WE SURVIVED THE END OF THE WORLD

LESSONS FROM NATIVE AMERICA ON APOCALYPSE AND HOPE

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To Susan
I could not have survived without you.

We will not overcome any apocalypse alone but only in community. I think we all subconsciously understand that. What has caused us to stumble is the fear that we have forgotten how to live together in mutual respect and unity. That is why the unique decision of Tenskwatawa to create a tangible focus for his people is so important. It gives us the awareness that we can do the same thing. We can plant communities of hope all around the world. We can do it through the use of a technology that the two Shawnee brothers would have been delighted to use if it had existed in their apocalyptic time. All of us, wherever we live, can begin building our own version of Prophetstown: communities open to all without exception, communities based on diversity and respect, communities believing enough together to begin seeing together.

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SMOHALLA

If the Land Has Anything to Say

As though scanning a battlefield, Howard assayed the individual before him: "a large headed, hump-shouldered, odd little wizard of an Indian . . . a strange mixture of timidity and daring, of superstition and intelligence. Howard observed of Smohalla that he was "short and shapeless . . . scarcely any neck; bandy legs, rather long for his body." . . . He further noted that although Smohalla was deformed and was the strangest human being that he had ever seen, the Dreamer had a finely formed head, expressive, magnetic eyes that contrasted with his head covering, two corners of which were tied under his chin.

—Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown

ONE OF THE most poignant stories of the American Apocalypse is that of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. His people were part of the Shapatian language group, which

included other Native nations around the Columbia Plateau within the modern-day states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Nations such as the Cayuses, Palouses, Sinkiuses, and Yakima were communities intimately connected to the rivers that were a major source of food in this otherwise arid landscape. They were salmon fishers as well as deer hunters, and the abundance of fish and game provided them with a large and stable economy.

This was land that Lewis and Clark crossed on their way to the Pacific in 1805. It was a major focus for the Hudson Bay Company, which sent trappers and traders into the region in the 1820s and 1830s from Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River. By the 1850s, so many settlers and miners had followed this well-worn trail of western expansion into the Columbia Plateau that the once fertile homeland of the Indigenous people was becoming something else entirely. Land speculators, railroad magnates, and commercial fishing companies had carved it up into slices for their own interests.

The American government demanded that all Indigenous nations be forced onto small reservations, and inevitably the people fought back. The Yakima War of 1855–1858 was a long and bloody conflict throughout Washington territory and beyond. The impact of that conflict was still being felt in 1877 when General Oliver Howard gave the

Nez Perce an ultimatum: either move onto the reservation or consider yourself at war with the United States.

Chief Joseph rejected that ultimatum, for religious reasons. He was a follower of the Dreamer religion, a spiritual tradition based on shamanistic visions. He held the earth as sacred—too sacred to be sold for a few pieces of silver or gold. The land on which the Nez Perce lived was the resting place of his ancestors and was holy ground that could not be bartered away. As he tried to explain to the Americans who had come to demand his submission,

> My father sent for me. I saw he was dying. I took his hand in mine. He said: My son, my body is returning to my mother earth, and my spirit is going very soon to see the Great Spirit Chief. When I am gone, think of your country. You are the chief of these people. They look to you to guide them. Always remember that your father never sold his country. You must stop your ears whenever you are asked to sign a treaty to sell your home. A few years more, and white men will be all around you. They have their eyes on this land. My son, never forget my dying words. This country holds your father's body. Never sell the bones of your father and mother. I pressed my father's hand and told him I would protect his grave with my life. My father smiled and passed away to the spirit-land.

Rather than break his vow, Chief Joseph led his people on a desperate escape. The whole nation attempted to reach the Canadian border. There they hoped to find religious freedom. They wanted to join Sitting Bull, who had brought many of the Lakota to safety, preferring to live as refugees than be guilty of giving away their birthright. For weeks the Nez Perce moved north, fighting a rear-guard action over and over again as General Howard and his troops relentlessly pursued them. Many of the elders and children died on the journey. Finally, only forty miles from the border, Chief Joseph and his starving people were cornered in Montana. His words to the general are considered one of the deepest expressions of Native American thought ever recorded:

> Tell General Howard I know his heart. What he told me before I have in my heart. I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Too-hul-hul-sote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say yes or no. He who led the young men is dead. It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food; no one knows where they are—perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever.

What was it that could inspire not just one man but a whole nation to undertake such a noble but tragic flight to freedom? What gave them the courage and dignity to defy overwhelming odds and remain true to their principles even in the midst of an apocalypse? The answer may seem strange, but it is accurate: they were following a dream.

That dream was contained in the *Washani*, a word that translates from the Shapitian word for "dancers." The Washani creed had grown up among all the peoples of the Columbia Plateau over the many years from Lewis and Clark to Chief Joseph. In many respects, the Washani creed was almost identical to the traditions of other Native American nations, including those whose prophets are the subject of this book. Like the Seneca, the Shawnee, and the Paiute, these people knew a long history of visionary travels by spiritual leaders. Entering a trance, being visited by heavenly messengers, and making the astral journey to the afterlife was common to all these cultures. The distance between earth and heaven was crossed by bridges, such as the Milky Way. It was not unusual for someone to claim they had made the trip, because the concept of the vision quest was so strong in Native tradition.

While the Americans came from a culture where receiving visions from heaven was reserved for only a select few

and most of those historical figures from the distant past, among Native American communities, seeking a personal vision from a higher power was a common expectation. Men and women regularly made a retreat into the natural world to seek divine guidance. After a period of preparation, such as prayer and purification, they would go to an isolated place to fast and wait for a vision. These visions were taken very seriously, because they were thought to show people their true path in life. The Washani creed, therefore, was a widespread part of Native American religion.

It was expressed by the Washat dance, the physical sign of the deeper spiritual bond that existed between Nami Piap, the Creator, the Earth Mother, and the many nations of human beings on the Columbia Plateau. The Washani creed was the traditional faith among the *yantcha*: the men and women who had "died" in a trance, gone to heaven, and returned with messages for the community. These were the Dreamers, and their faith was expressed in the Washat dances and songs they brought to their people.

Among these many Dreamers was one in particular who stands out: Smohalla, a yantcha from the small Wanapams community that occupied land at a place called Priest Rapids on the Columbia River. Around the year 1850, Smohalla began to experience the dream state that took him to a higher dimension of reality. As a young man he had made his own vision quest to the sacred mountain La Lac, where

he received his *wot*, his guardian spirit. But his journeys to heaven became even more intense. He made the mystic journey to heaven and was informed that an apocalypse was coming, a revelation that would herald a great change for all Indigenous people. Therefore, it was critical that Native people from every nation in North America return to their ancestral ways and abandon any reliance on the ways of the white people.

Smohalla's guidance was clear: Native people were to give up the technology and clothing of the colonizers. They were to go back to hunting and fishing as they had once done before the introduction of firearms. Like all of the four prophets, Smohalla stressed this need to divest from white culture in an intentional way. But in one aspect of this return to the old traditions, Smohalla was adamant. He came to understand that "a holy covenant existed between God and man, and that to maintain this relationship, the Indians must not disturb the earth by dividing it into parcels, by farming, or by selling any portion of land."

The prohibition against farming may seem odd to our contemporary sensibilities, which equate farming with a peaceful and life-sustaining vocation. But for Native American prophets, farming was sacrilegious. It was contrary to the covenant the Creator had made with the Native people when Nami Piap first chose them to live on their land. In Native spirituality, the cultivation of the land

was one of the sacred activities of women. The corn they planted or the roots and berries they harvested were part of the natural cycle of life. As life-givers, women planted the seeds and gathered the produce as an expression of their relationship with Mother Earth. Men, on the other hand, were hunters who harvested fish and game. This role balanced that of the women and required that men remain spiritually in kinship with the creatures they sought for food. Farming, especially in the way and on the scale suggested by the white people, overturned and violated this ancient equilibrium. It displaced women from their historic position, forced men to lose their identity as hunters, and scrambled the kinship ties between human beings and the rest of creation.

By 1850, the American solution to the "Indian problem" was described as the Plow and Bible approach. The strategy was simple: turn Native Americans into serf farmers on 160-acre plots of land on militarized reservations they could not leave; open up the rest to white settlement; take their children away for re-education at boarding schools; and christianize the Native people to erase their culture and assimilate them into the dominant way of life. In effect, it was a strategy of gradual apocalypse: a slow, downward spiral into cultural oblivion. As one historian has described it, "Nothing resulting from the American presence caused the tribes more anguish than

did confinement on reservations for the 'crime' of standing in the way of advancing Americans. Under governmental protection, whites appropriated and exploited Indian lands, some of which were sacred, and ancient subsistence patterns were destroyed in the process. Fenced off tracts interfered with passage to traditional grazing, root, berry, and fishing grounds."

The apocalypse unfolding on the Columbia Plateau not only involved cultural extinction but epidemic diseases like smallpox and measles, physical attacks and murders by white settlers, and military campaigns throughout what came to be called the Yakima War from 1855 to 1858. It was into this cauldron of apocalyptic crisis that Dreamer prophets like Smohalla sought to offer Native people an alternative of hope.

Like so many other Native American spiritual leaders, Smohalla drew on the ancient traditions of his people as the foundation for his new faith. The covenant triangle between the Creator, the earth, and human beings was the core of his teachings. He taught that the traditions of maintaining balance between the three must be maintained. But given the depth of the crisis faced by the people of the Plateau, more was needed. New expressions of the old faith must be released if genocide was to be avoided.

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In his visionary journeys to the spirit world, Smohalla received an expanded understanding of the traditional Washani creed. He returned from his dream state with new dances and songs to express the path to salvation. In his village by the Priest Rapids he erected a Longhouse where these ceremonies, the Washat ceremonies, could be performed. He raised a flag of his own design representing the four sacred directions inherent in all Native American religious beliefs: the yellow grass, green mountains, blue sky, and red heart.

He instructed the people in new dances. The men and women would dance opposite one another to represent the balance between them, and as they danced they would hold small bells, which would be the sound of their coming redemption. For when Nami Piap returned at the impending apocalypse to drive away the Americans and restore the Native nations, it would be to the sound of a great bell. The seven drums, the "pom-pom" drums, were used in the dances to sound the heartbeat of creation in which the people could take shelter.

In these new Washat celebrations, the people would physically embody the vision of their future. They would actively resist the evil surrounding them and push back the tide of American destruction. As they danced, they chanted the new songs Smohalla brought them, simple Zen-like lyrics and yet with a deep meaning for Washani theology:

Sound of the bell
Sound of the heart
My brothers
My sisters
I am meeting you
I am meeting you at the dance.

Like other Native American prophets, Smohalla was labeled a fraud by the American authorities and press. They blamed Smohalla and his new Washat dances for stirring up discontent. They claimed he was the mastermind behind all Native acts of resistance. On several occasions they sought to force him to agree to treaties, but each time Smohalla outmaneuvered the Americans and kept his small community off the reservation. He would meet with the American negotiators on reservation lands, outdebate them and shame them, camp there until they were gone, and then return to the Columbia, where his people, the Wanapams, the River People, would continue to live as they had for centuries.

In every regard, Smohalla rejected settler culture. He did not want their money, their annuities, their schools, their technology, or their churches. He was an iconoclast. He did not see any value in what they offered him. Instead, he preached the old values of his ancestors. While other yantcha upheld the same message, Smohalla

became the most widely revered. His integrity and tenacity, as well as his reputation for outsmarting the aggressors, won him converts throughout the Plateau and as far away as Nevada and the Dakotas. The Washat dances spread far and wide, creating more anxiety among the American authorities.

The irony of the Dreamer religion is that it was perceived in such diametrically different ways by those who encountered it. White people saw it as a dangerous and pernicious cult that incited Native people to acts of violence. For the Indigenous people, it was a faith of peaceful expectation, a message of care and protection for the third member of the ancient covenant triangle: Mother Earth. In one exchange with a government agent, Smohalla expressed the dichotomy between his people's way of seeing things and that of the American settlers:

> We simply take the gifts that are freely offered. We no more harm the earth than would an infant's fingers harm its mother's breast. But the white man tears up large tracts of land, runs deep ditches, cuts down forests, and changes the whole face of the earth. You know very well this is not right. Every honest man knows in his heart that this is all wrong. But the white men are so greedy they do not consider these things.

Smohalla never advocated violence. He never engaged in war, even if he felt the pain that caused his people to resist. He continued to believe in a higher level of justice. He trusted Nami Piap to restore the balance of life among his people in supernatural ways. Like the pom-pom drums, his message was the heartbeat of the Columbia Plateau. People believed there was still hope as long as Smohalla could hold out against white domination.

The influence of Smohalla explains the nonviolent actions of followers like Chief Joseph, who sought to buy time for divine intervention rather than make a suicidal charge against the guns of the American military. The poignancy of Chief Joseph's desperate escape plan underscores the peaceful nature of the Dreamer faith and its concern to treat the land as sacred. Essentially the two cultural views, settler and Native, were incompatible. White people saw nature as resources to be extracted and used. Native people saw nature as a personal relationship, a trust to be maintained. Smohalla was clear in his rejection of the American view:

> You asked me to plough the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stone! Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then

when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut the grass, make hay and sell it, and be rich like white men, but how dare I cut off my mother's hair?

Reading the language Smohalla used in his ceaseless arguments with the American authorities of his time is a bit like watching a melodrama. His language is dramatic, emotional, almost over the top for our contemporary culture. He can sound like a quaint reminder of a lost vision, interred now with the bones of Chief Joseph's father and mother.

But however heartfelt his words may have been, it is the silent image of Smoholla himself, standing alone, unmovable in his faith, that captures attention. His dignified silence is worth listening to. From 1850 until his death in 1895, Smohalla never capitulated to American demands. He never recanted his religious beliefs, never lived on a reservation. He remained true to his traditions long after others had given up and given in. When the other communities around him had been broken, moved to reservations, and forced to give their children to the boarding schools, Smohalla remained quietly independent. He kept his flag of the Washani creed flying. He stayed in the backwater of Priest Rapids living as he always lived, reminding others that they could live this way too.

History passed him by, and he became more of a curiosity than a threat to the dominant culture. He became an anachronism, but he was still standing. He was still an

alternative to business as usual in the American economic system. He offered people a choice, even if only a handful of them would choose to take it.

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Smohalla's choice is still here. To engage it, all we have to do is look at what we have most in common with his vision. It is not a quantum leap. What Smohalla had to say about the earth is as current as the latest scientific reports on the death of our planet. Smohalla's call to recognize the earth as a living being resonates with our contemporary ecological crises. The Washani creed is still here for any of us who want to join the prophet in fending off an environmental apocalypse. It is the choice to reconsider the fundamental relationship we have to the earth.

As I am writing these words, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has just released another apocalyptic report:

The world's leading climate scientists on Monday warned human-induced climate change is causing dangerous and widespread disruption in nature, with people and ecosystems least able to cope being the hardest hit. The highly anticipated report from the U.N.'s IPCC, approved by 195 member states, makes clear that minor, reactive or incremental changes are no longer sufficient to tackle

> the climate emergency. The analysis provides world leaders with a gold standard summation of modern climate science. . . . It says the world faces unavoidable climate hazards in the next two decades with global heating of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. . . . Even temporarily exceeding this critical threshold, the report says, would result in additional severe impact.

One of the surreal things about the environmental apocalypse is that we see it coming. In fact, it is already here. The polar ice is melting. Water levels are rising. Weather patterns are changing. Droughts and storms are intensifying. Crops are failing. Yet even as reports like this one keep coming out, sounding the alarm over and over like the ringing of a bell, our response is slow, almost sporadic, as affluent nations seek to meet the crisis while maintaining their standard of living. In the meantime, poorer nations continue to destroy their own ecology in an attempt to reach those inflated standards. A truly united, consistent, and sustainable response eludes us. We seem stuck in the headlights of an oncoming disaster without knowing how to move.

Perhaps the Dreamer can show us an answer. Not in more scientific reports but in a spiritual shift of the heart. In the covenant at the core of the Washani creed, Smohalla employed very graphic language to describe Mother

Earth. He equated the relationship between the earth and human beings with the reality of any mother who has given birth and raised children. He describes activities such as mining or farming as a violation of her body. In this way Smohalla, like many other Native American prophets, sought to anthropomorphize the earth as a living being with whom we have a very intimate relationship. He used dramatic language to create this imagery precisely because his opponents, the American business and military interests, used just the reverse: they sought to negotiate on the basis of inanimate objects, natural resources, and financial quantifiability. There was no room in their worldview for a personal relationship with the land or the rivers. They were just things. Things to be plowed up, cut down, or dug out. The utilitarian vision of the environment was as far as they could, or were willing, to see.

Smohalla's vision was very different. One of his followers, Young Chief of the Cayuses, expressed that alternative vision in 1855 during a debate over land with Isaac Stevens, the territorial governor of Washington: "I wonder," Young Chief said, "if this land has anything to say? I wonder if the ground is listening to what is said? I wonder if the ground would come to life and what is on it; though I hear what the Earth says: the Earth says, God has placed me here."

Young Chief is pointing to the missing voice in the land negotiation. He is asking if the earth herself has anything

to say in the conversation. He is inviting the governor to notice that a key player has not been invited to the table. The covenant triangle between the Creator, the earth, and humans is broken because Mother Earth is not being heard.

For adherents of the Dreamer religion, these are not romantic or poetic images but genuine spiritual concerns. The Washani creed is the belief in a single Creator who created a single life. That single life is the earth. The earth is a single living being in relationship with her maker. As human beings, we are only a small part of the total life of the earth, but we are special—chosen, you might say—because we have the self-awareness to be one step removed from the earth. We can step to one side spiritually or intellectually, and observe the other two parts of the triangle. We can relate to the Creator. We can relate to the earth. And the nature of those relationships is what we can describe as the Washani covenant.

In the ancient traditions of Judaism, the idea of humanity existing in a special relationship to God is foundational. The people of Israel are a chosen people, destined to occupy a sacred land, which they hold in trust in a covenant (agreement) with God. Exactly the same vision developed in Native America over the millennia of our life in North America. Like ancient Israel, ancient Native American theology understood a covenant relationship between God, the earth, and humanity. The two religious

concepts are almost identical. Native American nations believed they were the people chosen to live in a promised land. They understood that they occupied this land in a spiritual agreement with the Creator. They were stewards of the land, not true owners. Their existence on the land was a matter of sacred relationship, the mutual recognition of a covenant grounded in faith and worship.

The two religious worldviews part company, however, with regard to the third member of the covenant triangle: the role and nature of the earth. Native American spirituality has a more nuanced and sophisticated vision of the earth as a living ecosystem. Land is not just dirt and rocks but the outer skin of a living being. The earth is alive. It breathes. It grows. It dies. It is a being of infinite parts, just as humans are, and like humans, it has a spirit.

Perhaps their strictly monotheistic tradition kept ancient Israel from seeing the land, the earth, as a being worthy of voice and consideration. But Native American spiritual systems did not share that anxiety. The Washani creed is monotheistic, just like most every Indigenous religious community in North America, but it includes a carefully calibrated understanding of the relationship the Creator has with the creation. That relationship is not just between Creator and humanity, in which all the other partners are silent, but between Creator, humanity, and the earth. All the stakeholders must be at the table in the process we call life.

From the Native American viewpoint, without that third member of the covenant, the religion becomes a two-legged stool. Something critical, as Young Chief tried to point out, is missing. The third leg of the covenant is the relationship to every aspect of life embodied in the spiritual metaphor of Mother Earth. Human beings may be self-aware, they may even be the people chosen to occupy a particular niche in creation, but they are only a small part of the whole story, and not always even the most important characters of that story.

This acceptance of the earth as a conscious partner in the covenant of life helps us as human beings to avoid the arrogance and greed that Smohalla believed was the blindness of the white people who laughed at his vision of the earth as a living woman. Part of our inability to move out of the way of an environmental apocalypse is hubris, an overwhelming sense of pride in our own self-worth. From the traditional Native perspective, contemporary American culture lacks any sense of humility. Having been raised in the privileged fantasy that we are immune to consequences and able to invent solutions to every crisis, we lack the ability to trust in the Creator or to honor the Mother. We reduce our situation to a one-legged stool. We depend only on ourselves. We violate our ancient covenant and, eventually according to Smohalla, we will pay for our pride. In fact, we are already paying.

"Men who work," Smohalla once said, "cannot dream, and wisdom comes to us in dreams." He was talking about people who cannot see beyond their own utilitarian desires—people who cannot see the forest for the trees. They concentrate on what they need for the moment. They think of what will bring them more comfort and more leisure. They are constantly busy building wealth and power. These are people who have been raised in a culture of more. Always wanting more, needing more, taking more, and usually only for themselves. The old values of the Washani—values like sharing and equality—are lost in the stampede for more. Consequently, these people have no wisdom. They can see the apocalypse coming, but they cannot imagine how to prevent it. Their equivocation is their destiny.

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Many years ago, in 2007, I had a vision to change that destiny. I had a dream. Ironically, I first shared it in Seattle, Washington, not far from where Smohalla lived and taught. On February 24 of the following year I stood in the pulpit of the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, to announce my dream to the world and invite others to see it too.

Without realizing it, I was following in the path of the prophet. Like Smohalla, I believed that our Mother Earth

was under threat. And like Smohalla, I embraced the ancient covenant of our people as a way to save her, to save all of us, from the apocalypse of environmental collapse. In my sermon I spoke about that collapse as scientists around the world were already seeing it coming. I spoke about climate change and global warming, about rising sea levels and a toxic air. Then, without realizing it, I instinctively used Smohalla's Dreamer language:

> Who will save us? Who will act? When the need is so great. The time is short. Who will do this for us? Whom shall we send? Whom shall we look to for our salvation?
>
> I had a vision. Listen. I had a dream. Listen.
>
> There is an answer. There is the beginning of an answer. Where will it come from? From communities of faith. From people who believe in something greater than themselves. From spiritual people. From religious people. From those of us who care enough to stand up and to act together to effect change and to make things different because we are people of faith. Because we believe in something and have the courage and the resolve to act and live through that faith.
>
> I had a vision. I had a dream. I saw in my mind's eye a simple question begin to dawn. And I believe it was from God.

I went on to describe the vision I had dreamed to create a covenant between every religious community in the United States. My dream was to see all faith communities make a single witness together: to cut the greenhouse gas emissions from every property they owned by 50 percent in ten years or less. Every church, every synagogue, every mosque, every temple. Every school, every hospital, every office building owned and operated by religious communities. Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims: a united front to save the planet. In my dream the spiritual leaders of all these faith communities would appear together in the global media, standing side by side, saying that while we, people of faith, may disagree about many things, on this one issue we are absolutely united. We all acknowledge the danger, and we all take part in the solution. We set aside our differences for the common good.

What impact would that have? I asked that question in my sermon and offered an answer: it would be an apocalyptic revelation that the media could not ignore. The message of unity and harmony among people of different religions would make headlines around the world. It would inspire similar actions in other countries. It would invite internationally recognized spiritual leaders to step up to the microphone to offer support for this worldwide effort of faith.

In time, such a visible momentum in the struggle to combat climate change would draw in other sectors of the global society. Corporations, for example, would feel the need to be seen doing their part too. Political parties would be expected to offer their endorsement. Universities and medical facilities would be drawn into the expanding vision of a shared response. In my dream I saw how faith communities could become the catalyst for a truly effective reply to the threat of an ecological apocalypse. We would be the spark to light the fire of change. And all we had to do was cooperate. Acknowledge our relationship to Mother Earth. Accept our role in maintaining that relationship. Stand up together and be counted.

I called my dream the Genesis Covenant. I shared it publicly in as many places as I could, and I invited others from every faith community to join me in lobbying their community to embrace the vision. In 2009 my own denomination, the Episcopal Church, passed a Genesis Covenant resolution at our national convention. We went on record. We took the pledge to lower our greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint. I believed many other religious communities would soon join us and my dream of a united front would begin to unfold like a revelation.

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It never happened. While many said they were concerned about environmental issues and working on it in their own way, there was no unified response to the level I had dreamed: a stage filled with religious leaders of every description, all calling for a global response to this shared danger. The momentum I hoped to begin never got rolling. My dream of seeing Roman Catholic bishops standing next to Southern Baptist preachers, beside Jewish rabbis and Buddhist monks, with imams and Hindu gurus never materialized. What I thought would be such a simple and obvious solution—getting religious people to share in doing the right thing for the sake of the humanity they served—was left hanging in air. Like a mist, it soon evaporated as everyone got back to doing their own thing separately.

Did the failure of my Genesis Covenant miss an opportunity to change our destiny? I think so. I still believe, as Smohalla always believed, that acknowledging our intimate relationship to the earth is the beginning of wisdom. The dream I had would have produced more than environmental action: it would have demonstrated a foundation for peace beyond anything we had seen to date, or that we have seen since all these years later. That stage full of diverse religious leaders would have sent a message of peace and nonviolence around the world. It would have visibly demonstrated that while we can argue about

theology, when it comes to caring for our planet and our people, we are always together.

Not all dreams work in daylight. Smohalla was left standing on his historic stage alone. His dreams for the restoration of Native American traditional life were lost in other agendas, agendas of conflict and control. But that doesn't mean he failed. Smohalla was, like Ganiodaiio, Tenskwatawa, and as we shall see, Wovoka, a shooting star of the apocalyptic process. He rose from obscurity, burned brightly at a time of enormous crisis, and then slowly descended back into obscurity. Whether they were like shooting stars or not, these prophets shared a very similar trajectory. They made the same journey over the Milky Way. They visited heaven, received a mission, and returned to carry it out. And because their words were so powerful for the people of their time, they were both remembered and revered. They left their handprint in the mind and soul of Native America.

I hope I have done the same. My own dream may not have made it to the light of day, but that does not mean the effort was a failure. It is not too late. It is never too late to do what is right and holy.

The Genesis Covenant was the projection of the traditional Native American dream into the harsh realities of our own time. It may not have worked then, any more than Smohalla was able to do in his time, but there is no reason

it cannot work now. That is the power of faith. We need to follow the example of the prophet and keep his flag flying. My dream may have faded, but it is still there. The dreamer may die, but the Dream does not.

Mother Earth is a living being. She has a heart. She has a spirit. When we recognize her for who she is, we open the door of our souls to welcome her as our Mother. And once enough of us have made that intimate connection with her, once we have accepted our covenant with life, the quicker we will act with a common intention. Like siblings of one great Mother, we will stand up for what is right. We will make the changes and the sacrifices that will be needed if our Mother is to be healed. Therefore, our task is clear. We are to strive diligently with every means at our disposal to awaken people to one fundamental spiritual truth: if we do not believe the earth is alive, we do not believe she must be saved.

The key to stopping the environmental apocalypse is not science but love. For decades now we have been staring at the scientific reports. They have not sufficiently inspired us to change our apocalyptic reality. But where science has failed, faith can succeed. We must help humanity rediscover their loving parent, the living world that sustains them. We must help them feel her love just as we show them how that love can be returned. And it can begin by gathering people around two simple questions: Where

were you in nature when you experienced a vision of such beauty that it took your breath away? And how did that make you feel? If you can answer those two questions, you are on your way to meeting the Mother you may never have known before.

I wonder if the ground is aware of what I am writing?

I wonder if the earth has anything to say?