the world today. The Baha'i Faith, in that sense, can be said to be harmonious with the
spirit and power of the Aboriginal—and original—Rainbow Serpent.

36.Aboriginal and Baha'i: Merging Tradi5onal and New

May 5, 2019

Aboriginal religious traditions are "geosophical" or Earth-centered, say the scholars,
rather than "theosophical" or God-centered.
But regardless of the origins of those belief systems, Aboriginal "Dreaming"—the
concept of seeing the timeless and eternal in many Aboriginal religions—has much to
teach the rest of the world, especially in this time of human-induced

environmental
crises.
Traditionally, Australian Aboriginal religions have not been strictly monotheistic, although
the tendency today is in that direction. Instead, their geosophical beliefs, sometimes
called animism, “bring alive” the entire creation, and deepen our respect and
appreciation for nature.
At least one statement from the Baha’i teachings appears to recognize an element of
truth in animism: “The earth has its inhabitants, the water and the air contain many living
beings and all the elements have their nature spirits.” – Abdu’l-Baha, Divine Philosophy,
p. 114.
Baha’is believe that nature, taken as a whole, can also be said to embody spirit:
Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its
manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are
signs for men of discernment. Nature is God’s Will and is its expression in and
through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the
Ordainer, the All-Wise. Were anyone to affirm that it is the Will of God as
manifested in the world of being, no one should question this assertion. It is
endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp. Indeed a man
of insight can perceive naught therein save the effulgent splendor of Our Name, the Creator.
– Baha’u’llah, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 142.
If nature is “endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp,” and if “all
the elements have their nature spirits,” then working with Aboriginal and Indigenous
peoples—those who are closest to nature—may help us all prevent the foreseeable and
yet devastating effects of climate change.

But does this require a dual religious identity? Can a contemporary, Indigenous/
Aboriginal person adopt a new Faith while still adhering to some of the nature-centered
beliefs of the most ancient Indigenous cultures?
I have met more than several Baha’is who have dual religious identities. They usually
belong to the Baha’i Faith and identify as Baha’is, while at the same time

participating in
another faith tradition—usually their own Indigenous cultural tradition, in which they
were raised. They incorporate the wisdom of their tribal traditions into the modern
framework of the Baha'i teachings—because Baha'is recognize that truth, no matter
where it originates, is one:

Praise thou God that at last, through the divine teachings, thou hast obtained both sight and insight to the highest degree, and hast become firmly rooted in certitude and faith. It is my hope that others as well will achieve illumined eyes
and hearing ears, and attain to everlasting life: that these many rivers, each flowing along in diverse and separated beds, will find their way back to the circumambient sea, and merge together and rise up in a single wave of surging oneness; that the unity of truth, through the power of God, will make these illusory differences to vanish away.

– Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 29.

Kevin Locke, a Lakota Baha'i who co-wrote several of the essays in this series, is a
good example of a Baha'i who lives in both worlds at once—Baha'i and Lakota.
Similarly, Banjo Clarke was both a Baha'i and a traditional Aboriginal elder, who thought
that the Aboriginal way of life and outlook on life has something to offer humanity as a
whole:

Everybody is united and the same, I think. But Aboriginals have that real strong
spiritual gift about them, because in the world they lived in – nature – that sort of
spiritual thing governed their everyday lives. And so we still have it today.
…
I can see it would save the world if people got back to Aboriginal principles. It will
never rectify anything unless we do, one way or another. Aboriginal culture has
so many positive gifts to bring to the world. People say, 'Oh, those ways don't
exist any more.' But that's why there's big trouble today, because they are no
longer practised everywhere. And they could easily be. …
Love – great love – is Aboriginals' strength. Aboriginals have respect for all
people, no matter where they come from or how poor or how bad they are.
You've got to give everyone a chance. We treated other people the way we wanted to be treated.

– Banjo Clarke, Wisdom Man, pp. 217–219 (emphasis added).

Because “Aboriginals have that real strong spiritual gift about them,” Banjo Clarke, speaking both as a Baha’i and as an Aboriginal Elder, made this profound claim: “I can see it would save the world if people got back to Aboriginal principles.” Australian Aboriginal geosophy may have something to offer us all in that regard. The Rainbow Serpent, as a symbol of unity and harmony, can teach us an important truth. Building bridges, forming alliances, and cultivating collaboration will enrich us all. A new respect for the spiritual gifts nature has to offer us, and a recognition of our responsibility for its compassionate stewardship, goes together perfectly with the Baha’i teachings.

37.Do All Peoples Have a Prophet?

May 9, 2019
Co-author: Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini

Do all peoples have a Prophet? Has the call of God been raised to everyone? The Baha’i writings seem to answer that question affirmatively, especially in Abdu’l-Baha’s Tablet to Amir Khan.
In the following interview, I asked Dr. Nosrat Mohammadhosseini, a well-known Baha’i author and scholar of the Baha’i teachings, to offer his own comments on the meaning of Abdu’l-Baha’s Tablet to Amir Khan.
Q: Dr. Mohammadhosseini, in your opinion, does Abdu’l-Baha, in his Tablet to Amir Khan, indicate that Indigenous messengers of God appeared in the Americas, when he states, in this authorized translation, as follows:
In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.
As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur’an it hath been revealed: “We will not chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger.”
Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.
– Abdu’l-Baha, Additional Tablets, Extracts and Talks
A: Yes. By the phrase of the “Call of God” is definitely meant the advent of

Manifestation(s) of God, since the “Call of God” is a Babi and Baha’i expression for
manifestations of God, or, by extension, the promulgation of their teachings.
Q: So would you agree that the Tablet to Amir Khan is a clear text that enunciates what
amounts to a newly discovered Baha’i teaching which confirms that Indigenous
messengers of God definitely appeared in the Americas?
A: Yes, especially since Abdu’l-Baha, in his Tablet to Amir Khan, explicitly indicates that
Manifestations of God were sent to the Americas. But there are several Baha’i texts that
clearly imply this.

Q: Are these what Western scholars refer to as “universalisms”?
A: Yes. We have several texts from Baha’u’llah and the Bab that emphasize this truth.
Interestingly, the Bab has referred to the advent of Manifestations of God throughout
history and around the world, in different times and places. For example, in the Persian
Bayan VI:16, the Bab wrote:
The Lord of the universe hath never raised up a prophet nor hath He sent down a
Book unless He hath established His covenant with all men, calling for their
acceptance of the next Revelation and of the next Book; inasmuch as the
outpourings of His bounty are ceaseless and without limit.
– Selections from the Writings of the Bab, p. 87.
Here, “without limit” means “universally” or “throughout history.” The Bab elsewhere
confirms this interpretation of the Qur’an in language that is intentionally Qur’anic in
style: “Unto every people We have sent down the Book in their own language.” – The
Bab, Selections from the Writings of the Bab, p. 45.
In the “Commentary on the Sura of ‘The Sun’,” after explaining that by al-shams (“the
sun”) is meant the Manifestation of God, Baha’u’llah affirmed that truth when he
stated: “Every nation of the world hath been illuminated by one of these luminous
Suns.” – Baha’u’llah, “Commentary on the Sura of ‘The Sun’,” provisional translation
Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini.
In this statement, Baha’u’llah declares that these Manifestations—the prophets and
messengers of God—have appeared to every one of the peoples of Earth, although in
sundry times and places. Obviously this includes, among others, Native

Americans,
First Nations Canadians and the Indigenous peoples of the Americas in general, as
Abdu'l-Baha clearly affirms in the Tablet to Amir Khan.
Q: Thanks for referring to the "Commentary on the Sura of 'The Sun'."
In another
passage of this same Tablet, Baha'u'llah wrote:
On another level, furthermore, it ["the sun"] denotes the Prophets of God and His
intimate associates, for such are the very "suns" of His Names and of His
Attributes amongst His creatures. Indeed! Were it not for them, no one would
have been irradiated by the Lights of deep knowledge, just as is evidenced by
the fact that every religious community, among the religious communities of the
earth, hath been irradiated by a "sun" among these resplendent "suns."
– Baha'u'llah, "Commentary on the Sura of 'The Sun'," provisional
translation by Stephen Lambden.
So, Dr. Mohammadhosseini, in your view, do these Baha'i "universalisms" expand on
similar statements in the Qur'an?

A: In citing the verse of the Qur'an, "We will not chastise them if they had not been sent
a Messenger," Abdu'l-Baha definitely shows that the American continent has been the
scene of the advent of native messengers of God—since other Qur'anic passages, in
relation to this verse, clearly testify that God has sent a messenger to every nation. This
evidence from the Qur'an necessitates the advent of the Manifestations of God,
including to the "people of America," as Abdu'l-Baha stated in the Tablet to Amir Khan.
We should remember that, although the past religions have been "world religions" from
the point of view of their basis in divine origin and in their ethical principles and
regulatory ordinances, yet, socially speaking, they began as local religions. Here, I refer
only to the Qur'an itself, which explicitly states that the Qur'an has been revealed by
God to warn the people of Mecca and surrounding regions.
Unlike the Baha'i Faith and its universal aims, the immediate objectives of those earlier
religions involved the education and guidance of specific peoples. This further evidence
necessitates the advent of Manifestations of God specifically for the Indigenous peoples

of the American continent.
Q: So what about Abdu'l-Baha's apparent reference to the Bering Land Bridge Theory?
A: It is quite evident that Abdu'l-Baha is speaking about two different, but interrelated
subjects: the question of migration and then the question of revelation. First, Abdu'l-
Baha acknowledges that a migration across the Being Strait has been postulated by
scholars ("it hath been said") and that this has probably occurred as a matter of
historical fact ("There are other signs which indicate communication").
Although we are not aware of the exact question asked by Amir Khan in this regard,
Abdu'l-Baha's reply should be accounted as an answer to the question of crossing and
communication, including the issue of whether there was any religious influence as a
result of this migration.
Unless we are talking about prehistorical religions, so far as I know, no shred of
evidence of the migratory presence of Western religions in the Americas—from pre-
Columbian times—even exists. Scholars have found absolutely no trace of Western
religious influence—whether that of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, or Islam—on
the American continent before the European conquest and colonization of the Americas.
Q: What do you think that Abdu'l-Baha meant in stating that "it hath been forgotten
now"?
A: The term "forgotten" in the Tablet to Amir Khan is not related to those religions—
Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, or Islam—or any Eastern religions, either, for the
simple reason that the utter lack of evidence clearly shows that these religions did not
enter the Americas prior to the invasions of Europeans, whether in antiquity or in the
medieval period.

Scientifically speaking, no major natural catastrophe or cataclysm of a continental
magnitude during the past two thousand years was sufficient to wipe out and obliterate
all traces of those religions from the surface of American continent.

Thus the phrase, “the Call of God,” in this Tablet does not refer to the Call of God raised by the promulgators of those religions, because their adherents never reached the Americas in pre-Columbian times. If such were the case, then we would expect to see or at least find a few vestiges, even admixed with superstitions. Yet this expectation has never been met.

So the word “forgotten” definitely means that the teachings and influence of these Indigenous Manifestations of God who appeared in Americas no longer have the currency and influence that they once enjoyed.

Q: That which is “forgotten” can also be remembered, i.e. rediscovered or revitalized, since many of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas have preserved their spiritual heritages, notwithstanding various attempts, in the past, to suppress Indigenous languages, cultures and religions. Thank you, Dr. Mohammadhosseini, for these enlightening comments on the Tablet to Amir Khan.

38.The Indigenous Prophets: Lone Man in Mandan Sacred Tradi5on

May 19, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In the ongoing BahaiTeachings.org series on Indigenous Messengers of God, the fascinating conversation continues between Lakota artist and Baha’i Kevin Locke and author Chris Buck.

Q: Kevin, the Baha’i teachings say that humanity’s religions have all “been made manifest, one following the other …”:

From the days of Adam until today, the religions of God have been made manifest, one following the other, and each one of them fulfilled its due function, revived mankind, and provided education and enlightenment. They freed the people from the darkness of the world of nature and ushered them into the brightness of the Kingdom.

– Abdu’l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha, p. 51.

In that regard, Kevin, thanks for introducing me to Lone Man—or “First Man” or “Only Man”—a key spiritual figure in Mandan and Hidatsa sacred tradition, its own spiritual world and symbolic universe. Baha’is and others can readily recognize and respect the profound truths enshrined in these traditions. This does not mean believing the

traditions literally, but rather the inner truths they represent.
There is no question about the central importance of Lone Man in the Mandan worldview. This is even represented in the architecture of Mandan villages, where earth
lodges on the upper Missouri River were arranged in concentric circles around a plaza,
in the center of which was placed a red-painted cedar post symbolizing Lone Man, the
primary Mandan creator god and survivor of the Great Flood.
In so doing, you have further expanded my consciousness, as well as my spiritual
literacy. I have done a little bit of research on Lone Man in order to acquaint myself with
this significant figure in Mandan sacred history. Most of the sources that I consulted
described these traditions as “myths.”
Myths are stories. The stories may not be literally true, although some literally minded
people may think so. But, as in all belief systems, the truth of the story itself is not what
matters. What matters is the deeper truth the story tells. Sacred myths teach sacred
values. This seems like a common yet noteworthy characteristic of Indigenous traditions. Do you agree?

A: These traditions are myths in the same way that Noah’s Ark or the Resurrection are
myths. From our current, de-colonized, enlightened perspective we should not be too
hasty to categorize marginalized people’s sacred traditions as “myths.” Truly Lone Man
is a holy being who established the identity and reality of the Mandan civilization, whom
they believe had a divine mandate to do so.
Q: I’d also like to know what personal contacts you have had with Mandan individuals
and culture. You have already put me in contact with Mandan historian Calvin Grinnell.
What other Mandan contacts have you had? Can you tell us a little bit about Mandan
culture and society as well?
A: As a child starting school at Lewis and Clark Elementary School in Great Falls,
Montana, I vividly recall thrilling to the adventures of these two namesake explorers who
ventured up the Missouri River from St. Louis in 1803, and how they survived their first

extremely brutal winter on the upper Missouri due to the largesse and magnanimity of the Mandan who said to them, “If we survive, you survive.”

At that time, the Mandan numbered around 30,000 and controlled trade and commerce throughout the region. Their inspired horticultural genius enabled them to perfect, as nowhere else on the planet, the ability to raise an abundance of corn, beans, squash, and a host of other crops, all in a very brief growing season. Their homes and villages were spacious, thriving, immaculate and well made. Their organization and ceremonial life was rich and complex. All of this was abundantly chronicled by early European visitors. Many of these visitors also noted that all of these blessings were attributed to the divine being: Lone Man. At the center of every Mandan village, a shrine was erected to commemorate the rescue of humankind from the great mythic flood through the agency of the ark fashioned by Lone Man. The spot where the ark is said to have first made landfall is a hill along Highway 1806 near Cannon Ball, North Dakota, on the Standing Rock Reservation.

As a youth, my grandfather would often host his dear adopted brother, singer, dancer, traditionalist, and tribal historian, Ralph Little Owl, at our place. Every morning and at every meal he would offer prayers in his mother tongue, Mandan—or as they self-designate: “Nueta.” My associations with Nueta people could fill a lengthy book, but perhaps the most profound was the life-changing gift of the hoop dance by Nueta tribal member Arlo Good Bear in 1980.

Q: Mandan origin stories encode Mandan values. Mandan sacred tradition includes creation stories.

Here is one Mandan creation story, which is both a cosmogony—a creation of the physical universe—and a sociogony—a creation of the social universe—which describes key elements of the Mandan worldview and sacred values:

According to the Mandan creation myth, as told to Arthur Mandan by his mother Calf Woman, when First Creator and Lone Man decide to make the world from mud brought by a bird to the surface of the water, Lone Man chooses to create the east whereas First Creator chooses create the west, leaving a space

between, in the water, which becomes the Missouri River. … First Creator makes
the west side: broad valleys, hills, coulees with timber, mountain streams, and springs with 26 buffalo, elk, mule deer and white tails, mountain sheep and all other creatures useful to mankind for food and clothing. … Lone Man makes the east side: mostly level country, lakes and small streams with rivers far apart and
his animals were beaver, otter, muskrat, moose and other animals with cattle of many colors with long horns and long tails. First Creator and lone Man meet and compare their creations: They first inspect what Lone Man has created. …
First Creator disapproves: "The land is too level and affords no protection to man.
Look at the land I have created: it contains all kinds of game. It has buttes and
mountains by which man can mark his direction. Your land is so level that a man will easily lose its way for there are no high hills as signs to direct him. … The
lakes you have made have most of them no outlet and hence become impure.
Look at the cattle you have created with long horns and tail, of all colors, with hair
so short and smooth that they cannot stand the cold! … Lone Man realizes his dilemma: "The things I have created I thought were the very things most useful to
man. I cannot very well change them now that they are once created. So let us make man use first the things that you have made until the supply is exhausted and then the generations to come shall utilize those things which I have created."
– María Nieves Zedeño, Kacy Hollenback, and Calvin Grinnell, "From Path to Myth: Journeys and the Naturalization of Territorial Identity along the Missouri River," Landscapes of Movement: Trails, Paths, and Roads in Anthropological Perspective. Presented at the Lewis and Clark Symposium, Many Voices. Bismarck, North Dakota, 2004, p. 24.
From the sources that I have read so far, it seems that "First Creator" created the
physical universe, whereas Lone Man (or First Man) created the spiritual universe—
Mandan society and the sacred values that make it strong and enduring. Do you see
any similarities between this Mandan creation story and Lakota sacred traditions?
A: Due to the holocaust brought on by the Euro-American colonizers, the Nueta were
reduced from a thriving population of tens of thousands to scarcely 50 souls in the 19th
century. The last Nueta speaker, Edwin Benson, passed away last year. I bring this up
only to emphasize the fact that this civilization was nearly exterminated and

that much
of its rich history may be difficult to penetrate now.
Lone Man was such an overshadowing, dominating figure in Nueta civilization—very
analogous to the stature White Buffalo Calf Woman has to the Lakota. Both figures
brought divine teachings to transform and ennoble, and established binding covenants
to guide their followers on the straight path. Both of these stellar beings shaped the

heritage of this land, and should be venerated and respected in the context of an
emerging global civilization that draws from humankind's collective birthright.
Truly, as the Baha'i teachings so emphatically say, God has trained and provided for all,
including all the inhabitants of this continent:
If God did not love all, He would not have created, trained and provided for all.
Loving-kindness is the divine policy. Shall we consider human policy and attitude
superior to the wisdom and policy of God? This would be inconceivable,
impossible. Therefore, we must emulate and follow the divine policy, dealing with
each other in the utmost love and tenderness.
– Abdul-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 120.

39.Na5ve Messengers: Lone Man and the Mandan Sacred Values

May 26, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In this installment of the Indigenous Messengers of God series, Kevin Locke explores
the nobility and spirituality of the sacred traditions of the Mandan tribe and their holy
figure Lone Man.
Q: Kevin, what can you tell us about your experiences with the sacred Mandan traditions?
A: After having driven past it countless times, over 25 years ago I decided to hike up a
sacred hill, which dominates the horizon about 10 miles south of the city of Mandan,
North Dakota. Shortly after that experience, while visiting a Mandan elder, I mentioned
the hike. Immediately she asked several questions about Eagle Nose Butte: "Did you
see that it is like a crater at the top? Did you see that all around the

perfectly circular top
edge of the crater grows ground cedar? Did you see that the center of the crater is
covered in sand?”
I asked her: “When did you last visit there?” She responded: “Oh no, I’ve never been
there. My grandparents would make pilgrimage there every year, but said that it is such
a spiritually powerful place that I was too young and should wait until I was mature,
then I could go and pray as they dutifully did annually. I regret that I never did make the
pilgrimage there because they would describe the place in great detail. I’m glad that you
were able to pray there.”
She then volunteered that another site they would make pilgrimage to is just south of
the Cannonball River on the east side of Highway 1806—the place where Lone Man’s
ark first made landfall. She indicated that these were all sacred duties performed in
reverence to the covenant of Lone Man.
Q: Lydia Sage-Chase, the youngest of the five remaining full-blood Mandan Amerindian
people, is a Mandan “keeper” of the Mandan stories and traditions, commissioned to
prepare presentations of Mandan oral tradition for the archives of the Library of
Congress in Washington, D.C.
Ms. Sage-Chase described that tradition this way:
The Mandan believe that all life comes from one Creator, All is related. The ideas
of generosity, cooperation, and goodness towards others are everybody’s

responsibility so that the Creator’s gift of life will go on. … The world is generous,
and when one is generous the world returns that generosity.
Speaking of Mandan values as virtues, Ms. Sage-Chase further said:
From the teachings there come many values for all people to live by, our notion
of the peoples generosity goes back to the time of the Creator. The produce of
the gardens, corn, beans and squash, the produce is not given just for ourselves,
but for other people, to feed other people, to share with other people. Sharing
meant that there was, must be a trade-off with the other nations, tribes.
At presentations people sometimes say to me that Indians didn’t know anything
before whites came. That is not so, we have a complex language with different
language for men and women. Our number system has been used since the

beginning of time. We know botany, knowing the true value of plants and the use of them. We are environmentalists, protecting the environment we live in. We believe the Creator lived amongst the Mandan and taught us all these things, taught us everything.

– from Philip Arthur Zemke, “Mandan Amerindian Culture: A Study of Values Transmission,” 1994.

This summarizes what Lydia Sage-Chase taught about “Lone Man” as paraphrased by Zemke:

First Man appeared many times among the Mandan, but is now said to no longer come in physical form, as he has gone to live in the south. … The reason that First Man ceased coming to the villages may be that the innovation of consolidated fortified villages, with his shrine at the center, was recognized as a final entity of Mandan social organization. The consolidated villages brought the clans into a unified blend, and, the age-grade societies of non-blood related individuals secured an intra-village fidelity of mutual military support and coordination of garden production. The solidarity of social structure would not however have ended the need to continue to interpret the social rules First Man originated. Subsequently, when his guidance was needed the Mandan followed his example as the Lone Man, and they wandered in solitary vigil sending thoughts upon thoughts to him. Each Mandan striving to come to a “single mindedness” so that they might hear his advice.

– Ibid., pp. 74–75.

Kevin, what parallels do you see between the Mandan teachings of Lone Man and the Baha’i sacred teachings?

A: As for Baha’i sacred teachings, the following statement by Baha’u’llah might go well with the part above about hearing the voice of God while in solitude:

I am well aware, O my Lord, that I have been so carried away by the clear tokens of Thy loving-kindness, and so completely inebriated with the wine of Thine utterance, that whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards

of Thine omnipotence.
I swear by Thy might, O Thou in Whose grasp are the reins of all mankind, and the destinies of the nations! I am so inflamed by my love for Thee, and so inebriated with the wine of Thy oneness, that I can hear from the whisper of the winds the sound of Thy glorification and praise, and can recognize in the murmur of the waters the voice that proclaimeth Thy virtues and Thine attributes, and can apprehend from the rustling of the leaves the mysteries that have been irrevocably ordained by Thee in Thy realm.
– Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, pp. 271-272.
Q: I just came across this remarkable vision, recounted by Elizabeth Fenn in her 2015 Pulitzer Prize-winning history Encounters at the Heart of the World: A History of the Mandan People:
The Red Feather Man's Okipa—like all such ceremonies—begin with a vision. In it, a holy man approached and revealed what was to come. Cedric saw an Okipa lodge with people lining up to go inside. "I saw men and women," he recalls. "I saw Indians and non-Indians. I saw people from the five races of mankind—Red, Yellow, White, Black, and Brown. What mattered, the holy man said, was not skin color but quote the heart of the individual." Those with "a good heart" would "enter the Okipa lodge. They must have the genuine love of mankind, and they must have humility."
– Cedric Red Feather, also known as the "Red Feather Man," a Nueta (Mandan) Waikena—a Mandan turtle priest—and a modern-day Okipa Maker, quoted by Elizabeth A. Fenn, Encounters at the Heart of the World: A History of the Mandan People, p. 336.
Fenn concluded by noting:
Thus it was that some sixty people of all hues gathered at On-a-Slant Village on June 11, 2011, to fulfill Cedric's Okipa vision. The Black Mouth Soldier Society, The White Buffalo Cow Society, and the Goose Society were all present. … The Okipa suited the vision that inspired it. There was no piercing, no dragging Buffalo skulls. But Lone Man made his entry, and all the creatures came back. From morning to midnight, we danced and we danced, pausing to smoke, pray, tell stories, and ponder the Mandan way through the world.
– Ibid.
So here's my question for you, Kevin: Isn't the Red Feather Man's Okipa vision perfectly harmonious and resonant with the Baha'i vision?

A: Yes, indeed. I agree! Just as “Lone Man made his entry,” the spirit of Baha’u’llah is present in Baha’i sacred gatherings, like devotionals that Baha’is host and hold in their homes and neighborhoods around the world.

40.Breathmaker and Seminole Sacred Tradi5on

June 2, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In this newest installment of BahaiTeachings.org’s ongoing series about Indigenous Messengers of God, we learn about Breathmaker, the Seminole holy figure, and his teachings.

Q: Kevin, because I do research, it may appear that I know far more than I actually do. For instance, I wrote—and quoted—quite a lot about Lone Man, the indigenous messenger of Mandan sacred tradition in our previous article. But, truth be told, I knew nothing about Lone Man until you introduced me to him.

Now you’ve just told me about Breathmaker, the holy figure in the Seminole sacred tradition. There must have been a first time you heard about this fascinating Indigenous Messenger, too. So when and how did you first learn about Breathmaker—the Indigenous Messenger of God for the Seminoles?

A: In the late 1970s, I was invited to perform at one of the first annual Miccosukee Indian Arts Festivals at the Miccosukee Reservation, 40 miles west of Miami in the heart of the Everglades. It was quite a shock to go from -30° F in North Dakota to +85° F in Florida! I was initially overwhelmed to be suddenly in a land of dazzling greenery, flowers, caroling birds of every variety, and alligators. The performers all stayed at the Miccosukee community.

The most amazing thing to me was the fact that very few of the Miccosukee, especially the children, spoke English. I found a young man who could speak English and asked him why. He replied: “They don’t speak English because they don’t go to school and never hear it spoken.” He elaborated:

If you look around the village, you see many old people who grew up eating the pure food we grow and obtain from the land here. That’s why we have many who

are over 100 years old here. When they were young, there were no white people in this part of Florida. In their lifetime, they have witnessed the destruction of the Everglades and also the rapid growth of the cities, spreading like a cancer. They tell us that just as fast as it appeared, Breathmaker will roll it up and make it disappear. They tell us younger generations that they don't want us to stand with those people (white immigrants) or else we will be swept away with them. I personally don't agree. I think we should go to school and learn how to interact with white people. But since they are our grandparents, we respect them and obey their advice. When they are gone all this will change. The elders stay true to the teachings of Breathmaker who foretold that only those who hold to his teachings will be safe when the world is made new. They really believe in this! That's why we have survived, even though the U.S. government fought the three Seminole Wars to destroy us. Yet we have survived.

After hearing this, I wanted to go home immediately and never return. I didn't want to get swept away like all the other outsiders. Later, after becoming a Baha'i, I realized that their underlying principle of firmness in the Covenant meant that the Miccosukee elders were simply complying with the divine commandment of Breathmaker.

Q: Kevin, what you say about Breathmaker, who foretold that only those who hold to his teachings will be safe when the world is made new, was confirmed by Buffalo Tiger, a Miccosukee who passed away in 2015:

Buffalo Tiger may yearn for the old ways, but he, too, lives in town, across the street from a Target store.

Sitting motionless on a bench with wooden slats, along a canal skirting the Everglades, Buffalo Tiger doesn't seem to struggle with such dilemmas, perhaps because the Miccosukees believe the end of the Earth is near and so it doesn't much matter anyway.

"This will all be like a desert someday," he says. "It isn't long until the Breathmaker returns. He's going to destroy the Earth. Hurricanes will get worse. It will even snow here. There will be earthquakes here."

The signs, handed down by tribal elders for hundreds of years, are now appearing, he says. … Drug use is rampant. Fish and turtles are dying. And, probably most important, the Everglades wetland is being decimated, an

indication that the earth will be barren and people will starve.
I remember when I was a boy that there were so many fish that you could just rock the canoe, and the fish would pour into the canoe with the water that spilled over the sides," he says. "Maybe half the Miccosukees feel strongly about the old ways.
– Tom Wells, "Lights of Miami Lure the Young Away From a Vanishing Tribe; Culture: Miccosukee Indians fended off U.S. federal government troops in the 19th century. But modern development in the Everglades is taking a toll on their spirit," Los Angeles Times, 23 Feb. 1997, p. 4.
Buffalo Tiger talked about Breathmaker in his biography:
Traditional Miccosukee people, Eelaponke, always have great respect for this land, this year, and life itself. They believed Feshahkee-ommehche—the Breathmaker—created the land and all living things. … Breathmaker taught us how to live on and protect the land and how to love nature. He taught us how to understand other people but to maintain our customs and culture. … Since Breathmaker put this land for us to live on and care for, money cannot buy the land. … Breathmaker created us out of the clay; it happens to be brown muck, so we turned out to be brown persons. … We were Breathmaker's people … People used to be more in control because they knew Breathmaker's law. It's the only law we know. It is simple. We didn't make that law. Breathmaker thought that was the type of law we must use, and we lived with it. …
Breathmaker talked to us after we were created. He told us, "I will return one day.
Carry on what I have taught you to live by or otherwise I will destroy you." We were told before Breathmaker returns we will see signs like people changing to be disrespectful and people doing many wrong things. You'll probably see more hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes.
— Buffalo Tiger and Harry A. Kersey, Jr., Buffalo Tiger: A Life in the Everglades, pp. 34-122.
So, Kevin, it seems that the Seminoles see Breathmaker as both the Creator and the messenger of God, who gave the Miccosukee people—the Eelaponke—their sacred laws and teachings, much like the Creator and Lone Man in Mandan sacred tradition.
Do you agree?
A: Chris, our readers may be a bit confused, in that the Seminole and Miccosukee are one and the same tribe in nearly every way except political. The Miccosukee are the faction that always refused to acculturate. The U.S. federal government resisted

recognizing them, until Buffalo Tiger led a delegation in 1963 to meet with Fidel Castro
in Havana, who immediately drew up an official nationhood recognition statement and
was about to get the USSR, North Korea and others to co-sign. Then Congress stepped
in and decided to grant this “unconquered” faction who had managed to defeat the U.S.
federal government in the three most costly per-person wars ever waged by the U.S.—
the 3 “Seminole Wars”—official recognition.
Buffalo Tiger never went to school, but a shrewder statesman and negotiator has rarely
existed. He hired my mom, Patricia Locke, to help with grant writing. In the mid-1970’s,
he steered the tribe towards cultural tourism and started the Miccosukee Indian Arts
Festival. When he asked my mom if she knew of any cultural performers for the festival,
she recommended me. I was invited to perform there every year for about 20 years until
Buffalo Tiger retired from public office. I even went on some of my first international trips
to tourism development trade shows with the Miccosukee to Spain, Japan, etc. That
was all “B.C.” (before casinos). I am deeply connected to Mr. Tiger.
Q: Kevin, What about the prophecy of the return of Breathmaker? Do you think
Baha’u’llah fulfills that prophecy? If so, in what way—considering that Baha’u’llah was
not from among the Miccosukee people?

A: As Buffalo Tiger asserts, Breathmaker—like all other divine Messengers of God—
brought immutable spiritual laws, social laws and prophecies. Mr. Tiger’s generation
was keenly aware of the imminent fulfillment of Breathmaker’s prophecies, and
persistently guided the people away from materialism. So , yes, Baha’u’llah does fulfill
all authentic prophetic traditions from the “prophetic cycle” of humankind’s spiritual
development:
It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely
ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized as God’s appointed Day. This
Day, however, is unique, and is to be distinguished from those that have
preceded it. The designation “Seal of the Prophets” fully revealeth its high

station. The Prophetic Cycle hath, verily, ended. The Eternal Truth is now come.
He hath lifted up the Ensign of Power, and is now shedding upon the world the unclouded splendor of His Revelation.
– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 60.

41.Why Baha'is Respect Indigenous Sacred Tradi5ons

June 8, 2019 |
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In this continuing series of articles, Lakota Baha'i Kevin Locke and scholar and author
Chris Buck continue their conversation about the Baha'i teachings and the Indigenous
holy messengers.
Q: Yesterday, Kevin, during our phone conversation, you mentioned that the presence
of Christian missions on Indigenous American and Canadian reservations has
historically had a polarizing effect. Recently a Catholic Church was burned down in one
location near where you live—and that Catholics were expelled from another
reservation. Would you please elaborate, and explain why? The intent of this question is
not to criticize any particular religion, but to discuss the impacts that religions historically
have had on Indigenous populations.
A: Chris, it's not the presence of Christian missions that has had a polarizing effect—it's
the overarching and driving assumption by the "colonizers" that nothing Indigenous has
any validity or worth and, in fact, requires total extirpation and annihilation.
This assumption is inter-generational, carried forward by current descendants of Euro-
American immigrants in their refusal to acknowledge or even allow the consciousness of
the validity of anything Indigenous to this land. That perpetual immigrant expression of
righteousness and entitlement wears thin on many Indigenous peoples.
It was the archdiocese in Rapid City that arbitrarily decided to burn down its own historic
church in Wakpala, South Dakota, without any consultation with the local residents or
the tribe. In another community I recently visited it was reported that there had been so
much inter-generational abuse that the church's continued presence could not be

further tolerated.
Q: The attitude of many Christian missions on American and Canadian reservations and reserves towards Indigenous sacred traditions is that they are false and even "of the devil." This, in and of itself, historically has had a divisive effect, of course. So what difference can, and should, the Baha'i presence on reservations make when it comes to an enlightened Baha'i approach to Indigenous spiritual traditions? Can Baha'is take a lesson here from history, and avoid making the same mistakes?
A: Baha'is have no agenda or motive aside from transmitting pure, divine light— untainted by any cultural, nationalistic or personal goals. My own Baha'i teachers, husband and wife—both of pure Norwegian extraction from rural North Dakota—had no

interest in indoctrinating me into their own cultural experience, but only to bring the message that would empower, enlighten and enable one to arise to achieve one's own spiritual destiny. They truly exemplified what I can only strive for.
Q: I note the following historical anecdote:
On March 9, 1961, the late Ruhiyyih Khanum (a.k.a. Mary Maxwell), prominent Canadian Baha'i and beloved wife of Shoghi Effendi, wrote: "I could see the American Indians straighten their shoulders when I asked their forgiveness for the injustices my race had done them and when I praised their great past."
– Letter to the United States and Canada on Racism, 1961.
Would you agree that when the wife of the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith "praised their great past," she was setting a great example for Baha'i-Indigenous relations? Does "praised their great past" likely include recognition and respect for Indigenous sacred traditions, including Indigenous messengers of God as the primary sources of those traditions?
A: Indeed, she set a great example! We can't assume that when Ruhiyyih Khanum "praised their great past" that this did, in fact, include recognition and respect for Indigenous messengers of God. But, from my own personal experience, I know that Ruhiyyih Khanum always showed the utmost respect and admiration for the Indigenous spiritual heritage.
Q: In understanding and applying the Baha'i teachings on the essential unity

of all
religions in general to Indigenous sacred traditions in particular, would you agree that a
good place to start is with Baha'i universalisms? Over the years, you have frequently
quoted this profound statement by Baha'u'llah:
Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers, Whom He hath commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of abiding security, the Seat of eternal holiness and transcendent glory.
– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 145.
So in your view, do the "cities of all nations" include the Lakota people and nations, for
instance?
A: Yes, whether literally as in the largest cities on the planet in 1492—such as Cahokia,
Tenochtitlan, Cuzco, to name but a few in the Western Hemisphere—or spiritually,
meaning the "the cities of men's hearts." In a metaphorical, sense the Lakota—and all
peoples—are included in this quote.
Q: Is this confirmed by Abdu'l-Baha's statement in his Tablet to Amir Khan, which I've
quoted in previous articles in this series?:

Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.
– Abdu'l-Baha, "Extract from a Tablet of Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to Amir Khan,
Additional Tablets, Extracts and Talks.
A: Yes, of course! All Indigenous peoples have the spiritual traditions and teachings to
prove it.
Q: Speaking of Baha'i universalisms, what about those passages that reference "all
religions"? Let's take this passage as an example, just one of many mentions of "all
religions" found throughout the Baha'i writings:
O God, Who art the Author of all Manifestations, the Source of all Sources, the Fountainhead of all Revelations, and the Wellspring of all Lights! I testify that by
Thy Name the heaven of understanding hath been adorned, and the ocean of utterance hath surged, and the dispensations of Thy providence have been promulgated unto the followers of all religions.
– Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, pp. 59–60.
Would you agree, Kevin, that here, "all religions" includes Indigenous sacred traditions?

A: Yes, I do agree. The only difficulty in understanding this passage occurs with inherent assumptions of predominant English-language speakers and the cultural biases that persist to this day. But the instant one translates this passage into Lakota, or most any other language, this very same statement clearly becomes all-inclusive and is understood as universal, including Indigenous sacred traditions within its scope and range of discourse. Kenneth E. Bowers (Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States) stated this clearly in his "Introduction" to my book, Arising:

Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah is the latest in a series of Messengers of God to humanity Who have guided our spiritual and social evolution down through the ages. The Messengers are part of one divine plan, the ultimate goal of which is the unification of the entire world and the creation of a new civilization based upon the principles of divine justice. Baha'u'llah taught respect for the spiritual heritage of the entire human race, in all its vastness and diversity. He stated categorically that no nation or people have been deprived by the all-loving Creator of their share of divine knowledge and that none are to be condemned or disdained: "Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers, Whom He hath commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of abiding security, the Seat of eternal holiness and transcendent glory."

– Kenneth E. Bowers, "Introduction," Arising.

Q: So what do the Lakota sacred traditions have to offer the Baha'i Faith? What does the Baha'i Faith have to offer to Lakota sacred traditions? Can, and should, these two religions recognize and respect each other, and closely associate with each other? If so, what would be the benefit to both?

A: Personally speaking, the Baha'i Faith has enabled me to more deeply recognize the spiritual root and foundation of Lakota civilization, and to appreciate how it connects to the pervasive will of God now inexorably drawing all the disparate peoples into one unified whole.

Q: Why should recognition and respect for White Buffalo Calf Woman matter to

Baha'is
and others? Would it be fair to say that there can be no widespread, reciprocal recognition of the Baha'i Faith by the Lakota people, as a whole, unless and until the
Baha'i Faith recognizes and respects White Buffalo Calf Woman? In other words, is
reciprocal respect and recognition by Baha'i and Lakota sacred traditions, taken
together, the next logical step—and perhaps even a necessary precondition—before a
widespread, reciprocal recognition and respect of Baha'u'llah can take place among the
Lakota people?
A: Yes, it would be ideal for reciprocal respect and understanding to occur between the
Lakota and Baha'i beliefs and traditions. From my perspective the revelation of
Baha'u'llah offers the only lens through which we can fully appreciate revelators from
the prophetic cycle—such as Moses, Jesus, White Buffalo Calf Woman, Deganawida,
Sweet Medicine, Lone Man, Breathmaker, Quetzalcoatl, Viracocha, etc.—each of whom
foretold the future appearance of a divine teacher whose powerful principles, when put
into effect, would unify the world. Of course, for me, that universal revelatory figure is
Baha'u'llah. As the dawn of this appreciation brightens, it will be a cause of universal
celebration of our emergence from the darkness of ignorance and misunderstanding.

42.How to Be An Upholder and Defender of the Vic5ms of Oppression

June 23, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

So far, in this series of articles, we have offered some information on Indigenous
messengers of God. Messengers give messages and mandates for people to follow.
In this installment in the series, we'll go ahead and talk about the road ahead, and
explore what those messages ask us to do to make this world a better place.
In the Baha'i teachings, Baha'u'llah calls upon each of us, especially Baha'is—both
individually and institutionally—to be "an upholder and defender of the victim of
oppression" and "an ensign of the hosts of justice:"

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy
neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the
poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer to the cry of the needy, a preserver
of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech.
Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them
that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the
distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity
and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to
the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a
guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of
truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a
breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary
above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the
ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of
wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of
humility.
– Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 93-94.
Q: So Kevin, with this passage from Baha'u'llah in mind, taking the Lakota people as
just one example among Indigenous tribal peoples, can you summarize the oppression
they have suffered historically?
A: I briefly describe the oppression the Lakota people have suffered in my book Arising:

The Lakota had formerly lived as eagles. They had handled their own material
and spiritual affairs, and they had taken pride in their thriving communities and
vibrant culture.
However, the Lakota have been forced to live as crows for generations. One
treaty after another relocated entire populations, placed community land in the
hands of the government, and stripped the community of its resources.
Longstanding patterns of destabilizing the Indian way of life have prevented
entire communities from making material strides and realizing their spiritual
prosperity. The legacy of oppression persists.
Today, the poorest counties in the country, as identified by the census bureau,

are here in South Dakota. According to the Pew Research Center in 2014, the poverty rate is a little over forty-three percent—almost triple the national average.
– Kevin Locke, Arising.
Q: What about today? Is the oppression now a different complex of problems? What are
they, in brief? Is the present-day oppression really the outcome—the aftermath, legacy,
and ramifications—of past oppression? If so, how can the present and future make up
for the past?
A: Yes, it has taken many generations of systematic and calculated oppression to arrive
at our current impasse. The deeper we proceed into the morass, the clearer it becomes
that nothing short of divine intervention—and our efforts to bring God's will for peace,
harmony and justice to prevail after centuries of oppression—will create a way forward.
This is how our collective efforts can ensure that the present and future can make up for
the past. In this, the dreams, hopes and prayers of our long-suffering ancestors can be
realized and fulfilled by current and future generations, energized and activated by a
vision of a bright horizon.
Q: That which was lost can never be restored. If that's true, would you agree that the
best redress for past oppression is to address current problems, and to take concerned
and concerted action accordingly?
A: I believe that many things lost can be restored. To give a general idea, let me relate a
story from Arising:
I met Andres Jachacollo for the first time in 1982 when he came to speak at the nutrition center in Little Eagle. He had come from Bolivia with several others from
Panama, Chile, and various parts of Bolivia, as part of the Trail of Light initiative
—an effort of the Baha'i community to reinforce cultural and spiritual connections
between the Indigenous people of the Americas." …
Though he was short of stature, Andres had a commanding presence. "My dear relatives," he began, beaming out over the crowd. "I have come a long way to

see you. I see in the faces of all who have gathered here my own nieces and

nephews, my children and grandchildren. Though we have been separated for so long, we are closely related."

"Yet," he continued, "as I look upon you, I see how sad you are. You have suffered greatly in your lives. For generations, your ancestors have suffered and your people have been downtrodden. Your spirits have grown dim."

He paused. "But today—today is a day to rejoice because God has come to lift us up. God has come to restore our dignity and to enable us to become happy. He has come and given us the great task to recreate the world, to bring light, beauty, and happiness to all of mankind. He has given us the task to make the world into a garden. Our ancestors have prayed and hoped for this day to come."

I absorbed his every word, spellbound. I looked around me to see if the others in the audience were as touched by Andres' speech as I was. This man from Bolivia was speaking with such conviction about the experiences of Indigenous people everywhere. His words bore great certitude that the time had come for the redemption of the Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

–Ibid.

Q: So, with that in mind, how can we each become "an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression"?

A: We can stand up for the rights of individual victims and also focus on ameliorating the root source of oppression—by shining a light in the darkness and advocating and actively promoting the spiritualization process, both individually and collectively, including among the Lakota people.

Q: Similarly, how can we be "an ensign of the hosts of justice"—individually and institutionally?

A: An ensign is a flag or banner. To be "an ensign of the hosts of justice" one must truly distinguish themselves and be in the forefront of the forces of justice, just as past armies carried their ensigns into battle. Frankly, in my view, the most direct way of carrying out this injunction involves Baha'i-inspired children's classes and junior youth spiritual empowerment programs in Indigenous populations, including among the Lakota people.

Q: Furthermore, how can we be "a balm to the suffering"—individually and institutionally?

A: All of these divine injunctions from the Baha'i teachings require us to transcend self-
aggrandizement and to hone our ability to serve the best interests of humanity collectively. Each of us have different God-given abilities and capacities, and can
endeavor to develop our own most efficacious mode of service to humanity.

Q: How can we, moreover, be "a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an
answerer to the cry of the needy"—individually and institutionally?
A: In my personal experience, my mother—the late Patricia Locke—best exemplified
these traits. I think her method was to constantly reflect what she could do to better any
and every given situation and condition. Through her constant attention she was able to
upraise standards of justice broadly and effectively.
Q: So, in short, can we be "a joy to the sorrowful," as Baha'u'llah wrote—both
individually and institutionally—by doing what you have outlined above?
A: Absolutely!

43.Indigenous Spiritual Tradi5ons and Cultural Colonialism

June 30, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Cultural appropriation—the adoption of elements of one culture by another—has robbed
many Indigenous cultures of their native intellectual and religious traditions.
By appropriating those traditions, socially or economically dominant groups can practice
a destructive kind of cultural colonialism.
When a dominant culture copies and misappropriates cultural elements from an
Indigenous culture, and uses these symbols and practices outside of their original
cultural context, it can distort, disrespect, harm, trivialize or even contribute to the
destruction of the original traditions.
In our continuing series on Indigenous messengers of God, Christopher Buck and Kevin
Locke tackle this important subject.
Q: Kevin, what prevents Baha'i respect for and belief in the various Indigenous
messengers of God from becoming "cultural appropriation"?
A: This excerpt from "The Prosperity of Humankind," an official statement written in
1995 by the Baha'i International Community, offers foundational guidance on the

subject:
The principle of collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person to
expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the
protection of national and international law. Much like the role played by the gene
pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth
of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and
economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-
age. It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global
civilization. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from
suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway. On the other,
cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns
of civilization, free of manipulation for partisan political ends.
– "The Prosperity of Humankind," Baha'i International Community Office of
Public Information, Haifa
Q: Interesting and enlightening! With such a ready answer, Kevin, I see that you've
given this much thought—long before I ever asked you the question!

This statement sets forth protection of cultural diversity and the right to cultural identity
as closely-linked Baha'i principles. On the other hand, it compares cultural diversity to
"… the gene pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment," such that "…
cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of
civilization."
So, taking the analogy to genetics and evolution a bit further, it would seem that
Indigenous spiritual heritages are entitled to protection, so that they can survive and
flourish. That said, there's nothing wrong with non-Indigenous peoples being given
knowledge of the sacred Indigenous traditions, especially if based on authentic sources
and if presented with accuracy and respect. Do you agree?
A: This is such a fascinating topic! As you know, the United States is still very much
entrenched in the consequences of centuries of active genocidal extermination

and
repression of everything Indigenous to this hemisphere. The analogy between biodiversity and cultural diversity is perfect, because both are critically endangered.
Catastrophic climate change and the immanent extinction of a million species are
emblazoned every day by headline news.
But the headlines are silent—oblivious, in fact—to the ongoing threat to Indigenous
cultural diversity and survival. So the analogy in the above quote between cultural
diversity and biodiversity is most appropriate. The threat to both is the result of material
civilization run amok. Both biodiversity and cultural diversity must be protected by
national and international law. Both are vital to the present and future needs of the
human race. Both need protection from the materialistic influences currently holding
sway in the world. While awareness of the cataclysmic consequences of climate change
and annihilation of biodiversity is slowly entering into people's consciousness,
destruction of the cultural eco-system hasn't yet registered on the general public's radar.
Q: So the Baha'i International Community—which issues its public statements with the
approval of the Universal House of Justice, the democratically-elected international
Baha'i Council—in stating that "cultures must be enabled to interact with one another,"
appears to say that intercultural knowledge and respect can and should be a positive
interaction, especially when such cultural knowledge has already been publicly shared
and published by respected members of an indigenous culture, when, in the act of doing
so, implicitly grants an advance "permission" to discuss this same information,
especially for promoting intercultural respect and reciprocity.
A: Here's my definition of cultural appropriation: "the unacknowledged or inappropriate
adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of
another and typically more dominant people or society."
As you can see, this term reflects a detrimental, outworn social paradigm that casts us

all into debilitating roles of the following dysfunctional, destructive dichotomies:
dominant vs. marginalized, oppressor vs. oppressed, enslaver vs. enslaved, conqueror

vs. conquered, exploiter vs. exploited, etc., ad nauseam. Our respective ancestors
played out these opposing roles in a horrific drama whereby the Euro-Americans fought
to gain control and ascendancy over the planet's limited physical resources. We have
rehearsed these roles inter-generationally and continue to be shackled by them. We are
all victims in those roles. We need to move past them.
On this historic stage, we can all become heroes, regardless of our cultures. This
spiritual field of action has nothing to do with material gain or ascendancy. Instead, the
prize is the redemption of the collective heart of humanity in furtherance of the will of
God for this day and age.
In other words, the time has come for humanity to realize and embody the Baha'i ideal
of unity in diversity. Far more than an abstract ideal, the Baha'i teachings say that unity
in diversity acts as a measure of our collective quality of life in societies around the
world:
Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of
acceptance, so that we may perceive, with an eye purged from all conflicting
elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation
and detachment, and wing our flight unto the highest and innermost sanctuary of
the inner meaning of the Word of God.
– Baha'u'llah, The Book of Certitude, p. 160.
In reality all are members of one human family—children of one Heavenly Father.
Humanity may be likened unto the vari-colored flowers of one garden. There is
unity in diversity. Each sets off and enhances the other's beauty.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, pp. 25-26.

44.What Can We Do About Cultural Appropria5on?

July 14, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

As the conversation about Indigenous messengers of God continues in this series of
essays, Christopher Buck asks Lakota artist and author Kevin Locke to weigh in

on
cultural misappropriation.
Q: Kevin, what can we do about cultural misappropriation? Many people have spoken
out about athletic teams that have taken on “Indian” names and mascots—such as, in
professional baseball, the Cleveland Indians and the team’s mascot, “Chief Wahoo.” Or
the Atlanta Braves, with their former mascot, “Chief Noc-A-Homa,” until the 1983
season, along with “Princess Win-A-Lotta,” dropped at same time as Noc-A-Homa,
followed by “Tomahawk Chop,” adopted in 1991 and still in use, as far as I know. I’m
sure you can think of many other examples.
A: Team sports might represent the best example of cultural/spiritual misappropriation of
Indigenous cultures like mine. First, let’s look at a little historical information that many
may not know.
Team sports, as we know them today, did not exist outside of the Western hemisphere
before 1492. The earliest Western sporting events, like the Olympics in ancient Greece,
relied primarily on contests between individual athletes. Throughout the Western
hemisphere, Indigenous team sports were, and still are, used as a devotional practice.
In those practices, the ball symbolizes divine favor, and the opposing teams symbolize
the dialectic of contrasts in all the realms of God, both seen and unseen.
For example, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) call lacrosse “the Creator’s game.” In the
Southeast, the Cherokee “stick ball” is always a part of the Green Corn Dance—the
central devotional practice of that region. In my culture, the Lakota Thápa
Wankáyeyapi “Tossing The Ball Up” sport is one of the foundational prayers.
Apparently cultural misappropriation occurred when the European immigrants first
witnessed these devotional practices, these team sports, and inappropriately adopted
them. It may have been the first instance of cultural appropriation. Consequently
millions or even billions worldwide now addictively watch these practices, and some
even deify and worship the participants!

The Indigenous prophecies attached to this and many other similar misappropriations
foretell that sad cultural condition, and point to this mindless ignorance as a sign of the
crying need for spiritual renewal.
Q: Since cultural appropriation has become such a highly charged, politically incorrect
practice, can you think of another term—even if you have to invent one—for recognizing
and respecting Indigenous spiritual heritages, both within the Baha'i community, and in
society at large?
A: As we all disengage from the dark place where cultural misappropriation occurs, and
collectively move into the light of truth, then we can happily discard these terms that
define such a limited mindset. In all of my programs, I incorporate participation in music
and dance so that folks can escape the disconnect in which differentness equals
otherness. Through engagement with each other and with each other's cultures, we can
begin to take ownership to internalize and integrate diverse cultures and see that we
can, and should, see ourselves as legitimate heirs to all the treasures of humankind—
material, cultural and spiritual. The Baha'i teachings call upon all people to work
together to establish that exact sort of universal oneness:
I beg of God to strengthen these spiritual bonds as day followeth day, and make
this mystic oneness to shine ever more brightly, until at last all shall be as troops
marshalled together … within the sheltering shade of the Word of God; that they
may strive with all their might until universal fellowship, close and warm, and
unalloyed love, and spiritual relationships, will connect all the hearts in the world.
Then will all humankind, because of this fresh and dazzling bounty, be gathered
in a single homeland. Then will conflict and dissension vanish from the face of
the earth, then will mankind be cradled in love for the beauty of the All-Glorious.
Discord will change to accord, dissension to unison. The roots of malevolence
will be torn out, the basis of aggression destroyed. The bright rays of union will
obliterate the darkness of limitations, and the splendours of heaven will make the
human heart to be even as a mine veined richly with the love of God.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 19-20.

Q: Besides contributing to what academics refer to as “spiritual literacy,” isn’t this oneness a good thing, Kevin? If so, should we all promote this kind of spiritual literacy, recognition and respect for sacred Indigenous traditions?

A: Yes. In a word, let’s transform “cultural (mis)appropriation” into “intercultural appreciation”—with all of the mutual respect and reciprocity it entails, while expanding and enriching our “spiritual literacy.”

For instance, the sacred teachings of Deganawida, the Peacemaker, as enshrined in Concerning the League (recited by Chief John Arthur Gibson in 1912)—a great holy book that we should consider part of the world’s sacred literature—offer an excellent way for all of us to expand and enrich our spiritual literacy. Certainly we can all know about these powerful traditions without misappropriating them.

In fact, public knowledge of all things Indigenous—such as recognizing and respecting the great Indigenous messengers of God as part of our global heritage—can be a good thing, especially if it enhances and ensures “unity in cultural biodiversity.”

As Baha’u’llah wrote:

The most glorious fruit of the tree of knowledge is this exalted word: Of one tree are all ye the fruit, and of one bough the leaves. Let not man glory in this that he loveth his country, let him rather glory in this that he loveth his kind.

– Tablets of Baha’u’llah, pp. 127–128.

45.The Navajo Spirit: The Diné Tradi5on and the Baha’i Faith

July 21, 2019

Co-author: Bitahnii Wayne Wilson

The Navajo people know themselves as “Diné,” which simply means “the People.” Their powerful spiritual traditions include the practice of Hózhóójí—restoring balance and harmony.

After the Cherokees, the Navajos comprise the largest tribe in the United States, with more than 300,000 registered members. In the mid-20th century, many Diné began becoming Baha’is and forming thriving Baha’i communities on the Navajo reservation. In 1980 they formed the Native American Baha’i Institute, a permanent Baha’i

school in
Houck, Arizona, which has become the center of many Navajo Baha'i activities, meetings and projects.
In these next few BahaiTeachings.org essays, Christopher Buck interviews Bitahnii
Wayne Wilson, a Diné Baha'i, and together they explore the many connections and
commonalities between the Navajo beliefs and the Baha'i teachings.
Q: Greetings, and welcome to this series! First, I'm curious about your Navajo name,
"Bitahnii." Would you please tell us the meaning and significance of your Diné name?
A: Bitahnii is my mother's clan name. It has several meanings: Folded Arms Clan, or
Leaf Clan, or "the sacred folding of a corn leaf on a corn stalk." Bitahnii also means "the
sacred folding of a bird's wing when perched up in a tree, within his cover, close to the
body." I decided to use Bitahnii after I was instructed by my elders to always address
myself in my Indigenous language, Diné Bizaad (the Navajo language) whenever I introduce myself as a Diné/Navajo.
Q: How did you discover the Baha'i Faith? Can you tell us about your spiritual journey,
which led to your becoming a Baha'i?
A: During the 1970's, my late grandmother, Nesbah Burnside, took care of my older
brother, my older sister, and I, taking over the parenting duties from both of my
biological parents—who were separated at the time, due to alcoholism and domestic
violence, etc. My siblings and I had a very traumatic experience growing up, and then
my elderly grandmother fell ill and passed on. Not long after, both of my parents also
passed away from alcohol-related incidents. That's when my aunt and uncle adopted
me, my older brother, and my older sister.

As a child I used to herd sheep most of the time, in what we called the "summer sheep
camp wilderness area" near a canyon. There I had my first encounter with Baha'i
relatives, who also belonged to my Bitahnii clan. As I herded the sheep, they slowly
worked their way toward my grandmother Alta Kahn's homestead area. I had no idea

she was a Baha'i, or even what a Baha'i was at that time. She and Nesbah Burnside were sisters through the Bitahnii clan. As the sheep got closer, she came outside and called me to come over. So I approached her, thinking she was going to get after me for the sheep eating her forage and being around her homestead property. She said with a smile: "Ya'ateeh shi tsoii yazhi"—"Greetings, grandchild!" Then she told me to let the sheep eat, and she invited me to come inside her home to have something to eat, too.

So I washed my hands and sat at the table and she fed me.

As I ate, I noticed some strange writing hanging above her doorway, and I asked her about it. She explained to me, in Navajo, that it was written in the language of a people from across the ocean and that it praised and called the Great Spirit, God's "Most Glorious Name." At that time, I didn't know about the Baha'i Faith, but I became interested, so I began meeting and being around the late Alta and Jack Khan's children more often.

I began to get to know my extended family, my uncles—the late Benjamin Kahn, the late Franklin Kahn, and the late Chester Kahn (who recently passed away on in June 1, 2019)—and Alfred Kahn, Raymond Kahn, Suzie Khan, Della Kahn-Woody, and Evangeline Kahn. The Kahn family taught me the Baha'i Faith little by little.

I was raised in the Catholic Church, and as a child had many unpleasant boarding school experiences, as many native people did. But I never seemed to be drawn to Catholicism like I was to the Baha'i teachings.

I was mainly brought up in the traditional Navajo way of life, in what they call Tádíníín da oltsosiji' (The Carrying of the Corn Pollen Bag Way), which meant praying to the Great Spirit and the Holy People, along with giving a pinch of corn pollen for offerings.

That is our traditional form of reciprocity in the spirit of giving. As you begin to pray by giving from the heart, you receive blessings from above.

Later on, I participated in the Native American Church—a spiritual way that helped me through my transition of not having any parents and getting through the 1980s

during
my junior high and high school years. After I graduated from high school, I began to feel
more alone and confused, so I began drinking alcohol. At the same time, I noticed that I
had fallen into the same pattern as my parents. So, one day, I got tired of abusing
alcohol, and I walked over to NABI—the Native American Baha'i Institute. There I met a
kind Baha'i named Jeff Kiely, an administrator at NABI at that time.
I told him it was getting dark and I needed a place to stay for the night and Jeff told me,
"We don't really have any place where people stay and spend the night." "But," he
hastened to say, "You can stay one night in the prayer hogan, and you will need to

return the key in the morning." A hogan—a traditional Navajo structure—is a sacred
space.
So I went to the Baha'i prayer hogan and stayed up most of the night asking and
pleading to the Great Spirit for guidance with my alcohol problem. I basically prayed
myself sober from there on, then slept soundly until the next morning when I gave the
key back.
A year later, I started going to NABI regularly. At that time, another relative had started
an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, and I began attending there, too. Then I started
working with my late uncle, Benjamin Kahn, and my aunt, Lorraine Cowboy-Kahn. They
taught me the Baha'i Faith, as I helped them serve at NABI. I read the Baha'i writings,
as well as participating in Baha'i deepenings, where we studied and learned more about
the Baha'i teachings, and in Baha'i firesides, informal meetings where interested people
can learn more about the Baha'i Faith and its teachings of unity, peace and harmony:
… the teachings of Baha'u'llah are the very healing of the sick world, the remedy
for every need and condition. In them may be found the realization of every
desire and aspiration, the cause of the happiness of the world of humanity, the
stimulus and illumination of mentality, the impulse for advancement and uplift, the

basis of unity for all nations, the fountain source of love amongst mankind, the
center of agreement, the means of peace and harmony, the one bond which will unite the East and the West.
– Abdu’l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 440.
In 1990 I decided to become a Baha’i. Since then I’ve had several of my own spiritual
experiences with my dreams, which reassured and confirmed me about my decision to
be a Baha’i.

46.The Connec5ons Between Navajo and Baha’i Spirituality

July 28, 2019
Co-author: Bitahnii Wayne Wilson

In the previous essay in this series about Indigenous messengers of God, Christopher
Buck began interviewing Bitahnii Wayne Wilson, a Navajo/Diné Baha’i, about his faith.
Born and raised on the Navajo reservation in Northern Arizona, Wilson faced
tremendous challenges as a child. Before he discovered the Baha’i teachings, he was
raised by abusive alcoholic parents, then by a grandmother—but all three died in quick
succession when he was still very young, leaving him and his siblings in the care of an
aunt and uncle. After high school, Bitahnii turned to alcohol, too—but soon realized that
he would follow in the footsteps of his late parents if he continued. Instead, he walked to
the Native American Baha’i Institute (NABI), spent a night in its prayer hogan, and
“prayed himself sober.” After several years of studying the Baha’i teachings and going to
AA meetings, he became a Baha’i in 1990.
In this portion of Christopher Buck’s BahaiTeachings.org interview with him, Bitahnii
recounts the close connections and similarities between the traditional Diné/Navajo
spiritual practices and the Baha’i teachings.
Q: Bitahnii, do you practice both Baha’i and Diné sacred teachings? Are they compatible
with each other?
A: Yes, I practice my indigenous Navajo “Protection Way” and “Blessing Way” teachings
and ceremonies, along with participating in my local Baha’i community by having

devotional gatherings, giving service to others within my community and surrounding communities, along with deepenings we all participate in, which include reading Baha'i scriptures together and having discussions.

I spent my childhood around my late grandfather, John Burnside, a Navajo medicine man. My mother would take me around sometimes with him, and sometimes he would instruct us on how to gather medicinal herbs and the sandstone rocks he crushed and used in creating healing ceremonial sand paintings. My grandfather needed me to always pick up some specific instruments to be given out and collected before and after each Diné prayer ceremony. I later became initiated into those traditions through the "Protection Way" and the "Blessing Way." The three main kinds of Navajo ceremonies are the "Blessing Way," the "Protection Way," and the "Healing Way."

I was also initiated in the Yei Bi Chei or "Night Chant," also known as the "Nine Night Way" ceremony, in which I had memorable spiritual experiences while participating in singing the chants and helping out with our traditional Navajo all-night devotional ceremonies and purification rites in obtaining healing. There I found a spiritual state of Hózhó—the Diné system of principles that guide one's thoughts, speech and virtuous deeds into a state of peace, happiness, beauty, balance and harmony. I learned that they are very much the same as reading the Baha'i writings and prayers:

Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity. Cleave tenaciously unto that which will lead to the well-being and tranquillity of all mankind. This span of earth is but one homeland and one habitation. It behoveth you to abandon vainglory which causeth alienation and to set your hearts on whatever will ensure harmony.

– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, pp. 67-68.

Q: In Chapter 12 of my book, God & Apple Pie: Religious Myths and Visions of America, there is a photograph with this caption:

Jenny Manybeads, a Diné (Navajo) Baha'i, embraced the Baha'i Faith in the 1950's. At the age of 100, she is pictured here, in 1984, in front of her hogan (traditional Navajo sacred home of wooden poles, tree bark and mud) in Dinnebito, Arizona. Rug weaver, herbalist, and midwife, Manybeads was

affectionately called the “Grandmother of Big Mountain.” She passed away on November 3, 1999, at the age of 115. (Photo courtesy of David Smith.)

Did you know Jenny Manybeads?

A: I never met Jenny Manybeads, but I do know some of her other family members. When I attended the Louhelen Baha’i School back in 1991–93, I found out I was distantly related to Jenny Manybeads through my clan. So Jenny would have also been my grandmother.

Q: What impact do you think the Baha’i Faith had on her, and on your many other Navajo relatives who have become Baha’is?

A: I can only cite Baha’u’llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha’i Faith, when he wrote:

Beseech ye the one true God to grant that ye may taste the savor of such deeds as are performed in His path, and partake of the sweetness of such humility and submissiveness as are shown for His sake. Forget your own selves, and turn your eyes towards your neighbor. Bend your energies to whatever may foster the education of men. Nothing is, or can ever be, hidden from God. If ye follow in His way, His incalculable and imperishable blessings will be showered upon you.

– Baha’u’llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, p. 9.

47.The Sacred Covenant of the Navajos—and the Baha’is

August 4, 2019

Co-author: Bitahnii Wayne Wilson

Many Faiths establish a covenant between their founders and followers. That covenant, agreement or contract then becomes the guiding framework of the Faith.

In the Diné/Navajo tradition, and in the Baha’i Faith as well, covenants not only supply that guiding framework, but also provide for the protection and continuance of each spiritual tradition.

Continuing the ongoing conversation between Christopher Buck and Diné/Navajo Baha’i Bitahnii Wayne Wilson, BahaiTeachings.org examines the impact of those covenants on each religious community and their beliefs.

Q: Bitahnii, I have been reading the work of Linda S. Covey from Missouri State University, who has done some research on Navajo-Baha’i connections. In her book chapter, “The Navajo Tradition: Transition to the Baha’i Faith,” published in Images, imaginations, and Beyond: Proceedings of the 8th Native American Symposium,

November 2009, Professor Covey wrote on the “Return of the Warrior Twins: Shaping
Religious Ideology”:
… when responsibility for the world was given to the Nihookáá Diné (the First
Navajos), Changing Woman and the other Diyin Dine’e (Holy People) gave the
First Navajos the components of their ancestral knowledge in songs, prayers,
ceremonies, and stories. These together formed a charter for life, a contract or
covenant between the First Navajos and the Holy People who gave them the
right to live within Dinétah, the original Navajo land between the four sacred
mountains in Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. The Diné would be under the
special protection of the Holy People as long as they stayed within the guidelines
or boundaries of this covenant.
– p. 69.
Would you please tell us more about this sacred Diné covenant?
A: Yes. But this is a very delicate topic! You have to remember that some of these
teachings, stories, and methods are done slightly differently between some of our
families and distant relatives, like the Apache, who have their own version of their origin
stories that are similar to our own Navajo traditions.

These sacred stories vary from region to region, even within the Navajo Nation. So I will
explain them to you the way my grandfather, the late John Burnside explained them to
me.
My grandfather, John Burnside, taught me about Jish do dzil leezh do Ah tsaah—the
sacred Medicine bag, Mountain Dirt Bundle (dzil leezh) and Pouch. That’s a ceremonial
basket consisting of a deerskin pouch tied together into a bundle with a prayer and
chants, that is made up of soil ceremonially taken from the mountain with a prayer
offerings.
The Mountain Dirt Bundle connects first to ourselves through our mind, body, soul, the
Earth, the mountains, the corn fields, the domestic animals, our soft goods, and our
hard goods. Along with the ceremonial basket and other ceremonial instruments it
becomes a physical and spiritual Diné/Navajo covenant that constantly reminds you

about keeping your commitment—that is, your agreement by being truthful within
yourself, which becomes your foundation of your commitment to the Great Spirit—that
connects you from your Divine self to a Greater Divine Spirit.
Now, once again we are starting anew, because the Bab and Baha'u'llah have renewed
the spirit of our sacred Navajo teachings and given us a new covenant.
Q: Thank you, Bitahnii. In her book chapter, Professor Covey went on to say:
The origin story of the Warrior Twins illuminates those ancestral teachings that
influenced Diné Baha'is to accept the Bab and Baha'u'llah as the return of the
Warrior Twins. Anthropologist Maureen Trudelle Schwarz tells the story of the
Warrior Twins through the Diné creation stories of Álltsé Asdazáá (First
Woman), Álltsé Hastiin (First Man), and Changing Woman. Changing Woman
was found by the "holy spirit" Talking God as an infant, "lying under a dark cloud
with a rainbow and soft, falling rain; strapped into a cradle made of rainbow,
lightning, and sunbeams." The infant was given to First Man and First Woman
who raised her in a "miracle way" with "sunray pollen from clouds, plants and
flower dew so that she matured miraculously, coming into womanhood within
twelve days." Changing Woman gave birth to the Warrior Twins named Monster
Slayer and Born For Water who were fathered by the Sun. Later, Changing
Woman created the Nihookáá Diné (First Navajos) brought to life by her breath
and the Holy Winds entering into their bodies.
As young men, the Warrior Twins saved the world by slaying all Monsters except
for Death, Disease, Hunger, Poverty and Old Age. The Monster Slayers then
gave the weapons of sacred ceremonies and prayers to the Nihookáá Diné to
use for "healing and the good life". Archival material written by an anonymous
Diné Baha'i explains that the Monster Slayers were expected to return to the
Diné, "reborn by the iniquities of all humankind," and give to all humankind "the
spiritual weapons to battle and slay all the Monsters." Spoken of as the "New

Day" and signaled by "terrible trials for the Diné," the Wise Ones knew that they
would see "the death throes of the Old Era and the birth of the New Era."
– Ibid., p. 70.
Is the above description accurate? Are the Warrior Twins actually prophets—that is, are
they "Indigenous messengers of God"? If so, would you please tell us more about the

Warrior Twins? Are there prophecies of their return? Do you accept the Bab and Baha'u'llah as the "return" of the Warrior Twins?

A: When I first became a Baha'i, my inner spirit spoke and told me that the Bab and Baha'u'llah are the return of those ancient Spirit Beings of long ago before the Twin Warriors, they would be known as the Grandfathers of the Twin Warrior brothers. Their names were Haash ch'eh waan ("First Calling and/or House Spirit"). They were known as Holy Beings who had their own spiritual prayers, songs, teachings, and ceremonies. The traditions tell us that the first Grandfather would make the announcement of the coming of another Holy Being, who would be represented within the symbols of the coming of the evening twilight, night, and moon.

In the Navajo traditions Haash ch'eh Yaalti' ("First Talking Spirit") is that Holy Being. He is represented within the symbols of the coming of the new morning dawn and the sun of a renewed reality. They brought his spiritual prayers, songs, teachings, and healing ceremonies to guide his grandchildren in living a good virtuous lifestyle—in obtaining and maintaining Hozho, or balance and harmony.

The Diné nine-night ceremonial chant mentions that this Holy Being has a house made of white dawn in the Eastern direction from where the sun rises. That is why all Navajo hogans face east, and why we have to get up early in the morning to say our morning prayers and give offerings of corn pollen or white ground corn for good blessings.

Practiced throughout the Navajo Nation, this tradition is so similar to Baha'i dawn prayers:

I have wakened in Thy shelter, O my God, and it becometh him that seeketh that shelter to abide within the Sanctuary of Thy protection and the Stronghold of Thy defense. Illumine my inner being, O my Lord, with the splendors of the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, even as Thou didst illumine my outer being with the morning light of Thy favor.

– Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, p. 250.

In the Navajo spiritual tradition, the "Warrior Twins"—"Monster Slayer" and "Child Born of the Water"—were great spiritual teachers and warriors of our people long ago. The Warrior Twins also had brothers, named "Reared within the Earth" and "Changing

Grandchild," who were also ancient holy Twin warrior figures, who, when they appeared
with Monster Slayer and Child Born of the Water, represent the four sacred mountains
of Navajoland. These brothers also represent the female and male essences of their

grandfathers, First Calling Spirit and First Talking Spirit—so, yes, I believe that a part of
their essences have come and returned again in the advent of the Bab and Baha'u'llah,
the twin prophets of the Baha'i Faith.
This return of the spirit establishes the foundation of the Baha'i "Twin Manifestations"
concept, through what Navajos call Alkeeh Na Ashi' or Naki' Na ashi'—"The Two Who
Follow One Another," or "The Two Who Travel Together"—the Primordial Pairs. The
Diné/Navajo people feel that the Warrior Twins of long ago have faded into nature and
the universe to establish and verify the twin manifestations of God and/or Holy People
within this day and age, who have reappeared as the Bab and Baha'u'llah. I have found
that this is also much the same with in other ancient cultures.
It is through our way of being a true Diné/Navajo and practicing our indigenous way of
life that I'm able to understand the Baha'i Faith, because the spirit of both methods and
ways of life reflect the same qualities. These teachings are all from the Great Spirit—the
Creator, Almighty God.

48.Pressing on to Meet the Dawn: Patricia Locke

August 18, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Only one Indigenous woman has ever received a MacArthur "genius grant," a Google
"Those Who Make a Difference" award, and was inducted into the National Women's
Hall of Fame: Patricia Locke.
Q: Known in her Lakota language as Tawacin WasteWin—which means "She has a
good consciousness, a compassionate woman"—she is also Kevin Locke's mother. In
this installment of our Indigenous Messengers of God series, we ask Kevin to reflect on
his mother's legacy and on what he learned from such a remarkable parent.

Kevin, can
you summarize her focus in this life?
A: Creating a positive awareness of the holy souls who inspired our people was my
mom's passion. She grew up in an era when spiritual oppression was especially
intense. I well remember how delighted she was to support and participate in the
Indigenous spiritual revitalization movement and readily recognized that the foundation
of it all was God's mandate expressed through His holy emissaries to the people of this
land. Let's press on to meet the dawn.
Q: Among her many accomplishments, in 1993 Patricia Locke was elected as the first
Native American woman to serve as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of
the Baha'is of the United States.
In 2006, five years after she passed away, Patricia Locke was inducted into the National
Women's Hall of Fame. In 2014, the National Race Amity Conference awarded her
the "Race Amity Medal of Honor." (See video: "2014 Medal of Honor Recipient: Patricia
Locke" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ULcK1B7IRE.)
Kevin, your mother gained a huge amount of recognition for her work saving Indigenous
languages, so could you please comment further on your statement that "Creating a
positive awareness of these holy souls was my mom's passion"?
A: Even though it was forbidden and illegal at the time, my mother's relatives always
acknowledged and insisted that the foundation of Lakota identity and reality was the
divine message of the holy revelator: Ptehíncala Ska Win / White Buffalo Calf Woman.
When the noted pioneer ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore came to our Standing
Rock Reservation to do research among the most eminent elders in 1911, the elders
insisted that the document must begin with the teachings of the divine messenger,
White Buffalo Calf Woman. So foundational was her teaching that some say that even

the name Lakhóta or Dakhóta ("they who are faithful, pious, civilized, blessed") was
bestowed by her as recipients of God's covenant.
Q: What did you mean, Kevin, when you said "I well remember how delighted she was

to support and participate in the Indigenous spiritual revitalization movement”?
A: Perhaps, after having lived through so much oppression and colonization, my mother recognized an awakening process in which the people could arise and begin to take charge of their own destiny again.
Q: Is that why you said earlier that she readily recognized the foundation of it all was God’s mandate expressed through His holy emissaries to the people of this land?
A: Yes! Immigrant accounts of the first encounters with North American Indigenous peoples typically note that every one of their gatherings began with prayer. What the Euro-Americans did not note was that prayer was a divine injunction imparted by the holy souls—the prophets, the messengers, what the Baha’i teachings call the “Manifestations of God”—who appeared amongst the various Indigenous peoples. My mother’s earliest memories were of her family’s participation in secret devotional gatherings—far from the reach and ken of the immigrant authorities, who were unaware of these sacred ceremonies. Despite overwhelming opposition, Patricia Locke recognized the essence of faithfulness to the covenant.
Q: So what did she mean by “Let’s press on to meet the dawn”?
A: That comes from the closing paragraph of the April 1994 Universal House of Justice message to the Baha’i world:
Beloved friends: Do not be dismayed or deterred. Take courage in the security of God’s law and ordinances. These are the darkest hours before the break of day. Peace, as promised, will come at night’s end. Press on to meet the dawn.
– The Universal House of Justice, to the Baha’is of the World, April, 1994.
I love this statement, and my mother did, too, because the harbinger of the dawn is the morning star—perhaps the most important symbol in Indigenous North America—the herald of the new day that appears at the coldest, darkest hour before the dawn and announces the fulfillment of the promise that the cold and darkness and death would be transmuted into color, light and life. The morning star is often depicted as an 8-pointed star. The 8-pointed star gardens surrounding the Shrine of the Bab in Haifa

were a
magnet to the Baha'i Faith for me, especially when I understood that the Bab's mission
and life was synonymous with the symbolic meaning of the morning star.
Q: Kevin, how do you think our current "Indigenous Messengers of God" series helps to
brighten this "Dawn"?

A: I pray, Chris, that this series will add to the inspiration required for us to unify and
collectively arise to fulfill the dreams and aspirations of our ancestors who are ready to
rush to our assistance to usher in this new day—this Day of God.
Q: Thanks, Kevin. I think it's befitting to close with this statement written by Patricia
Locke and Jacqueline Left Hand Bull for the Parliament of World Religions, in keeping
with the spirit of this "Indigenous Messengers of God" series:

DECLARATION OF VISION
Toward the Next 500 Years from the gathering of the 1993 United Indigenous Peoples at the Parliament of World's Religions Chicago, Illinois, 1993
We as Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations, honoring our ancestors and our future generations, do hereby declare our present and continuing survival within
our sacred homelands in the Western Hemisphere.
Since time immemorial, we have lived in a spiritual way in keeping with our sacred laws, principles and values given to us by the Creator. Our ways of life are based on respect for Mother Earth, a sacred regard for all relations and the
survival of our languages, cultures and traditions.
In the "Year of the Indigenous Peoples," while the United Nations Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is still being prepared, we ask for solidarity in our cause from the religions of the world.
We call upon the people of conscience in the Roman Catholic hierarchy to persuade Pope John Paul II to formally revoke the Inter Cetera Bull of May 4, 1492, which will restore our fundamental rights. That Papal document called for our Nations and Peoples to be subjugated so that the Christian Empire and its doctrines be propagated. The United States Supreme Court ruling, Johnson v. M'Intosh, 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823), has adopted the same principle of subjugation expressed in the Inter Caetera Bull. This Papal Bull has been, and continues to be, devastating to our religions, our cultures, and the survival of our
populations. Since 1492, 85% of our 145,000,000 in population has been decimated by the effect of the Papal Bull!
We call upon the People of conscience in the many other organized religions whose historical actions have participated in the dehumanization of our Indigenous Nations, to help us put an end to the violation of our Peoples'

human
rights.
We call for an end to the deafening silence of religious denominations and groups regarding the violations of our peoples' rights, because this silence implies complicity and tolerance of the effects.

One hundred years ago, during the 1893 Parliament of World Religions, the profoundly religious Original Peoples of the Western Hemisphere were not invited. We are still here and still struggling to be heard for the sake of our Mother Earth and our children. Our spiritual and physical survival continues to be
threatened all over the hemisphere, we feel compelled to ask you to join us in restoring the balances of humanity and Mother Earth in these ways:
A. Acknowledgement of the myriad of messengers of the Creator, the Great Mystery, to the peoples of the Western Hemisphere.
B. Support in promoting, preserving and maintaining our Indigenous languages and cultures.
C. Involvement in the world outcry against the continuing genocide of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, by taking direct action in support of the International Conventions prohibiting genocide in their various countries.
D. Protection and return of the sacred sites and traditional lands of the Indigenous Peoples.
E. Reversal of the environmental degradation that endangers our traditional lifeways and threatens our very existence.
F. Repatriation of our ancestors and sacred objects from the museums and holdings of the world.
With respect for all life, we thank you.

– Patricia Locke and Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, "Declaration of Vision: Toward the Next 500 Years," from the gathering of the United Indigenous Peoples at the Parliament of World's Religions, Chicago, Illinois, 1993.

49.Spiritual Traveling on the Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path

August 25, 2019
Co-author: Bitahnii Wayne Wilson

In these next two essays, Chris Buck continues his deep spiritual conversation with
Navajo Baha'i Bitahnii Wayne Wilson about the Diné holy traditions and their congruence with the Baha'i teachings.
Q: Greetings, brother Bitahnii! Earlier today, you sent me a very interesting Navajo sand
painting, which was actually displayed on the cover of a book published by Stanford
University Press. This sand painting is featured not only on the book cover itself, but
also as the frontispiece for the book. The text of the frontispiece reads:

The Pollen Path: A Sand Painting from the Blessing Way Chant Cycle
The Initiate enters the path of the rainbow at the lower right, passes onto the yellow pollen path between the two mysterious Ethkaynaáshi Spirit Bringers, and
comes into the white field of ritual ceremony through the Navajo tree of life, the
Great Corn Plant. He has to pass through both female and male experience as he does so, the female experience symbolized by the smooth, curved lines of the rainbow (red and blue), and the male by the crooked, dynamic lines of the lightning. Passing out at the top through the corn tassels, he comes to the Blue
Bird, which signifies blessing and peace, and goes out into the world again on the yellow pollen path at upper right."
– Margaret Schevill Link, The Pollen Path: A Collection of Navajo Myths, Frontispiece.
A: That's good you found it, Chris! It kind of reminds me of how you have begun on a
new spiritual journey.
Q: Yes, I have—thanks to you! Is this sand painting known by any other name?
A: It's called the "Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path."
Q: These sand paintings, as I understand it, are utilized in healing ceremonies done by
Navajo medicine men—a remarkable coming-together of art, culture and medicine. In
your own Navajo spiritual life, have you encountered this "Rainbow and Corn Pollen
Path" sand painting before?
A: Yes, I've seen this version—it was done over me, but not in sand painting form.
When I say "done over me," I mean that this same "Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path"

design was done in ground white corn on a buckskin that was not slayed by a bullet or
arrow in a sacred ceremony I took part in.
The sand painting is from a unique ceremony—but one that isn't done as much anymore. The author, Margaret Schevill Link, used this sand painting only to promote
her book. This sand painting used to be used with the Blessing Way ceremony, but it
was changed or isn't being done anymore because of how the author has used it to
promote the book.
Q: I see. I also see that the "Pollen Path" is commercially available, with this description:
Design based on a traditional Navajo sand painting known as the Pollen Path. This shows two Yei (supernatural beings) assisting in bringing nourishment from

the ground up through the roots into the corn plant. In the corn field two additional beings represent the balanced forces of day-night and rainbow-lightning. Sky bird is perched on top of the tassels and the entire scene is framed
by a rainbow protection border, left open at the top for beneficial forces to enter.
– Artist, Kenny Bakeman, Pollen Path, https://www.imagekind.com/pollen-path_art?IMID=378eac11-9f19-40d0-840b-0dcf4a0e0881
A: This rendition of the sand painting is not complete because we Diné/Navajo purposely leave it incomplete, unless one is having the ceremony performed over them,
when the sand painting is then completed as part of the healing ceremony. So that's
why it was used on the book cover, since tradition dictates that a complete sand
painting must be destroyed, once the ceremony for which it was used is done.
Q: There are many Navajo/Diné sand paintings. Why did you choose this one?
A: I chose that particular design to explain to my elders and other people in general
spiritual teachings about the process of renewal, and about how the patient—who wants
harmony (hozho) to be restored within their mind, body, and soul—can start over and
new again, after the ceremony is over. It also reminds me of the Baha'i teachings
regarding the establishment of peace and harmony in the world:
O ye lovers of God! Make firm your steps; fulfil your pledge to one another; go forth in harmony to scatter abroad the sweet savours of God's love, and to establish His Teachings, until ye breathe a soul into the dead body of this world,
and bring true healing in the physical and spiritual realms to everyone who aileth.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 244.
Q: I understand that this sand painting comes from the Blessing Way tradition. I also
understand that corn is central to Navajo life, and that corn pollen is the essence. For
that reason, corn pollen is an essential part of Diné/Navajo life, including all of the
sacred ceremonies. Is the description in the caption to the Frontispiece above generally
accurate?

A: This sand painting is not now, or is rarely, performed during the Navajo Blessing Way
or Beauty Way ceremonies. Also, this sand painting is not of the Nine-Night Way. This is

how my elders explained this particular sand painting to me:

As our spirit is traveling from another world, we are traveling on the Rainbow Path.
Before you approach the Holy Grandfathers, you see four footprints that lead to the Holy
Grandfathers who are there and who grant you renewal and reawakening. As you take
the next four steps up the Corn Stalk, you're reborn into another world making the next
four steps as you experience the ugly and beautiful sides of life that help you to
spiritually develop. The Corn Stalk represents enduring the hardships of life and living a
beautiful life—from birth into the transformation of old age.
That is where the Spirit Guides come into your life and instruct you on how you're living
your life right or wrong, as you're beginning to reflect the spiritual processes in order to
develop your spiritual capacity.
In other words, the Rainbow Path consists of going on a spiritual journey, which is seen
on the sand painting itself, that shows the rainbow with four footprints leading to the
Holy Grandfathers. Then you start by going up the Corn Stalk, developing and
relearning what we call Hozho—peace, beauty, balance, and harmony, experiencing
your feminine essence, then the masculine essence, as you ascend the Corn Stalk. At
the top of the Corn Stalk is the final stage of enlightenment, as the result of being
transformed, by walking upon the pollen path. The bird at the top represents spiritual
sovereignty.
Like all other sand paintings, this "Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path" is considered a visual
prayer that tells us how to live in hozho on this Mother Earth and throughout the many
worlds of God—through time and eternity. So this sand painting depicts the visual
spiritual process of reaching the highest potential and capacity in one's spiritual
development.
I'm sharing with you some of my Navajo spiritual knowledge and philosophy that reflects
the Baha'i spiritual teachings, through my life experiences of this Navajo ceremony, and

others as well.

50.Twin Spiritual Perspec5ves: the Navajo and Baha’i Teachings

September 1, 2019
Co-author: Bitahnii Wayne Wilson

In this essay, Navajo Baha’i Bitahnii Wayne Wilson and Chris Buck continue their
conversation about the striking parallels between the Navajo spiritual traditions and the
Baha’i teachings.
Q: Bitahnii Wayne, I’m curious to know more about the Twin Grandfathers of the Twin
Warriors in the Diné beliefs. Is the term, “Twin Grandfathers,” ever used in the sacred
Diné/Navajo traditions?
A: The reason why I’m informing you about our Holy People and the holy Twin Prophets
of the Baha’i Faith, the Bab and Baha’u’llah, is because they reflect each other!
*** IMG: Navajo/Diné sacred sand painting: “Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path”
In our ancient Blessing Way Ceremony, the “Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path” sand
painting begins with the Rainbow Path that leads to Two Holy figures that one
recognizes as First Grandfather “Talking Spirit” or “Talking God” and “First Calling Spirit”
or “First Calling God.”
The Corn Pollen Path—or, as we say, the “Restoration of Walking the Beautiful Rainbow
and Corn Pollen Path—is a highly and richly symbolic sand painting. At the bottom of
the Corn Stalk, the sand painting shows the Two Holy Grandfathers—or what you called
the “Twin Grandfathers.” To me, this sand painting shows that one must recognize these
messengers of God as they’re born into this world.
Q: So who are the other two figures, appearing on the left and right of the sacred Corn
Stalk?
A: The two who are next to the Corn Stalk are considered to be Spirit Guides. One is
“Corn Pollen Boy” and the other is “Corn Beetle Girl.” They’re Spirit Guides of our
attitude towards our experiences in life—with the male essence being the lightning, and
the female essence being the rainbow. The sand painting shows that as we travel up

the Corn Stalk, we can balance those two essences and restore harmony to ourselves
and to the world once again.
Q: So is this sand painting not only a visual prayer, but a visual, symbolic prophecy as
well?

A: Yes. Our prophecies are in our ceremonies and chants. They tell of how life can be
beautiful on Earth, and also tell of the ugly side of life and of Earth's catastrophic
changes, due to the loss of our prayers in our Indigenous languages and ceremonial
ways. All this will bring about mass confusion and chaos. As a result our, environment is
also becoming more degraded—and now dangerous and life-threatening, due to cataclysmic climate change.
You have to keep in mind that colonization has taken its toll through the assimilation
process of the boarding school era and also through missionary Christianity and other
ways of life being forced upon us. So sadly, we have lost some of our ceremonial ways.
But some have survived—or transitioned—and some have always stayed strong and
survived.
Q: You chose this "Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path" sand painting for a good reason—
partly because it depicts the Two Holy Grandfathers, right? In your view, do the Two
Holy Grandfathers somehow have a connection with the Bab and Baha'u'llah?
A: I chose it because it reflects some of what we have been discussing about the two
Holy Ones at the base of the Corn Stalk. The Corn Stalk is our Indigenous traditional
Navajo Tree of Life, what the Baha'i teachings refer to symbolically as
"the tree beyond
which there is no passing:"
Advance, O people, with snow-white faces and radiant hearts, unto the blest and
crimson Spot, wherein the Tree beyond which there is no passing is calling:
'Verily, there is none other God beside Me, the Omnipotent Protector, the Self-
Subsisting!'
– Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 128-129.
The Divine Lote-Tree—which Muhammad and Baha'u'llah called in Arabic the Sadratu'l-
Muntahá, which means the "Lote-Tree of the Utmost Farthest

Boundary”—symbolically
marks the end of the seventh heaven, the border of consciousness which no creation
can pass. Ultimately, Baha’u’llah said, the Divine Lote-Tree is a metaphor for the
messenger of God:
For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself.
This is one of the verities that lie enshrined in My Revelation—a verity which I
have revealed in all the heavenly Books, which I have caused the Tongue of
Grandeur to utter, and the Pen of Power to inscribe. Ponder a while thereon, that
with both your inner and outer eye, ye may perceive the subtleties of Divine
wisdom and discover the gems of heavenly knowledge … that ye may not stray
far from the All-Highest Throne, from the Tree beyond which there is no passing,
from the Habitation of everlasting might and glory.
– Baha’u’llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, p.
143-144.

Q: So do you connect this sand painting with the appearance of the Twin
Manifestations, the Bab and Baha’u’llah?
A: It is already there! I’m saying the Bab and Baha’u’llah were already here—long
before, and during, the development of humanity.
This concept and idea is new to you. But, for us traditional Navajo, this spiritual
guidance, through these Holy Ones, has always been here—and is a recurring event in
a spiritual way, much like the processes of the cycles of the four seasons and times of
the day and night, the sun and the moon and their eclipse.
The way I understand this particular sand painting is that it starts from walking upon the
Rainbow Path that represents your old beliefs or other religions. But you then you must
recognize the Bab and Baha’u’llah first in order for you to experience what it means to
be a Baha’i.
Ethkaynaashi is what I’ve been sharing. Alkeeh na ashi’ or Naki’ Na ashi’. They all mean
the Twins, the Holy Twin Grandfathers, the follower pairs, the two who travel together as
one, and/or Primordial Pairs—the Twin Manifestations of God. So, as Navajo Baha’is,
we would say the Ethkaynaashi, Alkeeh na ashi’, Naki’Na ashi’ of this day and age

would be the Bab and Baha'u'llah.
It is what one would say is both a new and ancient revelation of these spiritual
teachings. The great Holy Ones, Manifestations, prophets, spiritual teachings are all, as
Baha'u'llah said, of the Great Spirit, Creator, Almighty, God. They all reflect each other
and reflect back into the universe, if we live by these teachings and sing our chants and
say our prayers.
This is what I mean when I say that the Navajo and Baha'i teachings share very similar
spiritual perspectives—now we've gone full circle in both Navajo spiritual teachings and
Baha'i teachings!

51.The Right to Cultural Iden5ty

September 8, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

The Baha'i principle of "unity in diversity" includes cultural diversity, too — which means
that all people have the right to their unique cultural identity, now considered a human
right under international law.
So let's continue our ongoing conversation with Kevin Locke about the Indigenous
messengers of God, with the idea of cultural diversity in mind.
Q: Kevin, in Part 43 of this series, you cited this excerpt from The Prosperity of
Humankind, an official statement written in 1995 by the Baha'i International Community:
The principle of collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person to
expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy the
protection of national and international law. Much like the role played by the gene
pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense wealth
of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social and
economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-age. It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a global
civilization. On the one hand, cultural expressions need to be protected from
suffocation by the materialistic influences currently holding sway. On the

other,
cultures must be enabled to interact with one another in ever-changing patterns of civilization, free of manipulation for partisan political ends.
– "The Prosperity of Humankind," Baha'i International Community Office of
Public Information, Haifa.
This important statement supports and validates everything that your mother Patricia
Locke stood for, doesn't it?
A: Yes, but much more than that! In my book, Arising, Chapter 5, I wrote about Patricia
Locke's activism, including her immediate, as well as long-term, goals and objectives:
At this time, she had so much going on in her life – most significantly, her activism to improve educational opportunities for Indigenous people; to support their cultural, spiritual, and linguistic heritage; and to eliminate discriminatory
practices toward them.
Note that the Baha'i International Community refers to the "protection of national and
international law." My mother knew that national law, standing alone, may not be

enough. The greater protection, in the long run, may be cultural protection and preservation under international law, to which national law should conform. Patricia
Locke, therefore, was not only an activist at local and national levels, but at the
international level as well.
Q: Some of the language in the Baha'i International Community's remarkable statement
appears to echo the UNESCO "Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity" declaration,
which says, in part:

IDENTITY, DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM
Article 1 – Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity
Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in
the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making
up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.
Article 2 – From cultural diversity to cultural pluralism
In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural

identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life.
– "UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity." http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/5_Cultural_Diversity_EN.pdf

So Kevin, can you comment on "cultural diversity" and "cultural pluralism"?
A: Chris, would you please clarify your question by first commenting on "cultural pluralism"?
Q: Sure! The term "cultural pluralism" was first coined in a famous conversation, in 1907, at the University of Oxford, after the Harlem Renaissance philosopher and writer Alain Locke (who later became a Baha'i in 1918), posed the question: "What difference does difference make?"

In the ensuing conversation with Jewish philosopher Howard Kallen, the term "cultural pluralism" – more commonly known today as "multiculturalism" – was born. How does that apply to your understanding of the Baha'i idea of unity in diversity today?
A: Chris, let me cite an example that you may be familiar with. In 1969, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada published a pamphlet, "The Right to An Identity," which says, in part:
Our hope is that Canada will be the first nation on earth to give practical force to the most fundamental right of all: the right of every citizen to be what God has made him.
Some of the steps which can contribute to such a breakthrough are:

- Recruitment of native Canadians as teachers and teaching assistants.
- Kindergarten and some primary instruction in the native language of the children.
- Development of courses of study covering the entire religious heritage of mankind.

- Involvement of Indian youth in Canada's overseas aid programs.
- Inclusion of the right to a cultural identity in any civil rights entrenched in the Constitution.

– The Canadian Baha'i Community National Office, The Right to An Identity, p. 9.

Note here the proposal for a new constitutional right to be added to the Canadian Constitution! Also, the Baha'i community of Canada recommended the "Development of courses of study covering the entire religious heritage of mankind," which presumably includes Indigenous Canadian and Indigenous American religions.

Q: Interesting! One way to promote "unity in diversity" is to promote the right to a cultural identity, which includes traditional, indigenous religious heritages as well. Would you agree?

A: Yes, definitely. I like the way the "Cultural Settings" section of the August 21, 1994, International Teaching Centre letter, "Growth of the Cause in Rural Communities" put this concept:

There is a tendency to feel that other peoples' cultures are less refined than one's own. This feeling is confirmed when contact with another people is superficial. But whenever those from outside penetrate another culture and discover its depth and subtleties, they develop an attitude of genuine respect for the people. At the most profound depth of every culture lies veneration of the sacred.

– The International Teaching Centre, ""Growth of the Cause in Rural Communities," August 21, 1994.

Societal transformation starts in the heart, and in that heart lies veneration of the sacred. Our series of articles identifies the source of that sacred heart as the holy souls sent from the heavenly Source to edify the lives in those rural communities to whom they appeared.

Q: So is the "right to a cultural identity" something that the Patricia Locke Foundation — a Baha'i-inspired community service initiative — actively promotes?

A: Absolutely. My mom's favorite Baha'i quote says it best:

O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not

away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee.
By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others,
and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is
My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.
– Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words, pp. 3–4.
Q: Since this was Patricia Locke's favorite Baha'i quote, and since the Indigenous
population is the most underrepresented in the United States government, certainly the
Patricia Locke Foundation must give serious weight to the topic of promoting the right to
a cultural/spiritual identity, right?
A: Interestingly, from a Baha'i perspective, there are six Baha'i national jurisdictions in
North America: Hawaii, Alaska, Canada, United States, Greenland and Mexico. Two are
majority Indigenous heritage: Greenland and Mexico. Territorially, Alaska and Canada
are predominantly Indigenous. Hawaii basically couldn't exist without its Indigenous
identity. Only the United States has a collective national amnesia regarding its
Indigenous heritage. Consequently, we in the United States have the bounty of being
able to work a little harder to create a positive awareness of the Indigenous element of
our global heritage.
Q: It's also heartening to know that the "right to a cultural identity" is recognized and
promoted as an independent human right in its own right — as proclaimed and
promulgated, under international law, by the UNESCO "Universal Declaration on
Cultural Diversity" — independent of whether or not the Baha'i truths and vision are
included in that process.
A: This is yet another human right, among many others, that the Baha'i teachings
actively support and promote, under the Baha'i watchword: "Human rights are God-
given rights," where respect for secular human rights is intensified by recognizing
human rights as sacred.

52.Remembering “Forgoben” Indigenous Religions

September 15, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

What has happened to the ancient religions and spiritual belief systems of many of the
tribal groups of North and South America? Have most of them been completely forgotten?
In this continuing conversation between Christopher Buck and Kevin Locke, we address
that important question and explore the Baha’i teachings on the subject.
Q: Several times in this series, Kevin, we have talked about Abdu’l-Baha’s Tablet to
Amir Khan:
In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions,
close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been
said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.
As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets,
such people are excused. In the Qur’án it hath been revealed: “We will not
chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger.” [Qur’an 17:15]
Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient
times, but it hath been forgotten now.
– Abdu’l-Baha, Extract from a Tablet of Abdu’l-Baha.
So here’s my question about Abdu’l-Baha’s phrase, “but it hath been forgotten now.”
Here, the “Call of God” refers to the sacred teachings of Indigenous messengers of God
who appeared “in ancient times” among “the people of America.”
Would it be fair to say that these sacred, Indigenous traditions were largely “forgotten”
because they were effaced and erased by cultural genocide, which wreaked havoc on
all things Indigenous?
A: Yes, Chris, it was a forced “forgetting” imposed by the colonizing immigrant
population.
I well recall the elders’ emphasis on the tantamount importance of the divine message
of Ptehíncala Ska Win/White Buffalo Calf Woman, and how key it is to the core of my
own Lakota identity. This, despite generations of suppression and enforced “forgetting.”

My uncle, who became a devout Christian toward the end of his life, often spoke of the

prophecies of White Buffalo Calf Woman — and that they point to an imminent fulfillment he had not discovered in his lifetime of searching. So he encouraged me to
persist in my quest — and never give up until I attained the goal. For me, he personalized the reality of White Buffalo Calf Woman and nurtured a great love for her
and her teachings in my heart — a deep love that grows today through its realization in
the Baha'i Faith, and in the person and teachings of Baha'u'llah as the "return" — or
spiritual re-voicing — of the spiritual reality of White Buffalo Calf Woman and of her
sacred teachings of harmony and the relatedness of all.
Q: Scorched-earth conquest — driven by the doctrine of "Manifest Destiny," intensified
by predatory commerce and greed, and exacerbated by religious and racial prejudice —
played a huge role in this cultural genocide. For a quick overview, see this video from
the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), of Kevin Gover's historic apology, "Never Again," on
the occasion of the BIA's 175th anniversary on September 8, 2000.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zu52ig696L4
Obviously, all this matters to Indigenous peoples. It's a life-and-death issue, after all.
Should this issue matter to Baha'is? Beyond recognizing and acknowledging this tragic
historical legacy, how can the Baha'i teachings help point the way forward? What, if
anything, can Baha'is do — whether individually or collectively — especially in the
process of community-building and helping to reverse the devastating effects of cultural
genocide?
A: There is a critical need for trained individuals skilled in raising up human resources,
especially in targeted "reservoir" areas. Since Indigenous North Americans are the only
non-urban based group remaining on this continent, reaching this population implies
learning to live beyond the grid and, yes, even beyond internet/cell phone connectivity.
This condition, of course, only applies to more geographically isolated groups. It came
to mind because, yesterday, at a local pow wow, some urban relatives could only stay
for a very short time because of the lack of amenities — number one being the

lack of
internet/cell phone service.
But I am convinced that once the sleeping giant that is the North American Indigenous
population awakens, it will move the world. Much is required to foster the momentum. I
invite any and all to join in this process so clearly prophesied by those blessed souls
who raised the “Call of God” in these regions.
Q: During this forced “forgetting”—perpetrated by the colonizing and devastating
conquests by Euro-Americans under the nefarious doctrine of Manifest Destiny — were
some of the teachings of White Buffalo Woman forcibly “forgotten”?
A: Yes. One of the primary instruments for this “forced forgetting” was the boarding
school system, in which entire generations were forcibly removed from their homes and
subjected to a process whose stated aim was to “Kill the Indian, and save the man.”

In other words, beat out everything Indigenous and impose a Euro-American identity in
its place. My mother, when pressed, would speak of the severe martial punishment she
and her classmates received at the hands of the nuns. One in particular was especially
brutal and pugilistic. Once, I asked her about that nun’s name. She began digging deep
into her repressed memories … “Sister?? … Sister?? … oh yeah! Sister Rocky
Marciano!” This was just a joke on my mom’s part referencing the famous boxer,
America’s heavyweight champion in the mid-1950s.
Q: Not everything has been lost, though. Obviously some of the teachings of White
Buffalo Woman are remembered, and are part and parcel of the sacred Lakota
traditions that survive as a living tradition today. How should non-Indigenous Baha’is
regard these teachings and spiritual practices, especially if they are the legacy of White
Buffalo Calf Woman?
A: Recently I co-wrote an entire book on this important subject, Chris, called Arising. It
tells the story of my own quest for meaning as a young Lakota man, and the way I first
encountered the Baha’i Faith—and how its spiritual principles fit so

perfectly with Lakota
beliefs. This passage from the Baha'i writings explains how Baha'u'llah came to connect
and unite all of the spiritual traditions — and enable us to discover the true nature and
reality of all the previous holy messengers:
The Revelation, of which Baha'u'llah is the source and center, abrogates none of
the religions that have preceded it, nor does it attempt, in the slightest degree, to
distort their features or to belittle their value. It disclaims any intention of dwarfing
any of the Prophets of the past, or of whittling down the eternal verity of their
teachings. It can, in no wise, conflict with the spirit that animates their claims, nor
does it seek to undermine the basis of any man's allegiance to their cause. Its
declared, its primary purpose is to enable every adherent of these Faiths to
obtain a fuller understanding of the religion with which he stands identified, and
to acquire a clearer apprehension of its purpose. It is neither eclectic in the
presentation of its truths, nor arrogant in the affirmation of its claims. Its teachings
revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but
relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final. Unequivocally and
without the least reservation it [the Baha'i Faith] proclaims all established
religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their
functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind.
– Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 57–58.
Q: Excellent answer! In this remarkable passage, let me illustrate how this statement
may apply to the Lakota sacred traditions, as being among "all established religions."
So, if we substitute "the Lakota sacred traditions" in place of "all established religions,"
we get this result:

Unequivocally and without the least reservation it [the Baha'i Faith] proclaims [the
Lakota sacred traditions] to be divine in origin, identical in their aims,
complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in
their value to mankind.

53.How Navajo Tradi5ons Lead to the Baha'i Faith

September 21, 2019
Co-author: Bitahnii Wayne Wilson

The Navajo people have a deep, rich, extensive spiritual tradition, which relies on the Navajo creation story. That complex cosmology defines every Navajo's relationship with all living creatures.

In the same way, the Baha'i cosmology – which reflects the oneness of all humanity – tells a story of harmony and unity:

O peoples of the world! The Sun of Truth hath risen to illumine the whole earth, and to spiritualize the community of man. Laudable are the results and the fruits thereof, abundant the holy evidences deriving from this grace. This is mercy unalloyed and purest bounty; it is light for the world and all its peoples; it is harmony and fellowship, and love and solidarity; indeed it is compassion and unity, and the end of foreignness; it is the being at one, in complete dignity and freedom, with all on earth.

– Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 1.

As a primary symbol of those unifying relationships, Navajo sand paintings hold deep spiritual meanings for the tribe, primarily because they reflect the content of the sacred ceremonies used by Navajo medicine men. In this continuing series of interviews with Navajo Baha'i Bitahnii Wayne Wilson, Christopher Buck asks about the deep meanings of the tribe's belief system and how they relate to the Baha'i teachings.

Q: Greetings, Bitahnii Wayne! Do you know of any sacred Navajo/Diné chants associated with the "Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path" sand painting, which you told me about in our previous two articles?

A: The Blessing Way Ceremony! The "Rainbow and Corn Pollen Path" sand painting was used in the Hail Chant and Ceremony, too. A famous Navajo/Diné Medicine Man, the late Hosteen Klah, explained that there were three other sand paintings similar to the last and final sand painting, which is the one we spoke of.

Q: Yes, I understand that the notable Hosteen Klah (Hastiin Tl'a, d. 1937) was also known for his weavings of sacred Navajo/Diné sand paintings – created and replicated

from chants he knew. He made those weavings in order to preserve the sacred ceremonial chants traditionally recited during the performance of ritually creating each
of these sand paintings.

Although this practice was contrary to the prevailing Navajo tradition of not creating
permanent images of sacred sand paintings, Hosteen Klah decided to do so since there
were not enough apprentices to whom he could teach his chants and thereby preserve
the tribe's traditions. So, by this ingenious and resourceful means, Hosteen Klah could
help keep alive the chants associated with these sand paintings, as a living tradition,
and prevent them from being lost. Of course, he did his very best to avoid offending the
gods, whose spirits and power would be evoked in these permanent images.
In 1937, Hosteen Klah, together with the American anthropologist Mary Cabot
Wheelwright, established the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, known today as the
Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe – New Mexico's oldest non-
profit, independent museum – which hosts most of Hosteen Klah's seventeen woven
sand painting tapestries in its collection. Although he blessed the ground on which the
museum is built, Hosteen Klah died a few months before it was completed.
Linda Covey, a Baha'i scholar who has done some important and valuable research in
this area, has primarily focused on the Navajo Warrior Twins and on the
Bab and Baha'u'llah as their return. Here's Linda Covey's Master's thesis: Diné
Becoming Baha'i: Through the Lens of Ancient Prophecies.
https://bahai-library.com/pdf/c/covey_navajo_becoming_bahai.pdf
So, Bitahnii Wayne, by drawing attention to "Talking God" and "Calling God," I think you
are contributing something new to this discussion about the relationship of the Baha'i
Faith and Navajo beliefs. I respect your knowledge and insight, so can you tell me more
about the first "Talking God," with whom you have associated the spirit of Baha'u'llah?
As a young Navajo, what were you taught about "Talking God" and "Calling God"?
Among these teachings, were there any prophecies that they would appear on earth in

the future? Do other Navajo/Diné Baha'is, besides you, actually identify Baha'u'llah with "Talking God" and the Bab with "Calling God"? Or is this a fresh, original theory that you offer for the first time?

A: When I was little, there were many Chanters and Medicine Men. But now, very few remain. With the passing of those people, some sacred ceremonies have now become extinct, like the "Big Star Way" and the "Big God Way." Many of our medicine men have passed on into the spirit world. Some of the remaining medicine men still do the ceremonial ways in their true form, but others have been lost.

So we're experiencing a shift, where some of my people have become Christians and other denominations, and others, like me, have become Baha'is. We hold on to what seems close to the Baha'i way – and that is the Blessing Way and the Beauty Way, considered to be the life-way of the essence of who we are as Navajos. All the sacred Navajo/Diné Blessing Way and Beauty Way Chants come from "Talking God."

Q: Can you tell us more about the Blessing Way and Beauty Way Chants?

A: In order to understand these chants, you have to really submerse yourself in the environment of that ceremonial setting for your spirit to truly understand what is being recited. It's like you going back to the classroom or lecture hall in college as the professor is chanting the words over and over until you understand. Then you must take the final and recite the chant the exact way it was chanted to you.

Within these chants, it takes years or sometimes a lifetime for one to know, learn and understand the words – they are the words of Talking God and the Holy People, passed down for centuries in their original form. In order to truly grasp the spirit of the ceremony, one needs to attend – just as Baha'is are encouraged to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, across the ocean, to visit the Baha'i holy places.

As just one example, though, I know that the late Navajo Baha'i Annie Kahn stated that there is a Chant which explains the coming of the Bab and Baha'u'llah.

Q: Linda Covey identifies this as the "Unity Chant," based on Annie

Kahn's
interpretation:
In 1963, Navajo Baha'i Annie Kahn, one of the organizers of the Great Council
Fire Unity Conference, wrote down for the first time the oral story of the
Unity
Chant given to her by her grandfather and the old "Holy Medicine Men" of
the
Navajo tribe. Annie writes in the Unity Chant that "He who is the All-Wise,
the All-
Knowing" brought something to the Navajo people "like a Holy Book,"
except they
couldn't read or write at the time so the "Great One" gave it to them in
chants.
The Unity Chant says that a new light will come from the east to send its rays
to
those few Indians who are watching from the tops of the mesas. The "glorious
new light" will be recognized by two signs. The first sign is a nine-pointed
star
whose points symbolize completeness and the love and unity of all religions,
races, and nations. Annie explains that nine is the "sign of the highest
unity
because all the numbers can be found in this one number." The nine-pointed
star,
one of three Baha'i religious symbols, is significant because the numerical
value
of [the word] Baha is nine.
The second sign instructs the Diné to look for a "great chief with twelve
feathers"
or "twelve great principles." There are twelve basic principles in the
Baha'i Faith.
Annie writes that "if we search carefully we will find that these twelve
principles of
world unity have already come to the world and, even in this day, are beginning
to bring people together in unity, understanding and love." The Unity Chant
also
instructs the Navajo people to "look when they see the Glory coming." Baha
is
the root word for Baha'u'llah and Baha'i, which translate, respectively,
as "the
Glory of God" and "follower of the Glory." For Navajo Baha'is these
images of
glory connect Baha'u'llah to the "Great One" in the Navajo Unity Chant,
who will
"come like the dawn" and who "gathers His flock, bringing all the
wandering
sheep back together again."

Annie quotes one of the Holy Medicine Men as saying that the “Time of the End”
is like two stages: in the first stage the “Spirit of the People” shall live again and
in the second stage “people shall melt into one,” meaning that “true love”
between people will be practiced. Annie writes that the “love of the Great Spirit
and of mankind that comes in the new day is so great that all the world’s afflictions and its dangers can in no way harm us.”
– Linda S. Covey, “The Navajo Tradition—Transition to the Baha’i Faith,” Images, imaginations, and Beyond: Proceedings of the Eighth Native American Symposium, November 4–6, 2009, pp. 73–74.

54.Baha’u’llah and the Navajo Talking God

September 29, 2019
Co-author: Bitahnii Wayne Wilson

The Baha’i teachings say that the Bab and Baha’u’llah, the twin holy messengers who
heralded and founded the Baha’i Faith, represent the return of the prophets of the past:
Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations … I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet. The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been identified had been definitely fore-ordained.
– Baha’u’llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, pp. 74-75.
With the primary Baha’i principle of progressive revelation in mind, this series of Chris
Buck’s interviews with Navajo Baha’i Bitahnii Wayne Wilson continues to explore the
close relationship between Navajo and Baha’i beliefs.
Q: Greetings again, Bitahnii Wayne! So what can you tell us from your perspective as a
Navajo Baha’i about the relationship between “Talking God” and Baha’u’llah, and
“Calling God” and the Bab?
A: As a Navajo, my understanding of the relationship between them goes deep. For
Navajos, the station of Talking God represents the beginning of a new day, dawn’s early
light, the beginning of springtime and on into summer time. Calling God represents the
ending process of the day, being the evening twilight. He represents the fall,

and, from
the season of autumn, on into winter.
Both have a special station. They represent the duality within nature, within the male
essences of our Grand Father, our father, Universal Father Sky, the sun and the female
essences of our Grand Mother, our mother, Mother Earth, and the moon. They balance
and complement one another. They are the ones that teach us to live in Hozho (balance
and harmony) within oneself and all existence.
They, too, tell us to live a virtuous lifestyle. During the Nine Night Ceremony, Talking
God and Calling God appear throughout: one is at the front of the male and female
dancers, and one is at the tail end. As they dance, they teach by their dancing of the

cycles in everything. They teach of the many cycles of change, and the many attributes
of the Great Spirit.
As a Navajo, I see the same teachings of the Bab and Baha'u'llah within these Holy
Grand Fathers. Talking God sacrificed his voice for us humans to be able to speak and
have a voice. I see and experience a similar, if not the same thing, happening as a
result of the Baha'i revelation. Now that we were given the right to speak in the
beginning of the development of humanity, today we are given all of the voices of the
Holy Prophets of God, whose words, in their sacred writings and prayers, have
developed with humanity to elevate and reach our spiritual capacity. The Talking God
Chant, to some extent, asks us to aspire to goodness, to holiness, to spirituality:

Talking God Prayer

In Kininaekai
In the house made of dawn.
In the story made of dawn.
On the trail of dawn.

O, Talking God!
His feet, my feet, restore [or: heal]
His limbs, my limbs, restore.
His body, my body, restore
His mind, my mind, restore

His voice, my voice, restore
His plumes, my plumes, restore

With beauty before him, with beauty before me
With beauty behind him, with beauty behind me
With beauty below him, with beauty below me
With beauty above him, with beauty above me
With beauty around him, with beauty around me

With pollen beautiful in his voice, with pollen beautiful in my voice.
It is finished in beauty.
It is finished in beauty.

If you look at this prayer carefully as a Navajo, it tells a story of a sacred and Holy Place where there is a White House in the East, where the sun rises: “In the house made of dawn. In the story made of dawn. On the trail of dawn.” This, too, tells me of a spiritual place. To me, as a traditional Navajo, I know that there is a special meaning within this prayer chant, because it tells us, with reassurance, of this sacred place. Now I’m sure that when Talking God made and gave us this prayer, he was telling his Grand Children and the future generations of this place in some way. It is a message to the future about this Sacred and Holy Threshold, that, we as Baha’is, know of this place that some say is the Holy Land, or Haifa, Israel.

Saying “O, Talking God!” would be like Baha’is praying (by paraphrasing this sacred Navajo prayer chant): “O, Baha’u’llah! Thy feet, my feet, restore [or: heal]. Thy limbs, my limbs, heal. Thy body, my body, heal. Thy mind, my mind, heal. Thy voice, my voice, heal. Thy plumes, my plumes, restore.”

Q: For me, this brings to mind one of Baha’u’llah’s prayers for healing, the “Long Healing Prayer,” said to be endowed with a special power:

I call on Thee O Most Sublime One, O Beauteous One, O Bounteous One! Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One! . . .
I call on Thee O Magnificent One, O Ancient of Days, O Magnanimous One! Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One! . . .
I call on Thee O Greatest Remembrance, O Noblest Name, O Most Ancient Way! Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One! . . .

I call on Thee O Friend, O Physician, O Captivating One! Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One!
I call on Thee O Glory, O Beauty, O Bountiful One! Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One!
I call on Thee O the Most Trusted, O the Best Lover, O Lord of the Dawn! Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One!
I call on Thee O Enkindler, O Brightener, O Bringer of Delight! Thou the Sufficing,
Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One! . . .
O Sufficer, I call on Thee, O Sufficer!
O Healer, I call on Thee, O Healer!
O Abider, I call on Thee, O Abider!
Thou the Ever-Abiding, O Thou Abiding One!
– Baha'u'llah, Baha'i Prayers, pp. 90-98.

I can see, Bitahnii Wayne, that you emphasize the spiritual harmony of Talking God and
Baha'u'llah, and the beauty of their teachings – and how, through Baha'u'llah's
revelation, we voice and universalize the teachings of Talking God.

The most important Navajo prophecy of Baha'u'llah is the harmony with the teachings of
Talking God, as enshrined in the sacred Navajo prayer chants. We can think of those
chants as sacred scriptures in oral form, a living tradition spiritually confirmed,
complemented, and completed by the teachings of Baha'u'llah, the voice of Talking God
for this day and age.

55.Keeping Indigenous Languages – and Adop5ng a Universal One

November 28, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

The United Nations officially designated 2019 as the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages – so what does that mean from a Baha'i perspective?
In this ongoing conversation about Indigenous messengers of God between Chris Buck
and Kevin Locke, BahaiTeachings.org examines the profusion of different languages
among Indigenous cultures and the misunderstandings that diversity has traditionally
led to, as well as the clear and present danger of the loss of those linguistic traditions
among so many Indigenous peoples. We also explore the solution – the Baha'i principle
of a universal auxiliary language, a key part of the Baha'i goal of universal

peace:
Baha'u'llah has proclaimed the adoption of a universal language. A language shall be agreed upon by which unity will be established in the world. Each person
will require training in two languages: his native tongue and the universal auxiliary form of speech. This will facilitate intercommunication and dispel the
misunderstandings which the barriers of language have occasioned in the world. All people worship the same God and are alike His servants. When they are able to communicate freely, they will associate in friendship and concord, entertain the
greatest love and fellowship for each other, and in reality the Orient and Occident
will embrace in unity and agreement.
– Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 300.
Q: Kevin, I just watched a video of Emma Stevens performing the Beatles song "Blackbird" – sung in her native tongue Mi'kmaq, the language of her indigenous Eastern Algonquian tribal people.
https://www.youtube.com/embed/99-LoEkAA3w
What a pure, authentic, and soulful voice! I don't understand a word of the Mi'kmaq
language, but I immediately understood the spirit in which she sang this version of
"Blackbird." It was beautiful, moving, entrancing.
The Baha'i teachings, as you well know, advocate the adoption of a universal auxiliary
language, taught alongside the mother tongues of all peoples – a call for universal
bilingualism as a tool for global communication, but also a way to preserve each group's
original language:

Diversity of languages has been a fruitful cause of discord. The function of language is to convey the thought and purpose of one to another. Therefore, it matters not what language man speaks or employs. … Baha'u'llah advocated one language as the greatest means of unity and the basis of international conference. He wrote to the kings and rulers of the various nations, recommending that one language should be sanctioned and adopted by all governments. According to this each nation should acquire the universal language in addition to its native tongue. The world would then be in close communication, consultation would become general, and dissensions due to diversity of speech would be removed.
– Ibid., pp. 232–233.
So given this primary Baha'i principle, how important is preserving the mother tongues
of indigenous languages, such as Mi'kmaq and Lakota, for example? Also, didn't your

mother, the late Patricia Locke, dedicate much of her time and energy to preserving
Lakota indigenous language and culture, while promoting the Baha'i Faith as well?
A: Yes, Chris, my mother was dedicated to the highly important task of language revitalization. Her mother grew up speaking Lakota and her father spoke only Ojibwe in
his younger years. Consequently my mother and her sister were raised with English as
the common household language, and only heard Indigenous languages when their parents' relatives visited. Of course, their classmates in school were non-English-
speaking. But since their father was transferred from one BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs]
post to another every three or four years – and the suppression of Indigenous languages was horrendous at each school and post – they were not able to achieve
fluency in any of the languages they heard. Since my mother witnessed first-hand the
trauma of forced language/culture eradication, she applied herself full force to healing
these deep wounds.
In recent years, abundant research has revealed the merits of bilingualism/ multiculturalism and vindicated my mom's dedication.
Q: Many preservation efforts now exist to defend, protect and save endangered Indigenous languages around the world. We know that language underpins every society, and when Indigenous languages die out, part of the culture dies with them. The
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates
that the world now speaks about 7,000 languages – but that half of the world's
population speak only the eight most common ones. They also report that approximately 3,000 of the world's languages are spoken by less than 10,000 people
each, which makes them endangered, especially if those languages aren't taught to the
younger generations. What, in your view, can be done to save the hundreds of endangered Indigenous languages and the cultures they represent?

A: Only two things, as far as I know, can truly save those endangered tongues – first,
the ongoing efforts by various tribes and peoples to ensure the continuation of their
linguistic traditions, and second, the adoption of a universal auxiliary language, as
the Baha'i teachings recommend. When that happens, every culture could

continue
speaking their native tongue, but still communicate with the wider world in one accepted
universal language. Otherwise, the world's dominant languages, and the cultural
hegemony that often comes along with them, will soon make many languages unheard,
unpracticed and untaught.

56.The Legend of the Eastern Algonquian Holy Man Gluskap

December 5, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Preserving indigenous languages goes hand-in-hand with preserving indigenous
cultures and sacred traditions. If that doesn't happen, humanity will lose much of its rich
spiritual heritage forever.
To examine those preservation efforts, and to delve into the less-widely-known
Indigenous spiritual traditions, this series of conversations between Chris Buck and
Kevin Locke focuses on various Indigenous messengers of God – the founders,
prophets and culture heroes of tribal peoples in the Americas.
Q: Kevin, one way of promoting and ensuring preservation of cultural identity is by
raising public awareness and appreciation of Indigenous knowledge about their own
spiritual traditions. This kind of information deeply interests Baha'is, who prize the
primary Baha'i principle of the independent investigation of the truth:
God has created in man the power of reason, whereby man is enabled to
investigate reality. God has not intended man to imitate blindly his fathers and
ancestors. He has endowed him with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the
exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and that which he
finds real and true he must accept. He must not be an imitator or blind follower of
any soul. He must not rely implicitly upon the opinion of any man without
investigation; nay, each soul must seek intelligently and independently, arriving at
a real conclusion and bound only by that reality.
– Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 291.
The St. George's Indian Band (Mi'kmaq), for instance, has one of the most attractive
and informative websites (http://www.sgibnl.ca) that I've recently seen. So naturally, as
a Baha'i highly committed to the independent investigation of the truth, I

became
interested in seeing if that site included anything about the teachings of Gluskap (or
Glooscap or Kluskap, with a wide array of alternate spellings), the storied "holy man" of
the Mi'kmaq tradition. To my surprise and delight, I found this statement:

Legend of Glooscap
The following is taken from the book "Glooscap Legends" by Stanley T. Spicer

The land of the Wabanaki, the land nearest to the sunrise, comprises the area
along the Atlantic seaboard inhabited by numerous Indian tribes including the
Micmacs, Malecites, Penobscots and Passamaquoddies. Through the years one
of the great legendary figures among these peoples has been the god-man Glooscap.
Glooscap was endowed with supreme powers. … Always he was portrayed as
kind, benevolent, a warrior against evil and the possessor of magical powers.
–
St. George's Indian Band, Legend of Glooscap. http://www.sgibnl.ca/legend-of-glooscap
Note that the tribe uses the word, "legend" here, instead of the more frequently-
encountered and sometimes pejorative term "myth." The Oxford English Dictionary defines "legend" this way:
A traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but not
authenticated; a fable, a myth. In scholarly use legend is distinguished from myth
as typically involving (potentially) historical figures acting within an earthly
environment, though supernatural elements are frequently present.

So, based on this definition, a legend may have a real historical origin, or core of facts,
later embellished by stories, some of which may strike readers as fanciful in nature.
Would you like to comment, Kevin, on how this choice of the word "legend" might serve
as the best term – located somewhere between history, with its hard, verifiable facts;
and myth, those unverifiable and often impossible narratives which often operate as
stories that convey sacred, moral, and social truths?
A: Each of the English words: "legend," "myth," "fable" have seriously loaded and
freighted connotations. They all suggest, in one way or another, that these oral histories
of holy people, the Indigenous messengers of God, are somehow specious, made up

or
not really true. This minimizes our traditions and makes them seem somehow inferior to
other spiritual teachings.
In Lakota, we use the term “wóyakapi” or narrative as a general descriptor of these
accounts. Other qualifiers can be added to achieve equivalent English meanings, such
as sacred narrative, fanciful narrative, etc. As we begin the process of “decolonizing”
our consciousness, it’s good to find the terms that elicit the least alarm – and to use
them in the most straightforward and honest way:
The first remedy of all is to guide the people aright, so that they will turn
themselves unto God, and listen to His counsellings, and go forth with hearing
ears and seeing eyes. … They must cleanse their hearts from even the slightest
trace of hatred and spite, and they must set about being truthful and honest,
conciliatory and loving to all humankind – so that East and West will, even as two

lovers, hold each other close; that hatred and hostility will perish from the earth,
and universal peace be firmly rooted in their place.
– Abdu’l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha, p. 244.
Q: Kevin, you recently traveled to the Passamaquoddy Tribe of Indian Township – the
largest Indian reservation in the Northeast state of Maine, close to Canada – where you
were invited to perform. When we spoke shortly afterwards, you told me that you had a
very pleasant talk with a Passamaquoddy Baha’i, and that, in the course of your
conversation, she mentioned the important indigenous figure of “Gluskap” (which
actually means the “Liar”). You told her that you had heard of Gluskap before, and that
you understood that Gluskap was a “trickster” figure. The Baha’i was taken somewhat
aback by your comment, and hastened to correct you. The Baha’i said that, in her view,
Gluskap was an Indigenous messenger of God. Is that true? If so, would you please tell
us more about your experience at Passamaquoddy?
A: I have never been able to figure out how to go deeper into a conversation about
Gluskap, but I do know exactly the people to approach. One Baha’i in

particular is an
impeccable Mi'kmaq linguist, who I'm sure could solve this riddle for us.
Q: Several times before, you have recommended that we talk and write about Gluskap.
This has been a challenging task for me, because there's some controversy, among
scholars, regarding the authenticity of some of the traditions, owing to bad early
scholarship on the part of one major anthropologist in the past.
Another reason why Gluskap has been a daunting topic for me is that the stories are so
varied and, in many cases, disconcerting to a non-indigenous person, like myself.
Here's why: Gluskap has been variously described as a Creator, trickster, transformer,
culture hero, the "Good Twin," "the Liar" (for promising to return and failing to do so, and
for other reasons as well), "Cheat," "Deceiver," etc. As you would expect, the less-than-
worthy stories about Gluskap, which depict him as not only mischievous but downright
deceitful, are difficult for me to understand and appreciate, much less accept as part of
the hypothetical core tradition regarding Gluskap's role as an Indigenous messenger of
God. What's your take on this?
A: If the mistakes perpetuated about the Mi'kmaq holy messenger are anything
comparable to what has happened with the Lakota, then it would be imperative to check
with a competent speaker who also has a grasp of the traditional spiritual heritage.
Q: I agree, so I did a lot of searching and sifting, critically reading the sources I
consulted. Let me disclose my method and choice of traditions: I have chosen to focus
on Penobscot traditions regarding Gluskap, as documented by the highly respected
anthropologist, Frank G. Speck. The Penobscot Nation, one of the tribal groups of the
Eastern Algonquians, inhabits the Penobscot river valley of central Maine.

So, Kevin, before asking you to comment on some of the Gluskap narratives that I have
selected, let me ask you this question: Is it okay for me to be a little bit skeptical about
some of the sacred Indigenous conditions regarding Gluskap, for instance? The same

question can be broadened to include other Indigenous traditions, of course – or any
tradition, for that matter.
Another way of putting this question is this: Would you agree that not everything in
Indigenous traditions is necessarily original and otherwise authentic, even if widely
believed? I understand that this is a culturally sensitive question, and that's why I'm
asking your views on this, since you are an indigenous person. What are your thoughts?
A: Yes, I am very skeptical about everything. Anything one encounters can be very
slanted in opposite extremes, depending on the lens of the viewer. Some information is
pointedly mean-spirited, while other information can be overly romanticized. You are
very correct to identify well-respected, credible scholars – and, I would add, to consult
knowledgeable members and elders of the tribe, as well. As the Baha'i teachings say,
we should investigate reality with our eyes wide open:
Discover for yourselves the reality of things, and strive to assimilate the methods
by which noble-mindedness and glory are attained among the nations and people of the world.
No man should follow blindly his ancestors and forefathers. Nay, each must see
with his own eyes, hear with his own ears and investigate independently in order
that he may find the truth. The religion of forefathers and ancestors is based
upon blind imitation. Man should investigate reality.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, p. 24.
Q: Thanks for these insights, Kevin. In our next article, I'll ask you about some very
interesting Penobscot legends of Gluskap.

57.Gluskap the Indigenous Messenger: Tall Tales, or Timeless Truths?

December 15, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Several of the Indigenous tribes in the Americas have been subjected to vigorous study
by anthropologists and other scientists – so much, in fact, that jokes have arisen as a
result.
The well-known Navajo Baha'i Franklin Kahn once joked that a Navajo family consists

of a grandmother, her married daughters and their husbands, her daughters' children, and an anthropologist!

Speaking of anthropologists, in our previous article, I wrote that I did a lot of searching and sifting, critically reading and carefully considering the various sources I consulted about the Penobscot traditions regarding Gluskap, as documented by the highly respected anthropologist, Frank G. Speck.

I did so much critical sifting because the following journal article put my scholarly instincts on guard: Thomas Parkhill, "Of Glooskap's Birth, and of His Brother Malsum, the Wolf": The Story of Charles Godfrey Leland's "Purely American Creation," in American Indian Culture and Research Journal Vol. 16, No. 1 (1992): pp. 45–69, in which Professor Parkhill cautioned:

Whatever else it is, Leland's disregard for the integrity of the traditions he studied is bad scholarship that has encouraged more bad scholarship. … The process of how Leland came to compose "Of Glooskap's Birth," indeed his story-gathering and editing methods in general, serve to remind students of Native American religions to be careful, even suspicious, when considering sources and to be tentative about their findings.

I have to be tentative myself about the impact of Leland's promotion of the Kluskap twin story on the self-understanding of native people. There is some evidence that some Abenaki and Micmac peoples have appropriated the Kluskap-Malsum story, that their creative response has been to make this story their own.

– Parkhill, "Of Glooskap's Birth," p. 61.

I took this statement as a word of caution, to be ever-vigilant, circumspect and careful when vetting the primary sources on which we rely.

Q: So Kevin, would you say that in this "Indigenous Messengers of God" essay series, you and I have been careful and circumspect in selecting our sources? Would you agree that we've practiced this one implication of two fundamental Baha'i principles: (1) independently investigating truth; and (2) harmonizing science and religion?

A: I am always very cautious, Chris, about believing anything I read that I am not already familiar with. Here's a good example – the universally accepted English translation of Dakota/Lakota to mean "allies" or "friends."

Too bad no one bothered to ask one of the tens of thousands of fluent native

speakers
who could have instantly rebutted this translation.
Another example: the widely accepted but wrong idea that there are three dialects
spoken in South Dakota; Dakota, Lakota and Nakota. Nakota is a separate language
division (sometimes referred to as Assiniboine and Stoney) with its own dialects spoken
by a small group in Montana and more extensively throughout Manitoba, Saskatchewan
and Alberta. It is not intelligible to the four Dakota dialects and one Lakota dialect
spoken in various communities in South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Montana,
Manitoba and Saskatchewan.
Although I have traveled extensively through Micmac, Passamaquody, Penobscot
communities in Maine and Nova Scotia, I have never heard much about Gluskap. I think
the people of that region are collectively known as Wabanaki. It is fascinating to me that,
despite overwhelming pressure from contact with Europeans from the beginning of the
colonization era, they retain total fluency in their languages and have maintained
enduring community cohesion. This alone indicates to me a powerful spiritual tradition,
possibly established by Gluskap.
Q: The anthropologist Frank G. Speck died in 1950, the year when I was born. In an
obituary published in 1951, scholar A. Irving Hallowell wrote, in part:
Speck not only studied American Indians, but was deeply attached to them. They
were as much a part of his personal as his professional life. … In fact, the abiding
interest he had in their languages and all other aspects of their mode of life and
thought long antedated his entrance into anthropology as a scholarly discipline.
– quoted by Elisabeth Tooker, “Frank G. Speck,” Expedition
Magazine 29.1 (1987), https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/frank-g-speck
Among others, I consulted this long article: Frank G. Speck, “Penobscot Tales and
Religious Beliefs,” Journal of American Folklore Vol. 48, No. 187
(Jan.–Mar., 1935), pp.
1–107.

The official “Penobscot Nation” website opens with this greeting: “kkwey
(hello), and

welcome to the home of the Penobscots '… the oldest continuous government in the
world …'." https://www.penobscotnation.org.

So, Kevin, what do you know about the Penobscot Nation? Are the Penobscot closely
related to the Passamaquoddy?
A: All of the various Wabanaki speak cognate languages of the Algonquin language
family.
Q: Professor Speck wrote: "The spiritual force dominating the universe is a power, or
opinions of some a being, called Ketci-Ni'-wskwe, Great Being" (p. 4). Baha'u'llah also
uses this term, the "Great Being," as a name for God:
The Great Being saith: O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and
the leaves of one branch. … That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.
The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.
– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, pp. 164, 167.
Interesting coincidence, isn't it?
A: Many if not most Indigenous North Americans refer to the supreme deity as "Great
Spirit," Great Being" or something analogous to that.
Q: Professor Speck went on to say:
Gluskabe the Transformer: The most important personage in Penobscot religious lore and one purely aboriginal in character is named Gluskabe (gluski is translated as "deceit, lie, nothing." -dbe or -abe is a stem denoting "person"),
"deceiver, liar," or "man from nothing," according to different opinions among
informants. The translation may be Deceiver or Trickster, the epithet is not uncomplimentary because it refers to the ability to outwit one's enemies by strategy and cunning. He is the hero and transformer personage of the Wabanaki tribes.
– "Penobscot Tales and Religious Beliefs," pp. 5–6.
Does that tally in your experience? Would you say that this statement remains true
today?
A: I find it fascinating how universal and yet how diverse the role of the "trickster" is from

one Indigenous group to the next. Generally, though, a trickster could certainly be a messenger of God, because tricksters usually have a high level of intellectual acumen or secret, mystical knowledge, and they use those attributes to change, challenge, upend or disobey normal rules and conventions.

Q: Here is Professor Speck's summary of Gluskap's achievements:

Penobscot mythology credits Gluskabe with some twenty major achievements for the benefit of man, to wit: distributing over the world the game animals, food, fish, hares and tobacco; renewing the warmth of summer; protecting the eagle above who regulates daylight and darkness; moderating the destructive force of the wind; tempering the winter; bringing the summer north; reducing giant animals to a harmless size; domesticating the dog; clearing obstructions from the portages along the routes of hunting and travel; smoothing out the most dangerous waterfalls; creating the whole Penobscot river system; moderating the power of fire; making burns curable; creating sweetgrass; and serving as a source of power for those who come to his distant dwelling with their troubles. His benefits to mankind reach a climax in the mission he allots to himself to watch over his people and to return to the land at some unknown date, against which time he is preparing food and armament to save them in a crisis. By inference the Penobscot are also inclined to attribute to him the origin of their arts and inventions. In some twelve episodes, moreover, he puts into practice the ethical code of the northeastern Indians, by punishing early mankind as well as fabulous beasts.

– Ibid., p. 10.

These narratives of exploits and wonders performed by Gluskap may strike some non-indigenous readers as "tall tales"—much like the early American "Paul Bunyan" tales.

How best to understand these Gluskap stories? What is their purpose and function? Are they vehicles meant to convey moral and social truths? How should Baha'is regard this sacred tradition, in the context of recognizing and respecting Indigenous messengers of God?

A: If this messenger continues to capture the faith and influence the current generations of spiritual descendants, then we must certainly accord proper respect and reverence to this heavenly soul.

December 22, 2019
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Have popular and romantic “pan-Indigenous” ideas influenced the traditional teachings of Indigenous messengers of God, and thereby altered some of the original native spiritual traditions?
In this series of essays on Gluskap – the Mi’kmaq holy figure – Lakota artist, author and performer Kevin Locke and religious scholar Chris Buck ponder that possibility and what we can potentially do about it.
Q: Kevin, can you help me understand what appears to be a tendency to ascribe all modern Mi’kmaq Indigenous beliefs to Gluskap’s ancient teachings?
For instance, I just accessed this publication by the University of New Brunswick’s Mi’kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre, as part of the “Wabanaki Collection”: “Wolastoqiyik and Mi’kmaq Studies: Elementary Level.”
https://www.wabanakicollection.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Teacher-Curriculum-Handbook.pdf

Here are some teachings that are ascribed to Gluskap (here spelled “Koluskap”):

“All My Relations”
In the beginning, Creator made the stars, moon, sun, clouds, and thunder beings.
Creator also made Mother Earth and upon Mother Earth Creator placed many gifts such as trees, streams, rivers, oceans, mountains, plants, and stones.
Creator then made the four-leggeds such the moose, deer, bear, wolf, fox, and all of the other animals found in the forest. Creator made the winged-people such as the eagle, crow, robin, butterflies and the sparrow.
Creator made the water-people such as the salmon, trout, whale, and dolphins.
Creator placed the water-people in rivers, streams, lakes and oceans. Creator made the plant people such as sweetgrass, sage, red willow tobacco, cedar, and many more.

Creator then decided to make the Wabanaki people. The word “Wabanaki” means “people of the dawn”. The Wabanaki people include the Wolastoqewiyik, Mi’kmaq, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy. The Wabanakis wondered why they were placed on Mother Earth and so our Creator decided to send Koluskap [Gluskap] to teach them. Koluskap gathered the Wabanaki people and held a council. Everyone was asked to sit in a circle and Koluskap began the council

by
lighting a Sacred Fire and smoking a Sacred Pipe. Koluskap then began his teachings:
“Brothers and sisters, our Creator has sent me to teach you the sacred ways of
the red road. If you follow this road, it will take you to the Sacred Lodge of our
Creator. First, you will always honor our Creator and give thanks for the many gifts that our Creator has placed on Mother Earth. You will also honor your Elders
because they have wisdom and knowledge that everyone will need. Their wisdom will guide you and help you to remain on the red road.
You will honor creation by saying “All My Relations”. This will remind you that you
are related to the four-leggeds, winged people, water people, tree people, plant
people and all of creation. Because they are your relations, you will respect them,
honor them, value them and learn from them. They have lessons to pass on to you. Your mind must be open to their messages. Your heart must be filled with love and compassion for all of creation.
When you look up to the sky during the day, you will see Father Sun. In the evening, you will see Grandmother Moon as well as the stars who are your ancestors. Look to the sky each day and each evening and say “All My Relations”. Look to the mountains, rivers, streams, brooks, and say “All My Relations”. Look to the forest and say “All My Relations” because it is the home
of the four-leggeds, winged people and plant people.
My brothers and sisters, thank you for listening. Remember these teachings and pass them on to your children and grandchildren. Instruct them to pass these teachings on to their children and grand-children as well. These teachings will remain with you forever. I must leave for now but I will be back to share more teachings with you. We will have another council when I return from the Sacred Lodge. All My Relations!”
Koluskap ended the council by asking everyone in the circle to offer red willow tobacco to the Sacred Fire. This offering was made to give thanks for Koluskap’s
teachings. The smoke from the Sacred Fire also sends a message to our Creator that the teachings will always guide them in their actions.
– “Wolastoqiyik and Mi’kmaq Studies: Elementary Level,” p. 37.

Do you see the problem that I have with this text? Repeated invocations of the phrase,
“All My Relations” (as well as the reference to “Mother Earth”) make it sound like all this
may have been borrowed from Lakota sacred traditions ascribed to White Buffalo Calf

Woman. Do you agree?
A: Yes, Chris, as far as I know, the Lakota/Dakota are the only ones who use the
phrase: “mitákuye oyás’in” or “all my relations.” Also the terms
“four legged,” “winged,”
etc. seem like they are taken directly from the well-known book Black Elk Speaks.
Q: If so, would you like to comment on what appears to be going on here? Are the
teachings of White Buffalo Calf Woman being universalized in a kind of “pan-Indigenous” way, such that they are being ascribed to Gluskap, and put in his mouth, as
it were, since his original teachings may have been irretrievably lost?
A: That is an interesting question! Anywhere that the language is intact, those who
document spiritual traditions would tend to translate phrases directly from the original
language.
Several years ago I tutored a Baha’i study class at Eskasoni, Nova Scotia, with about
10 participants. (The Eskasoni folks are Mi’kmaq.) Because English is a distant, second
language for them, every few minutes the group would have to take a break to process
the information in their mother tongue, which made me think that certainly Gluskap or
some divine being bestowed a language rich in spiritual nuances.
Q: Interesting and insightful! So here we are, you and I, advocating for recognition and
respect of the Indigenous messengers of God. At the same time, so far, we have tried to
be judicious in our selection of primary sources. We have done our best to critically sift
the authentic from the inauthentic. Would you agree that it is really an impossible task to
do these things with any degree of certainty?
A: Yes, it is daunting. But I am so appreciative that you have taken the lead to begin the
process of introducing the spiritual foundations of this land to a broad readership.
Q: So how can we reconcile what appear to be pan-Indigenous teachings seemingly put
into the mouth of Gluskap? Of course, we cannot and should not accuse the authors of
the above text of essentially plagiarizing Lakota teachings! So help me out here, Kevin,
because I’m struggling to understand what’s going on with all this

information, and how
to put it in perspective.
A: I see it all as part of an awakening process. As we become more fully conscious,
erudite individuals will be able to provide clarification, just as we are attempting to do in
this series.
Q: It has often been said that popular culture “romanticizes” sacred Indigenous
teachings. We ourselves may be vulnerable to such a criticism! We are not, are we?
What would you say?

A: Our Indigenous spiritual heritage has been suppressed, persecuted and vilified for so
many centuries that it is hard not to perhaps over-compensate on the positive side.
Q: So what’s the takeaway from all this? What is your best advice for Baha’is, and for
the public in general, in understanding and responding to these modern presentations of
ancient Indigenous sacred teachings?
A: As in all things, we must seek out reliable sources. Fortunately, we have a divine
standard in the Baha’i writings, which we can use as a powerful light that we can shine
on any matter and discern the true, universal elements therein.
Q: What implications does all this have for the “Baha’i-Indigenous” encounter? Do
Baha’i teachings complement and complete Indigenous sacred teachings and further
universalize them? In a sense, do the modern Baha’i teachings authenticate,
rejuvenate, and update Indigenous sacred teachings? Or am I going too far here?
A: The Baha’i teachings enable us see Indigenous spiritual teachings as part of a
progressive enlightenment, or spiritual evolution. All of these God-sent revelators
brought information attuned to the exigencies and temperament of the people who they
appeared to and taught – as the Universal House of Justice so beautifully and
eloquently expressed in its message to the Baha’i Unity Conference on the Navajo
Nation in 1972:

Beloved Friends,
Praise be to the Almighty that you have gathered in that beautiful spot in a spirit
of love and harmony for the purpose of strengthening the bonds of unity between

yourselves and among all men.
The All-Wise Creator of earth and heaven has from the beginning which has no beginning sent to His peoples Divine Messengers to guide them to the Straight Path. These Wise Ones have come to establish the unity of the Kingdom in human hearts. This great evolutionary process of building the organic unity of the human race has entered a new stage with this mighty message of Baha'u'llah. His voice is the voice of the Great Spirit. His love for human kind is the force of the New Age.
He who sends the rain, who causes the sun and the stars to shine, the rivers to flow, the winds to blow and the earth to give forth her bounties has in this Great Day sent to all mankind Baha'u'llah. It is this Great One who has opened the door of divine knowledge to every soul. It is His teachings that will establish world unity and bring about universal peace.
The people of the world are the tools in His hand. They must strive to understand His message and to walk in the path of His divine guidance. Every human being is responsible in this day to seek the truth for himself and thereafter to live according to that wise counsel. The old ones have all longed for this sweet message. Praise God that you have found it.
Now awakened to new wisdom, now guided to the straight path, now illumined with this mighty message, strive you day and night to guide and assist the thirsty ones in all lands to the ever-flowing fountain, the wandering ones to this fortress of certainty, the ignorant ones to this source of knowledge and the seekers to that One for whom their hearts long.
May your consultation reach so high a level of endeavor and purpose that the Great One will open before your faces the doors of the paradise of wisdom and love and cause the light of the Abha Beauty [Baha'u'llah] to shine in your midst.
With loving Baha'i greetings,
The Universal House of Justice, 18 May 1972

59.4 Indigenous Steps to "Enlighten the Whole World"

January 30, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

This extensive series of articles on Indigenous Messengers of God has now become a visual presentation on the Baha'i prophecy that "these Indians … will … enlighten the

whole world.”
This new slideshow basically presents our thoughts and reflections on two key statements by Abdu’l-Baha regarding the importance and eventual destiny of the
Indigenous peoples of the Americas:
Attach great importance to the Indigenous population of America. … Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.
– Abdu’l-Baha, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 33.
Undoubtedly in those regions [the Americas] the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.
– Abdu’l-Baha, The Tablet to Amir Khan.
Q: Kevin, would you like to comment on how these two Baha’i texts relate to each
other?
A: Yes, Chris, these two statements by Abdu’l-Baha are intimately related, because of
the high destiny he envisioned precisely because the “Call of God” was “raised” on this
land among the many different groups of Indigenous peoples. This call summoned the
faithful to turn their sights toward the higher realm in obedience to universal holy
ordinances of prayer, fasting and all things leading to piety and spiritual growth. Both
statements foresee a day of fulfillment, in which the descendants of all the Indigenous
tribal peoples would be illumined and ennobled. Praise be God that they now have the
ability to bear witness to the realization of the trust reposed in the hearts of those who
initially heard the Call of God in “ancient times,” as the Tablet to Amir Kahn so clearly
and eloquently states.
Q: In the slideshow, we offer a list of the following Indigenous messengers of God as
identified in some of the more well-known Indigenous spiritual traditions. In this list,
we’ve included specific references to various BahaiTeachings.org articles on each of
these prophets and enlighteners in this Indigenous Messengers of God series:

1. Deganawida, the Peacemaker (Parts 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 17, 18, 22 & 25)
2. White Buffalo Calf Woman (Parts 3, 16, 19, 23, 24, 25, 27 & 28)
3. Sweet Medicine (Part 30)
4. Lone Man (Parts 38 & 39)
5. Breathmaker (Part 40)

6. Quetzalcoatl (Parts 2 & 32)
7. Viracocha (Part 4)
8. Gluskap (Parts 56, 57 & 58)
9. Talking God (Part 54)
10. Bunjil (Part 34)

So Kevin, what, in your opinion, is the significance of this list? Would you agree that here, Abdu'l-Baha clearly establishes a foundational Baha'i principle regarding the messengers of God to First Nations peoples? Although the names of these Indigenous messengers of God cannot be added to the official Baha'i list of the manifestations of God who founded the best-known world religions, can they be recognized and respected by Baha'is and the followers of all other major global Faiths?

A: This brief list represents only a tiny fraction of those who raised the "Call of God" in the Americas before they were called the Americas, during the "pre-contact" era. After 500 years of brutal genocide of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, so much of the divine heritage of this land has been utterly effaced. So we are fortunate to have as much of a record as we do. Just as we revere and recognize the spiritual power and wisdom of messengers like Moses, Abraham, Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad, we all need to recognize the light of the teachings of these Indigenous messengers.

1. Building Spiritual Parity between Traditions

Q: Next, Kevin, you and I offer four proposed steps for helping to hasten the fulfillment of Abdu'l-Baha's remarkable prophecy that the Indigenous peoples of the Americas could enlighten the world. So let's go one step at a time – the first step, as we see it, builds equal spiritual parity between Baha'i and Indigenous sacred traditions. Would you agree, Kevin, that the first precondition for the fulfillment of Abdu'l-Baha's remarkable prophecy is a dynamic interaction, or interplay, between the sacred teachings of the Baha'i Faith and sacred Indigenous traditions? Could the dynamic and exemplary synergy between the two become the greatest cause of the enlightenment foreseen and foretold by Abdu'l-Baha?

A: Abdu'l-Baha's "Tablet to Amir Khan" assures us that the "Call of God" had been raised in this land, long ago, before Europeans reached the Americas. The continuity, and survival, of the teachings of those Indigenous messengers who raised that Call, against all odds, could be construed as a proof of the power and efficacy of the universality of those teachings. For a community which has survived 500 years of unparalleled genocide and marginalization, a Herculean effort must be made to achieve the fulfillment of Abdu'l-Baha's remarkable prophecy.

For that synergy to occur, first there needs to be reciprocal recognition and respect of Indigenous and Baha'i spirituality. Spiritual parity between Baha'i and Indigenous sacred traditions, as equal, is a first step in the process of progress and fulfillment of Abdu'l-Baha's prophecy. As the Baha'i teachings so clearly and cogently say:

… the proofs applicable to one Prophet are equally applicable to another. … since the Prophets themselves, the Founders, have loved, praised and testified of each other, why should we disagree and be alienated? God is one. He is the Shepherd of all. We are His sheep and, therefore, should live together in love and unity. We should manifest the spirit of justness and goodwill toward each other. Shall we do this, or shall we censure and pronounce anathema, praising ourselves and condemning all others? What possible good can come from such attitude and action?

– Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 409.

Q: How could this begin to occur?

A: Perhaps Baha'u'llah offers us a perfect example of what might need to occur in this passage:

… view all the Prophets and Messengers of God as one soul and one body, as one light and one spirit, in such wise that the first among them would be last and the last would be first. For they have all arisen to proclaim His Cause and have established the laws of divine wisdom. They are, one and all, the Manifestations of His Self, the Repositories of His might, the Treasuries of His Revelation, the Dawning-Places of His splendour and the Daysprings of His light. Through them are manifested the signs of sanctity in the realities of all things and the tokens of oneness in the essences of all beings. Through them are revealed the elements of glorification in the heavenly realities and the exponents of praise in the

eternal
essences. From them hath all creation proceeded and unto them shall return all that hath been mentioned. And since in their inmost Beings they are the same Luminaries and the self-same Mysteries, thou shouldst view their outward conditions in the same light, that thou mayest recognize them all as one Being, nay, find them united in their words, speech, and utterance.
– Baha'u'llah, Gems of Divine Mysteries, pp. 24–25.

Similarly, Indigenous peoples need to first understand that the illumination shed by
those Indigenous messengers of God who first raised the Call of God in this hemisphere, the Americas, can find its fulfillment in the message of Baha'u'llah, which
will result in the enlightenment of the entire planet.
You can download the new slideshow here:
h t t p s : / / w w w . a c a d e m i a . e d u / 4 1 1 9 5 0 5 3 / Buck_Locke_2019_Prophecy_Indians_Enlighten_World
Click here for a smaller version of the slideshow:
https://bahai-library.com/buck_locke_enlighten_world

60.The Spiritual Des5ny of Indigenous Peoples

February 5, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Previously in this series, we discussed a potential first step in the fulfillment of the
Baha'i prophecy that tribal peoples in the Americas "will become so illumined as to
enlighten the whole world":
Attach great importance to the Indigenous population of America. … Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 33.
That first step – establishing spiritual parity between Baha'i and Indigenous sacred
traditions as equals – requires a deep recognition of the core Baha'i principle of the
unity of all religions:
The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God's holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife. The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light
of unity amongst men.
– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 129.
Today the one overriding need is unity and harmony among the beloved of the Lord, for they should have among them but one heart and soul and should, so far as in them lieth, unitedly withstand the hostility of all the peoples of the

world;
they must bring to an end the benighted prejudices of all nations and religions and must make known to every member of the human race that all are the leaves of one branch, the fruits of one bough.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 277.

Once this step is achieved, the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Baha'is can productively consult together on an equal footing. In this continuing dialogue between Chris Buck and Lakota Baha'i Kevin Locke, let's explore the next three steps in this process.

2. Parity in Consultation

Q: Kevin, would you please tell us your thoughts about the spiritual and social implications of achieving parity in consultation between Baha'is and Indigenous peoples in the Americas? Of course, since many Indigenous people are Baha'is, when we say Baha'i and Indigenous, we want our readers to understand that these two groups overlap, since many Indigenous people belong to both groups. Given that fact, how do you think more Baha'i and Indigenous consultation can and should occur on an equal basis?

A: Reviewing historical documentation on the interactions between Indigenous peoples and colonists, we can see that, in every instance, the Indigenous peoples invoked the principle of spiritual unity. They would always kindle the sacred fire and beseech God to bend low and give ear and bless the meeting, so that truth and divine abundance would ensue. Parity in consultation has ever been a requirement for progress and release of the pent-up divine blessings. Unfortunately, in the past, this goodwill, based on such good-faith consultation, was reciprocated with deceit and betrayal by the colonizers.

Now, in this new day, as the Baha'i teachings define it, the consultative process must be transformed and placed firmly on a heavenly foundation of parity and love — that is, of equality, mutual respect, and true friendship. This takes dedication, work and patience.

In fact, it resembles how Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, described the

reconciliation Baha'is should endeavor to create between black and white people:
A tremendous effort is required by both races if their outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and teachings of the Faith of Baha'u'llah. Casting away once and for all the fallacious doctrine of racial superiority, with all its attendant evils, confusion, and miseries, and welcoming and encouraging the intermixture of races, and tearing down the barriers that now divide them, they should each endeavor, day and night, to fulfill their particular responsibilities in the common task which so urgently faces them.
– Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 39-40.

3. Parity in Social Action: Baha'is and Indigenous Peoples as Equal Partners
Q: What's the next step, Kevin?
A: Step Three involves Baha'is and Indigenous peoples becoming equal partners in social action. Baha'is have a clear mission — to unify the world and to make this world a better place. This mission does not make Baha'is missionaries. Instead, it asks each Baha'i to become an ambassador of the Baha'i universal teachings of harmony and unity among all peoples.

Q: So how can Baha'is and Indigenous groups best work together? If there is agreement to go forward with any initiative, can Baha'i and Indigenous groups work together as equal partners?
A: Yes, now that we are equipped with the mandate and practical tools for individual and societal transformation, we must transcend all of the old, outworn and destructive paradigms and go forward, together, with parity, vision and resolve. That way we can initiate and carry out social action projects to enhance and advance the quality of Indigenous community life across the Americas, throughout the far reaches of the Western Hemisphere.

4. Parity in Education: Baha'i and Indigenous Models to Enlighten the World
Q: Can you explain the final step, Kevin?
A: Step Four – parity in education – has tremendous spiritual and social implications.
Through this kind of parity – equal and collaborative participation in the

literary, cultural,
moral and spiritual education of Indigenous children and youth (as well as adults),
Baha'i and Indigenous groups can develop social models to enlighten the world.
Abdu'l-Baha, over 100 years ago, famously asked the Baha'is to:
Attach great importance to the Indigenous population of America. … Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.
– Tablets of the Divine Plan, p. 33.
Notice that the conditional verb, "should," occurs before the words, "educated and
guided." Education and guidance are key to the fulfillment of Abdu'l-Baha's prophecy of
the future destiny of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, which is also a social
mandate. In other words, Abdu'l-Baha gives instructions — a social formula, if you will
— as to how we can help hasten the time when the fulfillment of this prophecy will
surely come to fruition. This education and guidance must be entirely based on the
divine teachings.

61.Advance Permission, Appropria5on and Sacred Indigenous Knowledge

February 13, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In this installment of our continuing series on Indigenous messengers of God, Kevin
Locke and Chris Buck tackle the difficult issue of cultural appropriation and Indigenous
peoples.
Q: Kevin, I knew this was coming. Offline, we've been criticized – and commended – for
what we have written online about Indigenous messengers of God. One criticism: that
we've failed to follow Indigenous protocols, to learn from elders who are the preservers
and transmitters of sacred Indigenous knowledge, and to ask for and receive their
permission to share some of their sacred traditions. Have we, in the past, tried to do so,
in a good faith effort?
A: Yes Chris, this is a very sensitive topic! Especially in view of the fact that the

Indigenous peoples — and the legacy of our holy messengers' sacred teachings and traditions — have undergone centuries of colonial, physical, and cultural genocide, condemnation, vilification, etc. Despite the profound spirituality of their teachings, they have been suppressed, persecuted and slandered:

All the holy ones of God have tried with heart and soul to spread the light of love and unity throughout the world, so that the darkness of materiality might disappear and the light of spirituality might shine forth among the children of men. Then would hate, slander and murder disappear, and in their stead love, unity and peace would reign.

All the Manifestations of God came with the same purpose, and they have all sought to lead men into the paths of virtue. Yet we, their servants, still dispute among ourselves! Why is it thus? Why do we not love one another and live in unity?

It is because we have shut our eyes to the underlying principle of all religions, that God is one, that He is the Father of us all, that we are all immersed in the ocean of His mercy and sheltered and protected by His loving care.

– Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks.

But thankfully, things have changed. We now live in a time of a sea-change, awakening to the importance of attuning ourselves to the rising Indigenous voices. The foundation

of the efficacy and power of that collective voice are the universal spiritual principles deposited in the hearts of the ancestors through the very Indigenous messengers we describe in this series of articles.

The knowledge and significance of these divine messengers has been repressed for so long that the process of awakening to the power of their divine light sometimes seems slow and painful. In my own Lakota tradition, I have witnessed that dynamic firsthand.

Q: What are some of the problems and challenges in doing so?

A: It would be difficult, if not impossible to attempt to follow the various tribal protocols for each and every Indigenous messenger of God whom we present in this series. Fortunately, previous generations have left much to posterity with their precious, authentic insights. Chief John Arthur Gibson of the Haudenosaunee is perhaps

the best
example, when, in 1912 — just months before his death later that same year — he
recited the epic saga and “The Great Law” of Deganawida, the Peacemaker.
When famed ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore came to Standing Rock in 1911, she made no progress until a consultative body of eminent elders commandeered her
research by insisting that, since all light and reality is attributed to the messenger –
Ptehíncala Ska Win, White Buffalo Calf Woman — an account of her appearance and
legacy must precede all else. Fortunately we have pioneering examples such as these
on which to base our articles.
Q: Good point! It’s clear that you’re referring to books like Concerning the League: The
Iroquois League Tradition as Dictated in Onondaga by John Arthur Gibson, the winner
of the 1994 SSILA Book Award; and also to Teton Sioux Music, by Frances Densmore.
I’d like to now ask you if you agree that, in a sense, “advance permission” has been
given if an Indigenous faith-keeper, or elder, had previously given sacred indigenous
knowledge to someone, like an anthropologist, for publication. Can that be considered
“advance permission”?
A: Many of the aforementioned informants explicitly stated that their motive was to
benefit future unborn generations. Today we’re blessed to live in these times, when we
can bring this knowledge to fruition.
Q: Another source of information that we’ve sometimes used is information provided by
various First Nations online. Would you agree that there is another source of “advance
permission”?
A: The most important point here is intent. What is our goal? I’ll cite some of my
thoughts on this issue from my book, Arising:
In 1993, my mom was elected to serve on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States. … I learned much from my mother, as a part of her
everyday discourse, about sharing the teachings of the Baha’i Faith in the most

natural way. Teaching as a part of her everyday life was a manifestation of her

generosity and magnanimity. Without any airs and in numerous settings, whether in a public talk or on a visit to a friend's home, she mentioned Baha'u'llah and shared passages from The Hidden Words. Her favorite point of conversation was progressive revelation – that God has revealed Himself to mankind throughout time in the form of spiritual teachers who have brought to us religious laws and teachings suited for the time in which we live. She loved the quote:

Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers, Whom He hath commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of abiding security, the Seat of eternal holiness and transcendent glory.

– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah.

… I had come to understand that God had not forsaken us and had sent a great message through Baha'u'llah to connect the Lakota spiritual traditions with the other great world religions. The White Buffalo Calf Maiden is not directly mentioned in the Baha'i writings, as Abraham, Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are. The Baha'i writings further clarify that the names of some Prophets "seem to be lost in the mists of ancient history."

– Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 4, 1950, to an individual Baha'i.

My growing understanding of Baha'i teachings did not undermine Lakota spiritual traditions. Rather, the Lakota ceremonial life and the practices I cherished so dearly were given new meaning, and I did not have to abandon my background but could appreciate the gems within it more fully.

For the first time, in the Baha'i Faith, I had direct and lucid answers to many of my questions. I sensed that my search for meaning – for the red road – was not over, however; it was beginning afresh every day.

– Kevin Locke, Arising, pp. 227-274.

Q: I see that in the Introduction to your excellent book, that Kenneth E. Bowers, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States — although writing as an individual — states, in much the same vein, and with the same quote from Baha'u'llah that your mother loved so much.

Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah is the latest in a series of Messengers of God to humanity Who have guided our spiritual and social evolution down through the ages. The Messengers are part of one divine plan, the ultimate goal of which is the unification of the entire world and the creation of a new civilization based

upon the principles of divine justice. Baha'u'llah taught respect for the spiritual
heritage of the entire human race, in all its vastness and diversity. He stated

categorically that no nation or people have been deprived by the all-loving Creator of their share of divine knowledge and that none are to be condemned or disdained:
Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers, Whom He hath commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of abiding security, the Seat of eternal holiness and transcendent glory.
– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah.
Kevin found in this message a welcome contrast to the demands from various quarters to reject the beliefs of his ancestors. For the first time, he was able to
link his ancestors to the history of humanity's encounter with God in all its forms.
Virtually all cultures revere certain great spiritual visionaries whose teachings
have provided the moral foundations for their respective societies. Baha'u'llah,
Who lived in the Middle East in the nineteenth century, mentioned some of these Messengers by name, especially those known to the people of His place and time. Given the vast number of tribes and nations in the world, He did not specifically name all those sent by God for the spiritual education of His children.
Yet a person of any particular background might well consider certain souls to have been among such spiritual teachers. White Buffalo Calf Maiden, for example, figures prominently in Lakota tradition and was a source of inspiration
and guidance in Kevin's life. She ranks in his heart among these great spiritual
luminaries.
– Kenneth E. Bowers, in the Introduction to Kevin Locke's Arising, p. xiv.

62.Sacred Council Fires and the Baha'i Spark

February 23, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In Kevin Locke's recent autobiography, Arising, he writes about a "Continental
Indigenous Council Fire" that he attended in the summer of 1980 – and that changed his
life.
Q: Kevin, you devote an entire chapter of your book Arising to the account of this signal
event. Here's an excerpt from your narrative of that memorable experience:
In the summer of 1980, as I finished my Master's degree in Community

Education and was preparing to start my doctoral studies, a Baha'i friend, Ed Roberts, gave me a call. He was traveling to a gathering at the Baha'i House of Worship for Native American Baha'is and pioneers to the reservations in North America. Over the course of three days, this gathering, the Continental Indigenous Council Fire, would include teaching workshops, prayer, and fellowship. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, as the national administrative body for the Baha'i community, was hosting this gathering. …

One of the most powerful presentations that weekend was by an elder from the Tlingit tribe in Alaska, Eugene King. Eugene was a very tall man, over six feet, and had been blind all of his adult life. His erudite bearing made his presentation incredibly compelling. Eugene had descended from Tlingit Chiefs but had faced ostracization upon becoming a Baha'i and had ultimately sacrificed his chiefdom.

Hearing of his sacrifices for our beliefs moved me. Eugene talked about how the Baha'i Faith fulfills both Christian and Indigenous prophetic traditions. He shared long passages from the Baha'i writings and Christian scripture from memory. One of the common strands was how the light of the revelation enables one to see his or her own spiritual heritage and identify the universal aspects that will benefit all of humanity.

– Kevin Locke, Arising

In our previous article, Kevin, I asked you about "advance permission" to share the information on Indigenous messengers of God, which has now developed into quite a number of articles. Would you agree that one of the purposes of this Indigenous Messengers of God series is to show "how the light of the revelation enables one to see

his or her own spiritual heritage and identify the universal aspects that will benefit all of humanity"?

A: Yes, this is a process that all must go through both individually and collectively as we advance towards an awareness that we all have precious gifts, both as individuals and as a part of one or more of the many of the thousands of diverse kindreds and cultures

on our planet – as the Baha'i teachings clearly say:
The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples,
and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances
of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the
cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind.
– Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah
This collective process was illustrated powerfully during the 1992 Baha'i World
Congress, in New York, when, as requested by the Universal House of Justice, Juan
Bejerano spoke about how his Ngöbe (or Ngäbe)-Buglé (Guaymi) people from Panama
had used the Revelation of Baha'u'llah as a light to shine upon and illuminate those
aspects of their tribal heritage that align with the Divine Standard – and then to develop
those qualities in order to present them as a gift to the emerging global civilization. Mr.
Bejerano spoke on how his community, inspired by the divine principles, had refined
and developed aspects of their music, dance, culture and language with an eye towards
enriching all of humanity. He mentioned how the Baha'i revelation had been infused into
and enriched the well-being and vitality of every aspect of their identity, as a kindred
people, moving into the light of this Day of God.
Q: Interesting! I see that, today, the Ngöbe-Buglé people live in the largest and most
populous of Panama's five Indigenous administrative provinces (comarcas indígenas),
in which the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé was created in 1997 when the Panamanian
government finally granted land rights to the Ngöbe-Buglé. (Shouldn't it have been the
other way around, that the invading Europeans should have asked the Ngöbe-Buglé, as
the original Indigenous inhabitants of that area, for land rights?) In that region, Baha'i
development work has been quite significant, as this present-day example illustrates:
Radio Baha'i in Soloy, Panama, was established in the 1980s to give voice to
and serve as an educational and cultural channel for indigenous peoples. The
station broadcasts in both Spanish and Ngäbere, the language of the local
population, and has at least 7,000 listeners. It produces and airs content

especially for children, youth, and women on themes of spiritual import including
service, truthfulness, love, and generosity in the form of original songs, skits,
announcements, and interviews.
– For the Betterment of the World: The Worldwide Baha'i Community's
Approach to Social and Economic Development, Prepared by the Office of

Social and Economic Development, Baha'i International Community, p.
36.
So, as an illustrative example, how does "the light of the [Baha'i]
revelation enable" you
yourself — both as an Indigenous Lakota and and Anishinabe individual and as a
spiritually enkindled Baha'i — "to see his or her own spiritual heritage
and identify the
universal aspects that will benefit all of humanity"?
A: We all pray that God will use us as instruments to serve His greater purpose, and
then endeavor to align ourselves with that purpose. I was abundantly blessed, upon
becoming a Baha'i, to have doors open in my life that completely transformed and
rerouted my life in the direction of developing and using the Indigenous traditional arts
to accentuate universal themes. This "rerouting" has enabled outreach to millions of
people in nearly 100 countries.
Q: Here, I hear you obliquely referring to your work as "a world-famous visionary Hoop
Dancer, preeminent player of the Indigenous Northern Plains flute, traditional storyteller,
cultural ambassador, recording artist and educator," according to one online description
of you and your international outreach and renown — and further:
Kevin's goal is to empower today's youth in culture and "raise awareness of the
Oneness we share as human beings." His belief in the unity of humankind is
expressed dramatically in the traditional Hoop Dance which illustrates "the roles
and responsibilities that all human beings have within the hoops (circles) of life,"
reflects Kevin. "Through my music and dance, I want to create a positive
awareness of the oneness of humanity." Since 1982, Kevin has recorded twelve
albums of music and stories, most recently The First Flute, Open Circle, Keepers
of the Dream, and Dream Catcher. Kevin Locke dedicates his life's work to

Baha'u'llah.
– KevinLocke.com
So the year 2020 will mark 40 years since that memorable and important "Second Native Baha'i Council of North America" in 1980. Would you encourage another such Continental Indigenous Council Fire to be held in the near future? If so, why?
A: The "Continental Indigenous Councils," the "Trail of Light" expedition, and many other continental/hemispheric Indigenous activities were initiated by the Baha'i Continental Board of Counselors serving the Western Hemisphere in response to a groundswell of hemisphere-wide interest from Indigenous communities, eager to fulfill prophecies regarding the in-gathering of the widely dispersed and persecuted kindreds from this half of the planet. I personally feel that, as Indigenous communities arise and make a quality response to the forces released through the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, there will be amazing permutations and developments based upon the seeds planted during those original Continental Indigenous Councils.

Q: Kevin, tell me this: from your unique Indigenous-Baha'i perspective, how can Indigenous peoples benefit from the teachings of the Baha'i Faith? How can the world at large benefit from the presence and influence of Indigenous peoples, who are further enlightened and empowered by the teachings of the Baha'i Faith?
A: The brutal legacy of conquest, campaigns of extermination, genocide and oppression on this half of the planet are unmatched in the annals of human history. The negative roles resulting from this half-millennium period of darkness will be made illumined and heroic through the power of God in this new day.
Throughout the Western Hemisphere today, we can hear and acknowledge, with profound respect and admiration, the rising Indigenous voices, speaking dynamically to issues of environmental protection, women's rights, the education and moral uplift of children, the empowering of youth, the need for equality and equity, and so forth. The power of these strong, inspiring Indigenous voices is rooted in the seeds planted by

God through the Indigenous Messengers we have been extolling throughout this series
of articles. Those divine voices, filtered through languages and cultures that have
appeared, like a beautiful heavenly garden on this land, are now echoing, reverberating
and pulsating in hearts throughout the length and breadth of this land, as we speak.
Q: Thanks, Kevin! By the way, this video featuring Indigenous artists, is worth watching:
https://www.youtube.com/embed/XHhbeRJudY4

63.Preserving Spiritual Seeds for Posterity and Prosperity

March 13, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In February of 2020, the Cherokee Nation became the first tribe in U.S. to send
heirloom seeds to the global seed vault in Norway. The Nation's news release said:
TAHLEQUAH, Okla. – The Cherokee Nation is the first tribe in the United States
to receive an invitation to deposit its traditional heirloom seeds to the Svalbard
Global Seed Vault, a long-term seed storage facility housed deep inside a mountain on a remote island in Norway.
The Cherokee Nation Secretary of Natural Resources office collected nine
samples of Cherokee heirloom crops to send to Svalbard, including Cherokee
White Eagle Corn, the tribe's most sacred corn, which is typically used during
cultural activities, and three other varieties of corn grown for consumption in
distinct locations to keep the strains pure. Other seeds sent to the seed bank
include Cherokee Long Greasy Beans, Cherokee Trail of Tears Beans, Cherokee
Turkey Gizzard black and brown beans, and Cherokee Candy Roaster Squash.
All nine varieties sent to the seed bank predate European settlement.
"This is history in the making, and none of it could have been possible without the
hard work of our staff and the partnership with the team in Norway," said
Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. "It is such an honor to have a
piece of our culture preserved forever. Generations from now, these seeds will
still hold our history and there will always be a part of the Cherokee Nation in the
world."
– Ibid (https://www.cherokeephoenix.org/Article/index/114106)
Christopher Buck: So I have a three-part question for you, Kevin: Beyond the physical
seeds that germinate plants, is there such a thing as traditional heirloom

spiritual
“seeds” that could be “a piece of our culture preserved forever?” If
so, should those
spiritual seeds be taught as part and parcel of our global spiritual heritage?
Finally, how
does the Baha’i perspective relate to this question?
Kevin Locke: Much of the current U.S. population lives in the ancestral
homelands of
the historic Mound Builder civilization – around the Great Lakes and in the
Mississippi
and Ohio River valleys. Those cultures, including the Calusa, Adena, Hopewell
and Mississippian cultures, made the monumental earthworks that still surround
us and

remind us of a rich spiritual heritage. Many of those earthworks, the ones not
assiduously removed to make way for modern agriculture and development, are
burial
mounds.
The sacred seeds from the Cherokee Nation are a direct legacy of this land’s
foundational civilizers – the holy souls who enriched this land through
divine laws,
teachings and prophecies. Many of these heavenly teachings concern the sanctity
and
continuity of the soul.
Corn especially represents a physical manifestation of the soul’s mysterious
spiritual
reality. The holy revelators brought the divine gift of corn and taught how to
properly
care for it. This Baha’i prayer, often associated with children, perfectly
portrays the
spiritual dimension of corn and other divinely revealed horticultural
knowledge, including
squash, beans, etc.:
O God! Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thine orchard,
the flowers of Thy meadow, the roses of Thy garden. Let Thy rain fall upon
them;
let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love. Let Thy breeze refresh
them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the
utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver. Thou art the Compassionate.
– Abdu’l-Baha, Baha’i Prayers
The beloved souls lovingly and ceremoniously “planted” within the burial
mounds
surrounding us are analogous to the sacred seeds that the divine messengers
taught
Indigenous people to plant in mounded gardens. The “rain,” “Sun of
Reality” and
“breeze” symbolize the universal heavenly injunctions, laws, prayers,

virtues that the
child must receive as they are “trained,” “grow,” “develop” and
“appear in the utmost
beauty.”
When the corn reaches the height of a man, it produces a sweet, nutritious
fruit that has
been the foundation of civilization on this land for thousands of years. The
Hunká or
Corn Dance is a divine ordinance bestowed to create the spiritual
infrastructure and
relationship to allow for the soul to mature to produce the fruit – those
divine human
attributes – that will in turn provide spiritual sustenance for the
well-being of humankind.
The mounds with the seeds of the departed souls planted within represent the
growth of
the soul in the heavenly realms, whose fruit continues to shine, waft and rain
down
eternal blessings.
CB: Would you agree, Kevin, that an important, if not the most important, key
to
traditional spiritual legacies are the teachings, where preserved, of the
various
“Indigenous Messengers of God” – especially in connection with this
important Baha’i
statement:
The principle of collective trusteeship creates also the right of every person
to
expect that those cultural conditions essential to his or her identity enjoy
the

protection of national and international law. Much like the role played by the
gene
pool in the biological life of humankind and its environment, the immense
wealth
of cultural diversity achieved over thousands of years is vital to the social
and
economic development of a human race experiencing its collective coming-of-
age. It represents a heritage that must be permitted to bear its fruit in a
global
civilization.
– “The Prosperity of Humankind,” Baha’i International Community
Previously you’ve also cited this key statement: “At the most profound
depth of every
culture lies veneration of the sacred.” – The International Teaching
Centre, “Growth of
the Cause in Rural Communities,” August 21, 1994. So why does the legacy of

the
“Indigenous Messengers of God” matter? Does preserving such legacies for posterity
also promote, in some way, local and global prosperity?
KL: For thousands of years, here in North America, we can attribute every wondrous
blessing to the influence of the divine educators. They planted the seed of faith in the
hearts of the various peoples, which effloresced into a plethora of wonderful
civilizations. Acknowledgement of these divine educators was the milieu in which my
mother, Patricia Locke, was raised. Little wonder that she was devoted to restoring due
recognition to these holy souls.

64.Honoring Indigenous Customs: Promo5ng Reciprocal Respect

March 19, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

Do Baha’is recognize, honor and even practice the traditions of Indigenous peoples
around the world?
In our continuation of the ongoing BahaiTeachings.org discussion of Indigenous
messengers of God, Christopher Buck asks Lakota Baha’i Kevin Locke that interesting
and important question.
Christopher Buck: In a 1988 letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of
Canada, the Universal House of Justice states that the Baha’i Faith has “the best
interests of the Native community at heart,” and further says:
The Faith seeks to maintain cultural diversity while promoting the unity of all
peoples. Indeed, such diversity will enrich the tapestry of human life in a peaceful
world society. The House of Justice supports the view that in every country the
cultural traditions of the people should be observed within the Baha’i community
as long as they are not contrary to the Teachings.
– Letter from the Universal House of Justice, 25 July 1988
This guidance to the world’s Baha’is refers to “traditional activities” such as “festivals,
which may be regarded as having a religious origin long ago.” The House of Justice
further states that Indigenous “cultural traditions of the people should be observed
within the Baha’i community as long as they are not contrary to the Teachings.” Can you

offer some examples of this practice from your personal experience? Is this a good
practice? If so, why?
Kevin Locke: A good example of this might be the Baha'is of the Ngobe Bugle people of
Panama, who undertook the process of collective analysis of their cultural/spiritual
heritage in the light of the Divine Standard with an eye to honoring the prayers of their
ancestors by offering the best of their ancestral legacy as a gift toward the emerging
global civilization.
Another personal experience is the hoop dance (see article 62), which originates as a
choreographed prayer invoking the universal symbolism of the circle/hoop – a
ubiquitous archetype portraying unity, wholeness, continuity, etc. The designs create the
unfoldment of Spring, thus enfolding the people into the embrace of this powerful

prayer. Only in recent times, under the influence of an enshrouding, dominant material
culture, has this dance devolved into the category of mere "entertainment."
CB: Kevin, in the very same letter, the Universal House of Justice recommends that
Baha'is undertake the following community service projects, where welcome, in Indigenous settings:
When the Baha'i community in a village is a significant proportion of the
population, it has a wide range of opportunities to be an example and an
encouragement of means of improving the quality of life in the village. Among the
initiatives which it might take are measures to foster child education, adult
literacy and the training of women to better discharge their responsibilities as
mothers and to play an enlarged role in the administrative and social life of the
village; encouragement of the people of the village to join together in devotions,
perhaps in the early morning, irrespective of their varieties of religious belief;
support of efforts to improve the hygiene and the health of the village, including
attention to the provision of pure water, the preservation of cleanliness in the
village environment, and education in the harmful effects of narcotic and
intoxicating substances. No doubt other possibilities will present themselves to

the village Baha'i community and its Local Spiritual Assembly.
– Ibid.
So Kevin, can you offer some examples of such Baha'i-inspired community educational
and social development initiatives from your personal experience?
KL: Yes! Recent videos from the Baha'i World Centre portray many such examples
brilliantly, in Indigenous settings around the world. In the United States, NABI – the
Native American Baha'i Institute, situated on the Navajo Nation – has several such
initiatives. In the Dakotas, the communities on the Rosebud, Pine Ridge and Turtle
Mountain reservations are developing effective outreach that includes elements from
the message above. Here at Standing Rock, under the auspices of the Baha'i-inspired
Indigenous non-profit organization the Patricia Locke Foundation
(patricialockefoundation.org), we are launching several school/community garden
projects, including indoor tower gardens to provide fresh produce year round. We pray
that the seeds of these endeavors will take root in the hearts of the people and bring
physical and spiritual sustenance and release the sweet fruits latent in our communities.
CB: Can traditional Indigenous ceremonies be performed during Baha'i events?
KL: Yes. This has been occurring as long as I can recall, especially when Baha'i events
are within Indigenous communities. I recall Ruhiyyih Khanum, the wife of the Guardian
of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, would eagerly participate in pipe ceremonies and
other Native devotional activities. In New Delhi, she had the prayer dot on her forehead
at the India Temple dedication. She would always encourage the Baha'is to integrate
with the communities in which they resided. The Baha'i communities here in the

Dakotas have a long history of integrating these universal ways. I'm sure it is the same
in other Indigenous communities, like Navajo-land.
CB: Ruhiyyih Khanum wrote about her participation in an Indigenous pipe ceremony
among the Piikani (Peigan), one of the three nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy:
I need not tell you what a profound experience the Pipe Ceremony on the Peigan

Reservation was. It was probably the most moving thing that happened to me in my whole trip, and one of the most moving things that happened to me in my whole life. As I could neither understand the Indian words nor clearly see what was happening, it was undoubtedly the profound spiritual feeling of the Indians connected with this most sacred ceremony that affected me. . .
When I spoke to the Baha'is of Regina they asked me to say something in Persian at the end of my talk, and I spoke as strongly as one can humanly do on the subject of not going near the Indians or approaching them or going to the Reservations unless they could treat them with respect and honour their customs and feelings. . . Obviously this does not mean we must grace all Baha'i occasions with the Pipe Ceremony! But it certainly should be an eye-opener to us.
– Ruhiyyih Khanum, Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, 28 October 1986.
So what's the take-away from all this? How important is preserving spiritual "seeds" for posterity – and for prosperity? Is there a vital connection between past, present and future legacies?
KL: Yes, there certainly is. Among the teachings of the Indigenous messengers was the establishment of harmony and balance between humankind, the environment and the Creator. Humankind is assigned as the stewards of this balance. The messengers planted the seeds of this Covenant in the hearts of the ancestors. The prayers, visions and hopes they made in obedience to that covenant are now being realized – and we, the current generation, have the bounty of fulfilling them on their behalf.

65.How Baha'is Promote the Recogni5on of Indigenous Beliefs

May 30, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

How do Baha'is promote the recognition of Indigenous beliefs? We explore that question in our continuing conversation between scholar Chris Buck and Lakota artist and author Kevin Locke.

Q: Kevin, I recently came across this remarkable letter from the Universal House of Justice, the democratically-elected international Baha'i council that oversees the affairs of the Baha'i world:

It is, of course, true that new movements of thought, especially in the field of religion, tend to obliterate old ones, or to transform their nature in the eyes of the

people ….

The House of Justice feels that in discussion with … you should not challenge this point, nor should you enter into criticisms of the often ruthless manner in which the followers of new religions have suppressed the old ways. It is suggested that, instead, you present the Baha'i concepts, as expressed by Abdu'l-Baha, namely that the fountainhead of all religions is to be found in God through the Teachings of His Prophets, and that all peoples have drunk at this ocean of divine Revelation ….

The Baha'i attitude to earlier religions, therefore, is not that they are false or "heathen", but that, at root, they are all true and that these fundamental truths still persist within them. Baha'is encourage Indians in South America, for example, to see and reverence the profound spiritual truths which are to be found in both their pre-Christian religions and in the Catholicism which, in later centuries, has to varying degrees supplanted or overlaid their archaic faiths. Through the Baha'i teachings, the inner conflict which many still feel between their ancient religions and Christianity is resolved and, at the same time, they are enabled to understand their spiritual unity with the peoples of other continents, such as

Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims with whom they will undoubtedly come into contact with increasing frequency.

An example of the Baha'i attitude is to be found in the operation of such radio stations as Radio Baha'i Ecuador, which has a policy of encouraging Indian arts and music and fostering in the Indians pride in their heritage.
– Letter dated 22 March 1988, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly (https://bahai-library.com/compilation_cultural_diversity_maturity)

So Kevin, would you please comment on this Baha'i "policy of encouraging Indian arts and music and fostering in the Indians pride in their heritage"?

A: Yes! Unlike the U.S., where the policy towards Indigenous people was extermination, in the Andean region of South America, colonizers enslaved the Indigenous population to work the mines. Consequently, the traditional arts and music were suppressed and

marginalized. Radio Baha'i Ecuador has long been the sponsor of beautiful music and
dance festivals in the regions they serve. I had the bounty of attending such a festival in
the Aymara and Quechua area surrounding Lake Titicaca. Each village displayed their
own unique ancestral traditions. My feeling was that it was not so much pride as the
release of a long pent-up, suppressed collective voice from the heart of the Andes,
celebrating a new day in which this voice could be conjoined with and heard by all in our
emerging global civilization.

Q: In your book, Arising, I see that this experience took place in the summer of 1988,
when you were asked to travel to Bolivia and Peru with the "Trail of Light" expedition.
This team of Baha'i travel teachers consisted of Indigenous people like Sabino Ortega,
"a prominent, respected Indigenous man, who provided us with Quechua translations;"
Dr. Eloy Anello, founder of University Nur, who "served as our Spanish translator";
Jacqueline Left Hand Bull; Randy Chipps-Dihtidaht, from Western Vancouver Island;
Phil Lane, Jr., Dakota/Choctaw from Washington State, your late mother, Patricia Locke,
and yourself. You write, in part:

My mother had spent much of her adult life working in political activism. Though
she and her colleagues had achieved victories to improve educational access
and cultural preservation for Indigenous people, she abhorred the negativity and
divisiveness of politics, with its potential for corruption. Because the Baha'i

teachings offered relief from the political corruption around the world and offered
common-sense and progressive teachings, such as the equality of men and
women, the eliminations of the extremes of wealth and poverty, and the
dismantling of prejudices of all kinds, she was intellectually curious.

However, her negative encounters with Christianity had made her cautious when
dealing with religion. As a child in Catholic boarding school, my mother disdained
the restrictions placed on women within the Church and the persecution of
Indigenous culture, including its spiritual practices, within the school.

During her
career, she had endeavored to create an awareness of and preserve North American Indigenous spiritual heritage, and she had worked tirelessly to dispel the prevailing view of Indigenous culture as satanic. She feared that the Faith was another organized religion that would ultimately oppress Indigenous people. …

We had many conversations in which I shared how the Faith affirms Indigenous spirituality. …

Of all the villages we visited in Bolivia and Peru, the small mountain community
of Miskipampa held a significant place in my heart, especially for the profound impact its people had on my mother. … Many of these families were members of the Baha'i Faith. Though they were considered to be among the poorest Indigenous people materially, we regarded them as unbelievably wealthy because of the spirit of cooperation and love that pervaded their village. …

At the entrance of the village, we passed under an archway of woven branches. The entire village had arisen and come out to greet us at this early hour. The entire land was filled with the light of the brilliant flames of the candles
they held.
I was moved beyond words by their hospitality. My travel companions and I had entered a community of spiritual connection and unity. The moment we walked beneath that archway, we transitioned from being strangers to relatives of Miskipampa.

Each of the village members, as we approached them, looked in our eyes with the utmost tenderness and embraced us. They placed their left cheek on our right cheek and then their right cheek on our left. "Allah'u'abha,"
they said. This
greeting, used among the Baha'is of the world, means "God is most Glorious" in

Arabic. We walked from village member to village member. Each person embraced us as family and lovingly greeted us with "Allah'u'abha."

My mother, who did not yet consider herself a Baha'i, began to reciprocate
the
loving greeting back to our hosts. "Allah'u'abha," she replied after
each embrace.
"Allah'u'abha." At the end of this long procession, this warm and
phenomenal
welcome, her association with the pure-hearted people of Miskipampa opened her own heart and mind more completely to the teachings of Baha'u'llah.
That
night, she gave her heart to Baha'u'llah, even though her official
declaration
occurred upon our return to the United States.
– Excerpt from Kevin Locke's Arising, pp. 177-185.

Q: Thanks for relating that wonderful story, Kevin. I can see how this Baha'i "policy of encouraging Indian arts and music and fostering in the Indians pride in their heritage" greatly promotes unity, both in the local Indigenous communities, and also across the Americas, and then with the rest of the world. What an enlightened approach to Indigenous arts, music, and heritage – which includes Indigenous spiritual heritages! In the next article in this series, I'll ask you specifically about this related Baha'i policy from the Universal House of Justice as well: "Baha'is encourage Indians in South America, for example, to see and reverence the profound spiritual truths which are to be found in … their pre-Christian religions."

66.To "Reverence the Profound Spiritual Truths" in Indigenous Religions

Jun 6, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In this continuing conversation about Indigenous beliefs and their relationship to the Baha'i teachings, Chris Buck and Kevin Locke discuss seeing the profound spiritual truths in both.

Q: Kevin, could you please comment on this Baha'i policy from the Universal House of Justice, the governing body of the world's Baha'is?:

The Baha'i attitude to earlier religions, therefore, is not that they are false or "heathen", but that, at root, they are all true and that these fundamental truths still persist within them. Baha'is encourage Indians in South America, for example, to see and reverence the profound spiritual truths which are to be found in both their pre-Christian religions and in the Catholicism which, in later centuries, has to varying degrees supplanted or overlaid their archaic faiths.
– The Universal House of Justice, Letter to a National Spiritual Assembly (https://bahai-library.com/compilation_cultural_diversity_maturity).

A: Thanks, Chris, I'd love to discuss this powerful concept. When one goes beyond the Disney World-esque bubble ride, pre-packaged for tourists experience in the Andes, one finds a universe peopled by very non-European ancestry. The colonizers were

not
successful in eradicating the core Indigenous identity and language from most of the
Andean region. In large part, because of their core spiritual identity, the Indigenous
Andean region was the first place where large numbers of Indigenous people became
Baha'is in the western hemisphere. I will never forget visiting Machu Picchu with Baha'i
Quechua and Aymara elders, who shared the true history and significance of this sacred
spot and were able to perform the proper protocols of reverence for Inti Punku ("Gate of
the Sun") and other sacred sites there.

Q: Located near Cuzco (also called the "City of Stone," as is Machu Picchu as well) in
Peru, Inti Punku is along the "Path of Viracocha," from Tiahuanaco, to Cuzco, onward to

Ollantaytambo and finally to Machu Picchu. About Viracocha (see "The Return of
Viracocha, the Prophet of the Incas," Part 4 in this "Indigenous Messengers of God"
series), Hooper Dunbar, retired Universal House of Justice member, said:

"… from a Baha'i point of view, all the teachers have been at the same college.
That is, they're inspired with the same universal knowledge. But they're not able
to deliver a message which is not relative to the time that they appear in. Christ is
going to call us to a united mankind? Let the globe be one? Let the earth be one?
The earth was flat when he spoke. It was still flat. Nobody knew about America
except the Americans, the early Americans. They had their own messengers. But
you go amongst the tribes in South America, and so on. They've had lesser
guides and they have had greater guides. Viracocha was the great Incan prophet
…. And he taught the basic virtues is what he taught. And when the Christian
missionaries go and speak to them and tell them that Christ walked on the water
in the Sea of Galilee, they said, 'Oh, he may be then. He may be right, because
our Viracocha walked on the Lake Titicaca. We have traditions about that!'"
— Hooper Dunbar, "Introduction to the Baha'i Faith" (January 2019, Pasadena, CA).

So when we read that "Baha'is encourage Indians in South America, for example, to see
and reverence the profound spiritual truths which are to be found in … their

pre-
Christian religions," do you see that policy as quite remarkable and extraordinary, in and
of itself?

A: Yes, Chris, is it correct to say that, although individuals from other faith traditions may
acknowledge aspects of the spiritual heritage of the Indigenous peoples of the Western
Hemisphere, the Baha'i Faith is the only world religion that has taken an official
affirmative stance in this regard.

I also find it very noteworthy that Ruhiyyih Khanum, the last survivor of the Baha'i holy
family, made a particular point to visit Indigenous communities no matter how remote
they might be. Personally, I well recall visiting Indigenous villages that required arduous
journeys via all-terrain vehicles and then, having reached the limit of motorized travel,
walking treacherous mountain pathways to a village that Ruhiyyih Khanum had traveled
to decades before. As the most prominent member of the Baha'i Faith during her
lifetime – after her husband, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, passed
away in 1957 — her actions speak volumes.

Q: In that same vein, let's take a close look at a similar statement by the Baha'i
International Community, an agency of the Universal House of Justice and which serves
as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with consultative status at the United Nations:

"Baha'is, believing in all revealed religious truth of past ages as an unfoldment of
one divine plan, have respect for the customs and traditions relating to these
religions and cultures. They desire to preserve the cultural elements that
contribute to the well-being of man. An effort is made to acquaint people with
their own history on earth. … Because of the Baha'i belief in the unity of
mankind, all people are recognized as valued members of society and play an
equally important part in building world order."
– From information submitted by the Baha'i International Community for a "Study
of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations," undertaken by
the United Nations Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination And

Protection of Minorities," [U.S.] Baha'i News (February, 1975), p. 19 (https://bahai.works/index.php?title=File:Baha%27i_News_527.pdf&page=21).

So one key way that the Baha'i Faith seeks to promote unity within and among Indigenous peoples – and with the world at large – is to honor, respect, preserve and discover more about Indigenous spiritual heritages, by accentuating their spiritual harmonics with the best that other religions around the world have offered in their own sacred teachings – all of which the Baha'i Faith recognizes, respects, reinvigorates and revoices in global octaves, in what could be called the spiritual "music of the spheres."
Wouldn't you agree?

A: Yes, of course. That's a good way of putting it. These official Baha'i statements – which you have quoted and asked me about – validate and confirm everything we have been talking about throughout this "Indigenous Messengers of God" series. To show respect to people of all cultures is a Baha'i virtue, encouraged throughout the Baha'i writings. Beyond showing respect to the people themselves is respecting their cultures. Deeper than that is respecting their religions. Speaking of the spiritual "music of the spheres," Indigenous peoples in the Western Hemisphere have their own spiritual "music" – their sacred traditions. Encouraging study of Indigenous sacred traditions is like "music appreciation." All of the Baha'i teachings about "Progressive Revelation" can – and should – apply to Indigenous sacred traditions. One has to be open-minded to

learn about, understand, and respect the spiritual melodies and music of Indigenous traditions that are outside of our dominant culture.

As I've said before, the Western Hemisphere is the "other half" of the world. Religions are not only part of the so-called "Old World." They are part of the "New World" as well!
If we do not respect and appreciate Indigenous sacred traditions, then we cannot fully embrace the Baha'i principle of the oneness of religion. As Baha'is, not

only should we
each “Consort with all religions with amity and concord, that they may inhale from you
the sweet fragrance of God,” as Baha’u’llah advised us to do in his Most Holy Book, but
Baha’is should also promote “harmony and peace among religions.” What better way to
do this, with respect to Indigenous peoples across the Americas, than to respect their
sacred traditions? From a Baha’i point of view, the greatest respect that we can show to
Indigenous peoples’ sacred traditions is to recognize and respect their respective
Indigenous messengers of God, who originally brought those sacred teachings in the
first place!

Q: Thanks, Kevin. Well put! That said, this is a perfect segue into our next article, where
we’ll discuss the most frequent criticism that I’ve encountered, over the past quarter-
century, in promoting this Baha’i-inspired respect for Indigenous messengers of God –
those “Wise Ones” spoken of by Universal House of Justice.

67.Listening to the Wise Ones – Voices of the Great Spirit

Jun 13, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In the pursuit of religious unity, do Baha’is only recognize the founders of the world’s
most well-known religions – or do they also recognize the Indigenous messengers of
God?

In this ongoing conversation between Baha’i scholar and author Chris Buck and Lakota
artist and author Kevin Locke, we address that important subject.

Q: Greetings, Kevin! At the end of our article in Part 58 of this series (“Gluskap: Ancient
and Modern Teachings”), we quoted the following remarkable letter from the Universal
House of Justice to the 1972 Baha’i Unity Conference on the Navajo Nation — a letter
that you introduced to me, and which you have posted on a wall in your house on the
Standing Rock Reservation:

Beloved friends,

Praise be to the Almighty that you have gathered in that beautiful spot in a spirit of love and harmony for the purpose of strengthening the bonds of unity between yourselves and among all men.

The All-Wise Creator of earth and heaven has from the beginning which has no beginning sent to His peoples Divine Messengers to guide them to the Straight Path. These Wise Ones have come to establish the unity of the Kingdom in human hearts. This great evolutionary process of building the organic unity of the human race has entered a new stage with this mighty message of Baha'u'llah. His voice is the voice of the Great Spirit. His love for humankind is the force of the New Age.

He who sends the rain, who causes the sun and the stars to shine, the rivers to flow, the winds to blow and the earth to give forth her bounties has in this Great Day sent to all mankind Baha'u'llah. It is this Great One who has opened the door of divine knowledge to every soul. It is His teachings that will establish world unity and bring about universal peace.

The people of the world are the tools in His hand. They must strive to understand His message and to walk in the path of His divine guidance. Every human being is responsible in this day to seek the truth for himself and thereafter to live according to that wise counsel. The old ones have all longed for this sweet message. Praise God that you have found it.

Now awakened to new wisdom, now guided to the straight path, now illumined with this mighty message, strive you day and night to guide and assist the thirsty ones in all lands to the ever-flowing fountain, the wandering ones to this fortress of certainty, the ignorant ones to this source of knowledge and the seekers to that One for whom their hearts long.

May your consultation reach so high a level of endeavour and purpose that the Great One will open before your faces the doors of the paradise of wisdom and love and cause the light of the Abha Beauty [Baha'u'llah] to shine in your midst.

With loving Baha'i greetings,
The Universal House of Justice

Since Ganado, Arizona, is part of the Navajo Nation, I presume that most of the

participants were Navajos, including Navajo Baha'is. In our live-streamed presentation on April 16, 2020 (hosted by the Green Acre Baha'i School), I asked you about this extraordinary letter. Would you please comment again?

First, Kevin, who are "These Wise Ones" the Universal House of Justice refers to? Are they one and the same as the "Divine Messengers"? Since the immediate audience were primarily Navajo Baha'is, did the "Wise Ones" include the Indigenous messengers of God we've discussed in this series of articles?

A: Chris, this is one of my favorite messages from the Baha'i World Centre. When this message was sent, one of the members of the Universal House of Justice at the time had lived and served in the Ganado area of the Navajo Nation for many years, and was well familiar with the sentiments, perceptions and culture of the predominantly Navajo people there. This message from the Universal House of Justice was sent to a non-European language-speaking community, firmly rooted in their Indigenous spiritual heritage. For them, the "Wise Ones" (when translated into the Navajo language) would have implicitly meant those Indigenous messengers of God, who had planted the divine message in the hearts of the Navajo ancestors' people of the Ganado area, prior to the arrival of immigrants to this land.

Q: Who are "the old ones" who "have all longed for this sweet message"?

A: The "old ones" are certainly those Navajo and other Indigenous ancestors, who, in ancient times, received the spiritual glad-tidings from those teachers whom the Universal House of Justice respectfully referred to as "Wise Ones." One of the well-known Navajo customs is to rise before sun-up and run towards the dawn to receive and welcome the resplendent rays of the new day. This is the spirit with which we are to embrace the promised message of the Day of God – with energy and enthusiasm!

I find it noteworthy that one of the beautiful metaphors in the House of Justice's

message is to “to guide and assist the thirsty ones in all lands to the ever-flowing fountain.” This choice metaphor is as rich in meaning as it is poetic, being so culturally relevant to the immediate Navajo audience at the Ganado Baha’i conference. The Navajo live in the midst of a vast desert, where water is scarce and precious and is therefore symbolically strongly linked to God’s bestowals.

Q: The Universal House of Justice, in this same letter, refers to the “Great Spirit,” God, who has sent “this Great One” (Baha’u’llah) in “this Great Day” who brings a “new wisdom.” What is this “new wisdom” and “sweet message” that the “old ones” have “all longed for”? Does this refer to Baha’u’llah’s “teachings that will establish world unity and bring about universal peace”?

A: Throughout the Western Hemisphere, the first places where large numbers of people accepted Baha’u’llah’s message and became Baha’is were all among Indigenous populations – in Navajo-land, Saskatchewan, Bolivia, Peru, Panama, etc. These were

all places where the Indigenous populations had rejected the immigrant culture and language and clung to the ancestral promises of renewal and fulfillment. The “new wisdom” they received was not the false promise of material civilization but was the “sweet message” clearly enunciated by those Wise Ones who had raised the Call of God on this land from time immemorial.

Q: So I think you and I agree that the Universal House of Justice, in explicitly referring to the “Divine Messengers” as “these Wise Ones” — who were sent to “all lands” — implicitly includes those Indigenous messengers of God who were sent to the Americas.

A: Yes, we do. The all-inclusive unity of religions that Baha’u’llah taught makes that undoubtedly true.

Q: So each of these Wise Ones was a voice of the Great Spirit, culminating, after “this

great evolutionary process of building the organic unity of the human race," in "this
Great Day," in the appearance of Baha'u'llah, the Great One whose voice is the voice of
the Great Spirit, whose "love for humankind is the force of the New Age," and whose
"teachings that will establish world unity and bring about universal peace?"

A: Yes.

68.Why the Indigenous Messengers of God Maber

Jun 20, 2020
Co-author: Kevin Locke

In this installment of our extensive series of BahaiTeachings.org articles on Indigenous
messengers of God, Chris Buck and Kevin Locke consult together on why those
messengers matter to the modern world.

Q: Kevin, let's talk a little more about the whole idea of the Indigenous messengers of
God, in general, from a Baha'i perspective, and why those messengers are so important
to consider. You and I have very clear reasons for creating this "Indigenous Messengers
of God" series — a very real and practical purpose, in fact. But first, let's review the
fundamental basis for the series.

Baha'u'llah, as you know, did not mention the Indigenous messengers of God directly.
He did so indirectly, in such passages of his writings as this one, a favorite passage of
your late mother, Patricia Locke:

Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers, Whom He hath
commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good
pleasure, and to draw them nigh unto the Haven of abiding security, the Seat of
eternal holiness and transcendent glory.
– Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah

Here, Kevin, you and I agree that "the cities of all nations" must refer to all countries
around the world, including the Americas – the "First Nations."

Now please follow my logic here: The following letter from the Universal House of
Justice states that Abdu'l-Baha had, in effect, added the Buddha to the Manifestations

(Messengers or Prophets) of God not previously mentioned by Baha'u'llah. After quoting
this passage below, I will explain the relevance of this interesting point:

Baha'u'llah made no mention of Buddha, and if it had not been for Abdu'l-Baha's
statement we would not have been in a position to state definitely that Buddha
had been a Manifestation of God. There are a myriad traditions in the legends of
peoples that point back to some sort of divine revelation but, as the beloved
Guardian's secretary pointed out on his behalf in a letter written to an individual
believer on 13 March 1950, "… We cannot possibly add names of people we (or
anyone else) think might be Lesser Prophets to those found in the Qur'an, the
Bible and our own Scriptures. For only these can we consider authentic Books."
We must just accept that there are undoubtedly many prophetic figures of whom
all authentic record has been lost.
– Letter, dated 27 October 1986, sent on behalf of Universal House of
Justice to an individual (https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/
the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/19861027_001/1#284343382).

As to those "many prophetic figures of whom all authentic record has been lost," we
know that anything lost may later be found. (We'll discuss this idea further in a
subsequent article.)

This process of adding to — and thereby augmenting and enriching — the list of names
of the messengers of God to those previously mentioned by Baha'u'llah gets more
interesting, considering that Abdu'l-Baha also added the name of Krishna to
those messengers of God whom Baha'is recognize as well. In his Tablet to Amir Khan,
Abdu'l-Baha also added the category, or class, of Indigenous messengers of God to the
Americas, but without mentioning specific names:

In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions,
close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been
said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.

As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets,
such people are excused. In the Qur'an it hath been revealed: "We will not
chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger." (Qur'an 17:15.)

Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient

times, but it hath been forgotten now.
– Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to Amir Khan.

Although we have referred to this passage several times throughout this series, let's see what the internal evidence, standing alone, suggests, by way of a close reading and textual analysis.

Here, "the people of America" who lived "in ancient times" refers to those who dwelled on the American continents during the pre-contact period prior to Columbus and the subsequent European colonization (to put it politely). The "people of America" who lived "in ancient times" clearly identifies the Indigenous peoples – the original inhabitants of the Americas.

Consequently, the places where the Indigenous people of the Americas lived refers not only to "their northern regions" (i.e. North America), but evidently to all of the Americas as well — that is, to the entire length and breadth of the Western Hemisphere, the so-called "New World."

Interestingly, Abdu'l-Baha doesn't fully endorse the Bering Land Bridge theory, but simply mentions it ("it hath been said") by way of acknowledging a contemporary scientific theory, perfectly in keeping with the Baha'i principle of the harmony of science and religion.

In the final sentence of this brief yet significant tablet, Abdu'l-Baha added the category of Indigenous messengers of God to those already identified in the writings of Baha'u'llah. He also added the Buddha and Krishna, as previously mentioned.

The context makes it clear that the terms "Call of God" and "Messengers of God" are synonymous, because the "Messengers of God" are the ones who originally raise the "Call of God," as Baha'u'llah states in this exemplary passage:

These sublime words have streamed forth from the Pen of the Most High. He saith, exalted be His glory: "This is the day of vision, for the countenance of God is shining resplendent above the horizon of Manifestation. This is the day of

hearing, for the call of God hath been raised. It behoveth everyone in this day to
uphold and proclaim that which hath been revealed by Him Who is the Author of
all scripture, the Dayspring of revelation, the Fount of knowledge and the Source
of divine wisdom."
– Baha'u'llah, The Tabernacle of Unity, p. 21 (emphasis added)

Space does not permit any further elaboration on this point – but suffice it to say that
there is plenty of evidence in the Baha'i writings to support this interpretation, which is
my personal understanding, and not an "official" position.

That said, that which is "forgotten" may also be remembered. We previously addressed
this issue in Part 52 ("Remembering 'Forgotten' Indigenous Religions") of this
"Indigenous Messengers of God" series.

Kevin, do you have any further comments to add? Why is this topic important? Why
have we spent so many articles in this series addressing it? What do we do with this
information? Why is it useful? Why is it needed?

A: Just because a portion of humankind occupying half the planet Earth were ruthlessly
slaughtered and disenfranchised of their birthright as human beings does not justify that
their spiritual heritage — through which a huge portion of the world's basic foods,
medicines and institutions were divinely inspired — should continue to be ignored.
Now that the world is on a forced time-out in a worldwide lockdown, it is fitting to
meditate on the spiritual heritage of half the planet and how it has benefitted us all. Two
good references for reflection on this point are by Jack Weatherford, DeWitt Wallace
Professor, Emeritus, Macalester College: Indian Givers: How the Indians of the
Americas Transformed the World (1988) and Native Roots: How the Indians Enriched
America (1991). His findings are summarized in a 1996 article, "Impact of American
Indian Civilizations on Europe and the World," in The Encyclopedia of the American
Indian. What Professor Weatherford omits is that the Indigenous people themselves

attribute their contributions to America and to world civilization to those
“Wise Ones”
commissioned by the “Great Spirit” to raise the “Call of God”
throughout the Western
Hemisphere.

— Indigenous Messengers of God (Used by permission of the curator)