



the natural world is not a free world

BES

The task of returning to a natural life is a difficult one.

People should approach it with a deep sense of commitment and they should understand that it will take generations of time to accomplish. It will not happen entirely within their own lifetime. They can create these opportunities for their children, who in turn will create them for their children.

Most people have been so deeply poisoned by the way in which they were brought up and by their alienation from the natural world that they cannot expect to rid themselves of this poison in their lifetime. But this should not dissuade them from trying. They must begin. But they must not feel that if after a week, or a month, or ten years, they have not been successful, that they have failed. They have not failed.

I'll try to comment on some of the problems that I see with many white people who have moved in this direction. One problem is that people have taken this as an individual quest. One of the ways in which people have been alienated is from each other. They have been so individualized that they see the situation that they are in as an individual situation. They are going to deal with it as individuals, and they are going to achieve it as individuals. When they get done, they realize that not even their own children will follow in their footsteps because they have not created a community in which those children can be raised up, and in which those children can live. So the first thing is that people must get themselves together with other people and make deep commitments to each other as relatives--as brothers and sisters, as aunts and uncles, and they must remain together and make unity one of their highest priorities--a unity under the creation following natural law as a principle which guides them and holds them together above all other principles.

A second problem is the alienation from people other than their own age group. People are alienated from children and they are alienated from old people. Those people who get themselves together tend to get themselves together with people of the same age. These people should go to old-age homes, they should go to retirement cities, they should go to day-care centers and orphanages. They should gather together a family of people of a wide age group. It may be difficult for people, sadly enough, to bring in their own parents or their own grandparents, and so they are going to have to seek aunts and uncles and grandmothers and grandfathers from other places and bring them together and create a family.

People tend to think they can take on new ideas without purifying themselves of ideas which they already hold. It is like building something beautiful on a garbage heap. There is a great mixture there. The result is that we find people who are very much in tune with their own spirit and seem to be good with the land, and so on, who are very racist. We find people who are kind and good with other people but who are very materialistic. We find these mixtures of things, and so purification needs to be our need. And by whatever means people choose to purify themselves--whether this is through fasting, through meditation, through sweat lodge, or whatever way--it should be thought of as purification, purification of their bodies and purification of their spirits. It should be a constant process which people are going through. And it must be a conscious process.

People need to be constantly ridding themselves of their contradictions. It's sort of like trying to quit smoking or something like that. People need to do it. They have been addicted to so many things which are a part of their psyches, not only addicted to tangible things, but addicted to ways of thinking which they need to deal with.

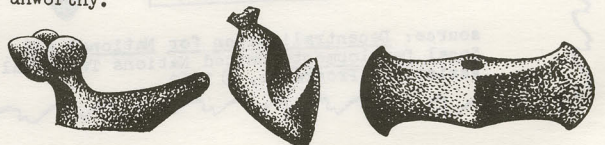
There is also this chauvinism of the white people to be constantly thinking of themselves as sort of being "the" people in a way that they can't understand why other people do not accept them. When they talk about equality, what they are really talking about is being white. They do not understand this. They do not understand why a group of Indian people will not accept them. They do not understand why other people may not wish to join them. They do not realize that the natural world is a world of great diversity. Communities of like things existing in harmony with other communities of like things. The common denominator of the natural world is communities, not individuals. A community of white (historically and culturally oriented Europeans) can live in harmony and in peace as brothers and sisters with a community of, say, Indian people. But they should not necessarily expect the white people as individuals and the Indian people as individuals to get together and form one community. I'm not saying that communities need to be set up on a racial basis--I am saying that there are already those people who have common denominators of history, language, religion, relationship, way of life, who are in fact already living together, and who should not be expected to give this up to join some huge brotherhood of man which really is not a brotherhood of man but is a disguised form of Western civilization. We need unity in diversity and an appreciation for diversity.

We meet a lot of white people keep telling us of all we have in common. They should instead tell us how much they appreciate our differences.

Part of the white people's reliance on spiritual teachers is a result of what we have just discussed. If you are in a community of people your own age, you will be thinking that you are in need of a spiritual teacher, when simply you are in need of older people around you, of elders.

It is also true that you are related to this earth that is your mother. It was that Mother Earth who was the original teacher, and she is still available to teach. People can turn to the earth. They do not need someone to tell them the way of the earth. They don't need to have someone tell them the way of the sun and the moon and the waters. They can go directly to these things because all people and all things are related. In that way you turn to your relatives, your elders.

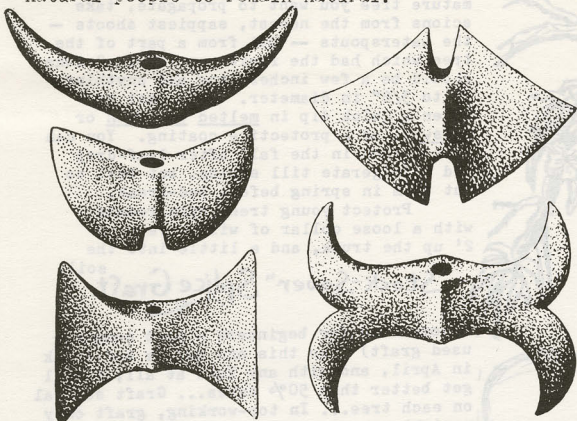
It's good to have spiritual teachers. They will emerge. You will come upon these people. You will value them when you meet them, but there are not enough exactly to go around. People do not understand that spiritual people also need reinforcement, they need time. They will be very careful to share their knowledge with people until they are certain that those people are worthy of that knowledge. Anything that is a part of the natural world is in danger of being exploited--spiritual teachers are those people who are closest to the natural world and therefore in the greatest danger of exploitation. They need to be very cautious in this way. People think they can go to a spiritual teacher and in the weekend get the spiritual instruction. It will take more than that weekend for most spiritual teachers to even begin to speak. People very often interpret their silence as meaning that they don't want to tell me, that they don't want to share with me what they have--and yet it has just been that these people are very impatient and by their impatience have proved themselves unworthy.



Also, they don't understand that spiritual people have wood to cut and gardens to tend and houses to take care of and things to do. People should not constantly expect spiritual leaders to be sitting with their legs crossed holding court and so on.

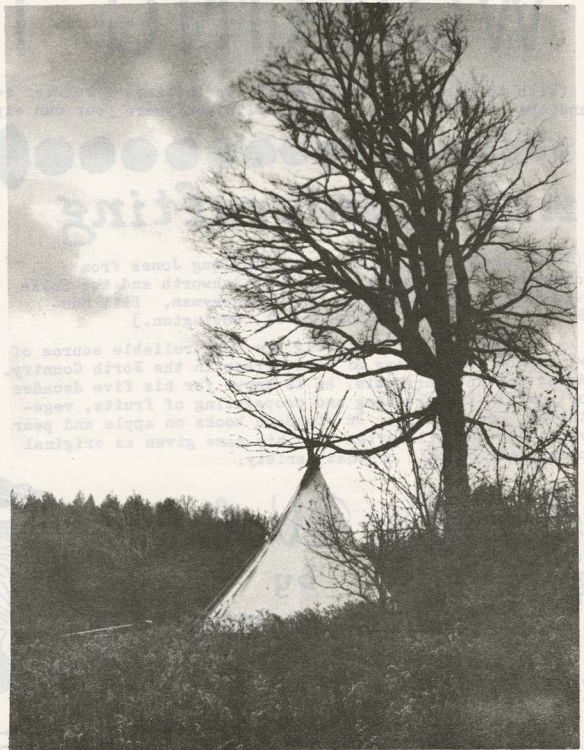
One of the other hang-ups that people have developed is the reliance on their incredible verbal skills. There is the expectation that spiritual people will pass on their instruction in a verbal fashion. We find that there are many people who are able to verbalize everything about the way things are supposed to be, and yet it has not been integrated into their own lives. People should expect an understanding of things in a non-verbal way. Be very careful of all those people who tell you about all they know. If they know it, they will show you, and it will not be necessary to tell you.

One of the problems which natural people constantly have is how to deal with the unnatural world. Are you open to it? If you are, you will probably be destroyed by it. If you are not open to it, how do you relate to it? How do you deal with your own feelings that you should be open to all living things? People have to develop their own answers to that question. It is my belief that the unnatural world must be naturalized before it can be trusted, that the sharing and oneness are meant to be shared with those people who also share. It is not meant to be shared with people who take. When givers meet takers, takers always win. I think one of the services which recently-naturalized people can perform for naturalized people is that of intermediary with the unnatural world. People who know that they are too poisoned to ever themselves become natural people can at least protect the natural people. They can serve as interpreters for them. They can help them in many ways in dealing with the unnatural world, and in that way, allow the natural people to remain natural.



People should not try to become anything. They should understand who they are, and get back in touch with themselves because their own spirit is a part of the natural world. They have been alienated from that as well as from the land and from each other. If they can begin to get in touch first of all with their own spirits, so they can know what spirit is, and can know the spirit of other living people, then perhaps they will begin to be sensitive to the spirits who do not have a material presence. It is a progression. Once they have become familiar with human spirit, they will be able to talk with a living tree. If they can talk to a living tree, they can begin, perhaps, to have an appreciation for the spirits of all the trees which once lived in that area, and all the birds and all the animals which once lived and died in that area. But if people cannot even be in touch with their own human living spirit, how can they expect to be in touch with the spirit of a tree which has gone before it? So begin in that way.

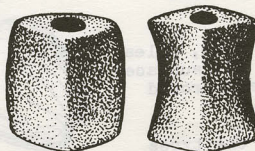
Many people do not understand that the natural world is not a free world. The natural world operates by natural law, but there are many cycles of the natural world that one has to be in harmony with. What is to be sought is a freedom within these cycles and within this law.



This is an incredible freedom and is much greater than the freedom which most people have experienced. It doesn't mean, however, freedom to get up when you want to and go to bed when you want to. People who are simply on a quest for freedom do not understand that the natural world is very disciplined and very hard. The natural life is a hard life and a very good life. We find a lot of white people who just don't understand that, and we have a lot of trouble in trying to coexist with them.

It is difficult for people who are engaged in a struggle to relate to people who are not in struggle, even though their goals are much the same. I think that there needs to be realization of white people who are moving towards a more natural way that maybe, at this point in time, there is a need to struggle or a need to aid people in struggling. If they don't they might find themselves the only ones who made it and the natural world doesn't exist anymore.

I think that the time we are in is a turning point kind of thing, not in the sort of way of opening up a new chapter in history, but in starting a new book. It's a new era that is coming. The spiritual leaders talk of a time of purification. In some ways I believe that that has already begun. The greatest purification amongst people will take place when purification is not necessary. It will be easy for people to go back to a more natural way after there is a great destruction and catastrophe--then they will have to if they survive. It's like the difference between starving and fasting. It is not difficult to fast when there is no food available. To have the greatest purification, you have to do it when it is not necessary to do so. I think that this is the time we are in right now.



Stone objects of Northern New England Woodlands; made of banded slate, quartz, steatite, diorite and porphyry.

appeared in the Early Spring 1976 issue of *Akwesasne Notes*. It is based on a taped conversation with Rarihokwats, editor of the *Notes*, conducted by Nani Sheppard. For a subscription to the *Notes*, send \$5 to AKWESASNE NOTES, Mohawk Nation, via Roosevelttown, N.Y. 13683. This essay is used by permission.)