

INDIGENOUS & ANCESTRAL TRADITIONS

# **The Sacred Hoop: Walking the Good Red Road**

A guide to Native American spiritual teachings organized around the Sacred Hoop: the Great Mystery, the interconnection of all life, sacred ceremonies such as the vision quest and the sweat lodge, and the relationship between the land, the seasons, and the soul.

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## **The Sacred Way**

<sup>1</sup> The people of this land have walked a sacred path since before memory began. It is not a religion in the way that word is understood by those who came later—not a set of beliefs to be accepted or rejected, not a collection of doctrines to be memorized and recited. It is a way of being, a way of walking through the world with reverence and compassion for all life.

<sup>2</sup> There is no single word in the old languages that means "religion" as the newcomers use it. The sacred and the ordinary were never separated. All work is prayer. A woman gathering reeds for a basket speaks to the spirit of the grass as she cuts it. The hunter thanks the deer for giving its life so that the people might eat. The farmer honors the corn, the beans, the squash—the Three Sisters—who have come to feed the people.

<sup>3</sup> This is the Good Red Road. It is the path of balance, of walking in harmony with all that is. It teaches that the universe is alive, that every stone and stream, every tree and bird, every wind and cloud carries within it the Breath of the Great Mystery. We are not separate from creation. We are part of it, related to everything that lives and moves and has being.

<sup>4</sup> In the old teachings, the world was not something to be conquered or controlled. It was a gift, a sacred trust passed down from the ancestors to the children yet unborn. The people understood that they were no greater than the ants and no less than the mountains. All things have their place, their purpose, their voice. All things deserve respect.

<sup>5</sup> The Great Mystery—Wakan Tanka to the Lakota, Manitou to the Algonquin, Orenda to the Iroquois—cannot be captured in words or images. It is not a personal god who speaks to humankind in the way one person speaks to another. It is more like the Dao of the ancient Chinese, a universal power that is above and in all things. It cannot be seen or touched, but it is present in every cycle and sign of nature: the changing seasons, the movement of the sun and moon, the rhythm of growth and decay, the turning of the stars in the night sky.

<sup>6</sup> The children learn from an early age to pay attention to their dreams, to examine them for meaning. They learn to be aware of the spirit world, a kind of parallel universe that is always close at hand. Later in life, they may actively seek a vision through periods of fasting and solitude, going out into the wilderness to cry for a vision, to ask the Great Mystery for guidance and purpose.

<sup>7</sup> This is the way it has always been, from the beginning of time. The stories say that the people emerged from the earth, from the darkness of the underworld, into the light of this present world. They were given ceremonies and songs to help them live in harmony with all creation. They were told to walk gently upon the earth, to take only what they needed, to give thanks for all that was given.

## **The Breath of Creation**

<sup>1</sup> The world was not made from nothing. It came forth from the Great Mystery, and all things within it carry that sacred power. The breath of the Creator moves through everything—through the wind

that stirs the grass, through the water that flows in the rivers, through the blood that pulses in the hearts of all living beings.

<sup>2</sup> This is the sacred power that the people call Medicine. It is not medicine in the way the newcomers use that word—a substance to cure sickness. It is spiritual power, the ability to channel the Breath of the Creator for the benefit of all.

<sup>3</sup> Some people are given this gift in greater measure than others. They are chosen by the spirits, sometimes from childhood, to serve as intermediaries between the seen and unseen worlds. These are the shamans, the medicine people, the singers. They are not chosen because they are better or more worthy than others. They are chosen because they have a special calling, a particular relationship with the spirit world.

<sup>4</sup> The shaman's path is not an easy one. It requires long years of training, discipline, and sacrifice. The candidate must learn to hear the voices of the spirits, to understand the language of animals and plants, to read the signs that are written in the patterns of the stars and the flight of birds. They must learn to walk between the worlds, to travel in the spirit realms while their body remains here on earth.

<sup>5</sup> Some shamans specialize in healing, using their knowledge of herbs and their connection to the spirits to restore health and balance to the sick. Others are diviners, able to foresee the future and interpret dreams and visions. Still others are ceremonial leaders, entrusted with the sacred rituals that preserve the people's connection to the Great Mystery and maintain the harmony of the world.

<sup>6</sup> The training begins with the basics—learning to quiet the mind, to listen with the heart, to be still and know that the Great Mystery is present. The candidate must learn to see with more than the eyes, to hear with more than the ears. They must cultivate the ability to travel in the spirit realms, to journey between the worlds.

<sup>7</sup> This is not something that can be learned from books or in classrooms. It is a direct experience, a personal encounter with the sacred. The candidate must go out into the wilderness, fast and pray, wait for a vision. Only when they have received a vision, when they have made contact with their personal power animal and their guardian spirit, can the real work begin.

## **All Our Relations**

<sup>1</sup> The old teachings say that all things are related. The deer, the eagle, the salmon, the bear—they are our relatives. The corn, the beans, the squash, the wild rice—they are our relatives. The mountains, the rivers, the clouds, the wind—they are our relatives. We are all children of the same Great Mystery, all born of the same sacred breath.

<sup>2</sup> This is not poetry or metaphor. It is a statement of fact, a description of the way the world truly is. We are connected to everything that exists, and everything that exists is connected to us. What we do to the earth, we do to ourselves. What we do to the animals, we do to ourselves. What we do to each other, we do to ourselves.

<sup>3</sup> The people understood this in a way that the newcomers never could. They lived close to the land, dependent on its gifts for their survival. They knew that if they took too much, there would be

nothing left for tomorrow. They knew that if they polluted the water, the fish would die. They knew that if they destroyed the forests, the game would disappear.

<sup>4</sup> This is why they performed ceremonies before a hunt, asking the spirits of the animals to give themselves freely to the people. This is why they gave thanks after a kill, honoring the life that had been given. This is why they burned offerings of tobacco and sage, letting the smoke carry their prayers to the sky.

<sup>5</sup> The sacred pipe is the symbol of this relationship. When the pipe is smoked, the smoke rises to the heavens, carrying the prayers of the people to the Great Mystery. The bowl of the pipe represents the earth, the stem represents the sky. When they are joined together, the whole of creation is brought into balance.

<sup>6</sup> The pipe was given to the people by a sacred messenger, Buffalo Calf Woman, who taught them how to live in harmony with all life. She told them that they must always respect the fruits of the earth, help the women in raising children, share their sorrows, and be kind to the little ones. When they needed meat, they should smoke the pipe, and their hunting would be successful.

<sup>7</sup> This is the way of the Good Red Road. It is not a path of rules and commandments, of punishments and rewards. It is a path of relationship, of mutual respect and responsibility. We are all related, and what we do matters.

## **The Sacred Hoop of Life**

<sup>1</sup> The world is a circle. The sun travels in a circle across the sky, returning each day to its starting point. The moon travels in a circle, waxing and waning, dying and being reborn. The seasons move in a circle, spring to summer to fall to winter and back to spring again. Life moves in a circle—birth to youth to maturity to old age to death and back to new life.

<sup>2</sup> This is the Sacred Hoop. It is the pattern of all existence, the rhythm that holds the universe together. The people understood this from the beginning, and they organized everything around it. Their villages were built in circles, their ceremonies performed in circles, their lives lived in circles.

<sup>3</sup> The Medicine Wheel is the symbol of this understanding. It is a circle divided into four quarters, each representing one of the sacred directions. The east is the direction of dawn, of new beginnings, of spring and birth. The south is the direction of summer, of growth and youth. The west is the direction of autumn, of maturity and harvest. The north is the direction of winter, of old age and death.

<sup>4</sup> Each direction has its color, its animal, its teaching. The east is yellow, the color of the rising sun. Its animal is the eagle, who flies highest and carries prayers to the Creator. The south is red, the color of life and blood. Its animal is the coyote, the trickster who teaches us to laugh at ourselves. The west is black, the color of the great waters and the mystery of death. Its animal is the bear, who sleeps through winter and wakes to new life. The north is white, the color of snow and purity. Its animal is the buffalo, who gives everything for the survival of the people.

<sup>5</sup> In the center of the Medicine Wheel is the Great Mystery, the source of all life. Around it circle the seven sacred directions—east, south, west, north, above, below, and within. The people understand

that they must live in balance with these directions, with the forces they represent, with the cycle of life itself.

<sup>6</sup> When the Sacred Hoop is broken, when people forget their place in the circle, when they try to live outside the rhythm, then disharmony and suffering result. The medicine people work to restore the balance, to heal the broken hoop, to bring the people back into harmony with the natural order.

<sup>7</sup> This is the work of the shaman—to mend the Sacred Hoop, to heal the wounds that separate us from each other and from the earth, to restore the balance that has been lost.

<sup>8</sup> The Sacred Hoop: Walking the Good Red Road

<sup>9</sup> A Guide to Native American Spiritual Teachings

## **The Art of Journeying**

<sup>1</sup> There are worlds within worlds, realms beyond what the physical eyes can see. The old ones knew this. They traveled between these realms, walking in the dreamtime, moving between the worlds of spirit and matter. This is the gift of the shaman, the ability to journey beyond the ordinary.

<sup>2</sup> Journeying is not the same as dreaming. In a dream, the mind wanders where it will, often without purpose or direction. Journeying is intentional. It is a deliberate act of consciousness, a disciplined movement of the soul from one reality to another. The shaman learns to send their spirit body into other realms while the physical body remains here in the middle world.

<sup>3</sup> The journey always begins in the same way. The shaman sits in a quiet place, a sacred space prepared for this purpose. They smudge themselves with sage or cedar, letting the smoke purify their body and mind. They call upon the spirits of the four directions, asking for their protection and guidance. They beat the drum or shake the rattle, the rhythmic sound helping to shift consciousness from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

<sup>4</sup> The first journeys are the most difficult. The mind resists. It wants to stay in control, to analyze and judge, to separate what is real from what is imagined. The heart must learn to lead, to quiet the endless chatter of thoughts and listen to the deeper voice that knows the way.

<sup>5</sup> Some people see their journeys in images, as clear as waking life. Others feel them in their bodies, experiencing sensations of movement and emotion without visual pictures. Still others hear songs or voices, receive words without a speaker. Each person's experience is unique, because each person's relationship with the spirit world is unique.

<sup>6</sup> The realms the shaman visits are many. There is the lower world, the realm of deep earth, where the animal spirits dwell and the roots of power grow. This is not a place of punishment or darkness. It is the womb of creation, the source of life, the place where healing powers are found.

<sup>7</sup> There is the middle world, the realm we inhabit while awake. Here too spirits dwell—the spirits of trees and stones, of rivers and mountains, of places made sacred by prayer and ceremony. The shaman walks in this world with open eyes, seeing both the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality.

<sup>8</sup> And there is the upper world, the realm of sky, where the star people and the ancient teachers reside. This is the place of wisdom, of visions that speak to the soul's deepest questions. It is not a heaven of reward, but a realm of learning, a university of the spirit.

<sup>9</sup> Between these worlds, the shaman journeys as a traveler between nations, carrying messages, seeking knowledge, bringing healing and balance. The power animals and guardian spirits accompany them, protecting them from harm, guiding them to the places they need to go.

## **The Power Animals**

<sup>1</sup> Every person has a spirit helper, a guide from the animal kingdom that walks with them through life. This is the power animal, the embodiment of the soul's essential nature. It is not chosen by the person, but chooses them, revealing itself in visions, dreams, and moments of deep connection.

<sup>2</sup> The power animal reflects the person's strengths and challenges, their gifts and their shadow. Someone whose power animal is the eagle may be a visionary, seeing far and clear, carrying the prayers of the people to the Creator. Someone whose power animal is the bear may be a healer, strong and protective, able to find healing power even in winter's darkness.

<sup>3</sup> The power animal is not a pet or a servant. It is an ally, a teacher, a companion on the journey. It has its own wisdom, its own purpose, its own way of being. The shaman learns to listen to the power animal, to trust its guidance, to honor its presence.

<sup>4</sup> Many people know their power animal from childhood. They feel a connection to a particular species, a sense of recognition that goes beyond ordinary liking. They may dream of the animal, see it in the physical world at significant moments, feel its presence in times of need.

<sup>5</sup> But others must seek their power animal through vision quests, going out into the wilderness to fast and pray until the spirit reveals itself. This is not a casual undertaking. It requires courage, discipline, and openness to the unknown.

<sup>6</sup> The old teachings say that a person may have more than one power animal. The first is the primary guide, the one that reflects the soul's essential nature. Others may come later, at different stages of life, to teach specific lessons or support particular work.

<sup>7</sup> There is also a counterbalance power animal, a spirit that represents the qualities the person needs to develop, the shadow side of their nature. The eagle, for example, may be balanced by the coyote, teaching the visionary to laugh, to be humble, to recognize the foolishness that lurks in all wisdom.

<sup>8</sup> The power animals are not symbolic. They are real beings, spirits who have chosen to walk with humanity and help us find our way. When a shaman journeys, they call upon their power animals, asking them to lead the way, protect the traveler, and open doors that would otherwise remain closed.

<sup>9</sup> This relationship is reciprocal. The shaman honors the power animal with prayers and offerings, with attention and respect. In return, the power animal shares its gifts—the eagle's far sight, the bear's healing touch, the wolf's loyalty, the deer's gentleness, the raven's magic.

## The Three Worlds

<sup>1</sup> The universe is not flat, a single plane of existence. It is layered, like the levels of a great lodge, each realm having its own laws, its own inhabitants, its own way of being. The old ones knew these realms intimately, traveled them freely, lived in all of them at once.

<sup>2</sup> The lower world is the realm of earth, but not the earth we walk upon. It is the earth beneath, the deep places where roots reach down and waters flow in darkness. It is the place of emergence, where the first people came from, where the ancestors still dwell.

<sup>3</sup> Here the land is always beautiful, always healing. The rivers are clear, the forests ancient, the meadows lush. The creatures of this world are the great ones, the teachers, the ones who carry the old knowledge. Bear and Wolf and Buffalo, Raven and Eagle and Snake—they all live here, not as symbols but as living presences.

<sup>4</sup> To journey to the lower world, the shaman enters through a place of connection—a cave, a hollow tree, a spring, a place where the earth opens. They travel inward, downward, following the roots of the world tree until they emerge into a landscape of wonder and power.

<sup>5</sup> This is where the healing ceremonies are given. The power animals teach. The ancestors offer guidance. The shaman receives the songs and medicines that will help their people.

<sup>6</sup> The middle world is the realm we know, the world of physical existence. But it is not only physical. Spirits dwell here too, in the trees and stones, in the places of power, in the homes and lands of the people. The shaman walks through this world with eyes open to both realms, seeing what others miss.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the spirits of the middle world are friendly, the guardians of places and families. Others are troublesome, causing illness and confusion. The shaman works to keep the balance, to appease the angry spirits, to keep the people safe.

<sup>8</sup> The upper world is the realm of sky, the place of the star people and the ancient teachers. It is vast and beautiful, full of light and wisdom. This is where the great visions come from, where the meaning of life is understood, where the purpose of the soul is revealed.

<sup>9</sup> To journey to the upper world, the shaman climbs, following the path of the pole star, ascending through the layers of sky until they reach the place of teaching. Here the elders of the cosmos reside—the ones who have walked the way for ages beyond counting, who see the whole tapestry of life from its beginning to its end.

<sup>10</sup> The upper world is not a reward for good behavior. It is a place of learning, a school for souls who are ready to understand more than they know. The shaman travels there not for escape but for wisdom, not for rest but for guidance.

<sup>11</sup> Between these worlds there are other spaces, other realms. There is the realm of the dead, where the ancestors wait to be reborn. There is the realm of dreams, where the ordinary mind dissolves and the deeper knowing emerges. There is the realm of the trickster, where laughter and reversal teach humility and wisdom.

<sup>12</sup> The shaman knows all these realms, travels all these paths. They are the ones who hold the world together, who keep the balance, who walk between the worlds so that the people can live in peace.

## The Healing Path

<sup>1</sup> Sickness comes in many forms. There is sickness of the body, when the flesh is wounded or diseased. There is sickness of the mind, when the thoughts circle and repeat without rest. There is sickness of the spirit, when the soul becomes lost, disconnected from its source.

<sup>2</sup> In the old way, these are not separate. The body, the mind, and the spirit are one. When one part is sick, all parts suffer. Healing must address the whole person—the physical, the emotional, the spiritual.

<sup>3</sup> The shaman's healing begins with vision. They journey to the spirit world to find the cause of the sickness. Sometimes they see a foreign object lodged in the body, a piece of negative energy that must be removed. Sometimes they see the person's soul has wandered away, frightened or wounded, and must be brought back. Sometimes they see a conflict between the person and a spirit, a broken relationship that must be mended.

<sup>4</sup> When the cause is found, the healing can begin. The shaman may sing songs of power, beating the drum to call the helping spirits. They may blow smoke over the person, or touch them with feathers or crystals. They may create a sandpainting, a sacred design that represents the harmony of creation, and seat the person in its center so the healing power can flow.

<sup>5</sup> In the Navajo way, the healing ceremonies are called chants. They can last for many days, each night a new phase, each morning a new song. The singer creates sandpaintings from colored sands, images of the holy ones and the sacred powers. The person sits in the painting, becoming part of the sacred design, absorbing the healing energy.

<sup>6</sup> The songs themselves are powerful. They are not just words set to music. They are the voice of the spirits, carried through the singer to the one who needs healing. Each song has a purpose, a specific power to restore balance and health.

<sup>7</sup> Herbs and medicines are part of the healing too. The old ones knew the plants of the land, knew their uses for every ailment. Some plants heal the body, some heal the mind, some open the door to spiritual vision. The shaman learns the plants from the spirits, who teach where to find them and how to prepare them.

<sup>8</sup> But all healing comes from the Great Mystery. The shaman is only a conduit, a vessel through which the sacred power flows. They do not heal by their own power. They make themselves available to the healing power, open themselves to be used for the good of the people.

<sup>9</sup> The person who is healed must also participate. They must want to be healed, must open themselves to the healing power, must be willing to change the patterns that led to the sickness. The shaman can help, can make the healing power available, but the person must receive it.

<sup>10</sup> When the healing is complete, the person returns to balance. The lost soul is restored. The foreign object is removed. The broken relationship is mended. The body, mind, and spirit come back into harmony, and the person can walk the Good Red Road again.

## The Path of Life

<sup>1</sup> From birth to death, the people walk a sacred path. Each stage of life has its ceremonies, its teachings, its way of understanding what it means to be human. The old ones marked these passages with ritual, celebrating the milestones that shape a life.

<sup>2</sup> The naming ceremony is the first. When a child is born, they are not yet a full person. They must be named, given an identity, welcomed into the community. The name is not chosen casually. It comes from the spirits, revealed in vision, or it is passed down from an ancestor who lived well.

<sup>3</sup> In many tribes, the naming ceremony happens at dawn. The child is carried outside to greet the rising sun. The grandmother or the medicine person speaks the child's name, offers it to the four directions, asks the spirits to bless the new life. From that moment, the child is a person, a member of the community, a carrier of the tradition.

<sup>4</sup> The child grows, learning the ways of the people through example and story. They learn to respect the earth, to honor the animals, to treat others with kindness. They learn the songs and the ceremonies, the prayers and the customs. They learn who they are and where they belong.

<sup>5</sup> At puberty, the child becomes an adult. For girls, the first moon is marked with ceremony, a celebration of their power to give life. They are taken to a special place, given instruction in the duties and responsibilities of womanhood. They learn the songs of the women, the work of the home, the power of their own bodies.

<sup>6</sup> For boys, the passage may be a vision quest, a time of fasting and prayer in the wilderness. They go out alone, seeking a vision that will guide their life. They cry for the spirits, wait for a dream, ask for a power animal and a purpose. When they return, they are no longer boys but men.

<sup>7</sup> Marriage is another passage, the joining of two families and two spirits. The bride and groom exchange gifts, promises, the sacred pipe. They begin a new household, a new branch of the family tree. The community welcomes them, supports them, holds them accountable for the new life they are creating.

<sup>8</sup> The years pass. The adults raise their children, work the land, hunt the game, keep the ceremonies. They serve their families, their communities, the people. They become the elders, the ones who carry the knowledge, who guide the next generation.

<sup>9</sup> Old age is honored, not hidden. The elders are the ones who know the stories, the songs, the ceremonies. They are the ones who have walked the path the longest, who have seen many seasons turn. They are the teachers, the counselors, the ones who hold the wisdom of the people.

<sup>10</sup> Death is not the end. It is a transition, a passage from this world to the next. The body returns to the earth, becomes part of the cycle again. The soul moves on, to the spirit world, to the land of the ancestors, to the place of waiting for rebirth.

<sup>11</sup> The old ones did not fear death. They knew it was part of the circle, part of the sacred hoop. They prepared for it with ceremony and prayer, with a clear conscience and a clean heart. When death came, they greeted it as an old friend, a familiar journey.

<sup>12</sup> The path of life is a circle. We are born, we grow, we love, we die. And then we are born again, in another form, another life. The soul learns what it needs to learn, grows as it needs to grow, returns again and again until the Great Mystery is satisfied.

<sup>13</sup> This is the Good Red Road. It is the path of the people, the path of the ancestors, the path of all life. It is the way of walking in balance, in harmony, in sacred relation to all that is.

<sup>14</sup> The Sacred Hoop: Walking the Good Red Road

<sup>15</sup> A Guide to Native American Spiritual Teachings

## **The Purification Lodge**

<sup>1</sup> Before any great ceremony, before any sacred undertaking, the people must be made clean. The body must be purified, the mind must be focused, the spirit must be opened. This is the purpose of the purification lodge, the sweat lodge, the place of cleansing and renewal.

<sup>2</sup> The lodge is a small structure, a dome of bent branches covered with blankets or hides. It is low to the ground, humble, reminding the people that they are children of the earth. Inside, a pit is dug in the center, where the sacred stones will be placed.

<sup>3</sup> The stones are not ordinary rocks. They are chosen with care, gathered from special places, honored as living beings. They are heated in a fire outside the lodge until they glow with heat, until they are red and alive with fire's power. Then they are brought inside, placed in the pit, the door is closed, and the ceremony begins.

<sup>4</sup> Water is poured over the stones. The water meets the fire, and steam rises, filling the lodge with heat and moisture. The steam is the breath of the Great Mystery, the sacred power made visible, the cleansing wind that washes away all that is impure.

<sup>5</sup> The people sit in the darkness, feeling the heat penetrate their bodies. They sweat, and with the sweat, the impurities leave them. The tension and worry of daily life, the grudges and resentments, the fears and doubts—all these are released into the steam, carried away by the breath of the spirits.

<sup>6</sup> Songs are sung. Prayers are offered. The leader calls upon the spirits of the four directions, upon the Great Mystery, upon the ancestors. The people pray for themselves and for each other, for their families and their communities, for the health of the earth and the well-being of all life.

<sup>7</sup> The ceremony has four rounds, each round honoring one of the sacred directions. In the east, the people pray for new beginnings, for the dawn of understanding. In the south, they pray for growth and strength, for the warmth of the sun. In the west, they pray for healing and release, for the power of transformation. In the north, they pray for wisdom and peace, for the stillness of winter.

<sup>8</sup> Between the rounds, the door is opened. Cool air flows in. The people breathe deeply, feeling the contrast between the heat of the lodge and the coolness of the outer air. They are reminded of the balance of life, the alternation of challenge and rest, of struggle and ease.

<sup>9</sup> By the end of the fourth round, the people are exhausted and cleansed. They have faced the heat, endured the darkness, prayed with all their hearts. They emerge from the lodge like newborns, washed clean of their burdens, ready to begin again.

<sup>10</sup> The sweat lodge is not just a physical cleansing. It is a spiritual rebirth. The people enter as they are, with all their faults and failings. They leave as they hope to be, purified and renewed, walking the Good Red Road with open hearts.

## The Dance of the Sun

<sup>1</sup> Of all the ceremonies of the people, the Sun Dance is the most powerful. It is the ceremony of renewal, the dance that restores the world, the sacrifice that keeps the sun moving across the sky.

<sup>2</sup> The Sun Dance is held in the summer, when the sun is highest and the earth is most alive. The people gather from many camps, traveling great distances to be together. They come to pray for the people, for the land, for all living things. They come to give thanks for the blessings of the past year and to ask for help in the year to come.

<sup>3</sup> The ceremony begins with the selection of the tree. It must be a tall, straight tree, a gift from the earth. The people go out to find it, walking with reverence, asking the tree's permission to be cut. They offer tobacco and prayers, honoring the spirit of the tree.

<sup>4</sup> When the tree is cut, it is carried to the center of the camp. The people dance and sing, welcoming the tree as a guest. It is planted in the ground, becoming the center pole of the Sun Dance lodge, the axis of the world, the connection between the earth below and the sky above.

<sup>5</sup> The lodge is built around the tree, a circle of branches and leaves. It is open to the sky, open to the sun. Around the central pole, the people will dance, moving with the rhythm of the drums, following the path of the sun across the sky.

<sup>6</sup> The dancers are the bravest ones, the ones who have made a vow to sacrifice for the people. They fast for four days, eating nothing, drinking nothing. They paint their bodies with sacred colors. They wear eagle feathers, the sign of the one who flies highest.

<sup>7</sup> The dance is long, hours upon hours of movement. The dancers face the sun, their eyes fixed on the pole. They move as the sun moves, east to west, following the path of the sacred circle. They blow their eagle bone whistles, calling to the spirits, asking for visions.

<sup>8</sup> The sacrifice is real. Some dancers have their chests pierced with skewers, ropes attached to the central pole. They pull against the ropes, dancing, until the flesh tears. This is not done for glory or for show. It is done in gratitude, in honor of the ancestors, in sacrifice for the people.

<sup>9</sup> Some see visions during the dance. The spirits come to them, offering guidance, revealing the future. They see the ancestors, the power animals, the sacred ways. They receive healing for themselves and for their people.

<sup>10</sup> The dance continues for four days. Each day, the dancers become stronger, more focused, more open to the spirit world. Each night, they rest and pray, preparing for the next day's journey.

<sup>11</sup> On the final day, the ceremony concludes. The dancers have made their sacrifice. They have danced the sun's path, renewed the sacred hoop, brought the people back into balance. The community rejoices, singing and dancing, honoring those who have given so much.

<sup>12</sup> The Sun Dance is not just for the people. It is for all life. When the people dance, they dance for the animals and the plants, for the rivers and the mountains, for the sky and the earth. They dance to keep the world turning, to keep the sun shining, to keep life alive.

## **The Green Corn Ceremony**

- <sup>1</sup> In the days when the corn is green, when the first ears are ready to be harvested, the people gather for the Green Corn Ceremony. This is the thanksgiving of the agricultural tribes, the celebration of the earth's abundance, the renewal of the community's bond with the spirits of the plants.
- <sup>2</sup> The ceremony is held when the corn is ripening, when the beans are forming in their pods, when the squash are growing fat on the vines. The people have tended these plants for months, praying over them, singing to them, asking the spirits to bless them. Now the plants are ready, and the people give thanks.
- <sup>3</sup> The Green Corn Ceremony is a time of cleansing and renewal. The people clean their homes, throwing out the old and preparing for the new. They settle their disputes, forgiving each other, starting fresh. They renew their vows to the community, to the ancestors, to the sacred way.
- <sup>4</sup> The ceremony begins with a fast. The people eat nothing, drink nothing, purifying their bodies for the sacred work ahead. They sit in the ceremonial lodge, praying and singing, waiting for the spirits to come.
- <sup>5</sup> When the spirits arrive, the dancing begins. The people move in a circle, following the path of the sun, their feet beating the rhythm of the earth. They sing the old songs, the songs of the ancestors, the songs that bring the rain and the harvest.
- <sup>6</sup> The corn is brought out, the first ears of the new season. The people bless them with prayers, offering them to the spirits, giving thanks for the gift of life. They eat the corn, the first food of the new year, tasting the sweetness of the earth's abundance.
- <sup>7</sup> The Green Corn Ceremony is not just a celebration. It is a renewal of the covenant between the people and the spirits. The people promise to respect the earth, to care for the plants, to use the gifts of creation wisely. The spirits promise to continue their blessings, to bring the rain and the sun, to keep the people alive.
- <sup>8</sup> The ceremony lasts for days. There is dancing and singing, feasting and storytelling. The people share their hopes and their fears, their joys and their sorrows. They remember the ancestors, the ones who taught them how to grow the corn. They teach the children, the ones who will carry the tradition forward.
- <sup>9</sup> When the ceremony is complete, the people return to their homes, renewed and restored. They have given thanks, settled their differences, renewed their commitment to the Good Red Road. They are ready for the season ahead, ready to harvest the blessings of the earth, ready to walk in balance.

## **The Healing Chants**

- <sup>1</sup> The people understand that illness is not just a physical condition. It is a sign that something is out of balance, that the harmony of body, mind, and spirit has been broken. The healing chants are the medicine that restores this harmony, the songs that bring the soul back into alignment with the sacred order.
- <sup>2</sup> The Navajo have the most elaborate healing tradition. The chants are called "sings," and there are many of them, each for a specific condition. The Nightway is for healing the mind, for restoring the

soul that has wandered away. The Mountainway is for healing the body, for bringing the physical self back into balance. The Blessingway is for general well-being, for keeping the harmony of the world.

<sup>3</sup> Each chant is a complex ceremony, lasting from one to nine days. The singer must know hundreds of songs, thousands of prayers, the intricate details of the sandpaintings and the rituals. It takes years to learn a single chant, and the greatest singers know only a few.

<sup>4</sup> The ceremony begins with purification. The patient enters the sweat lodge, cleansed of physical impurities. The relatives and friends gather, bringing offerings and support. They will participate in the ceremony, praying and singing with the singer, helping to create the field of healing power.

<sup>5</sup> Over the days of the chant, sandpaintings are created. These are not ordinary drawings. They are sacred images, made from colored sand, representing the holy ones, the spirits of the healing powers. Each sandpainting is specific to the chant, to the patient, to the condition being treated.

<sup>6</sup> The patient sits in the center of the sandpainting, surrounded by the holy ones. The singer touches them, transferring the healing power. The patient absorbs the energy of the painting, receiving the blessing of the spirits. When the ritual is complete, the sandpainting is destroyed, its power released, its energy flowing into the patient.

<sup>7</sup> The songs of the chant are powerful. They are not just words. They are the voices of the spirits, the sounds of creation, the vibrations that restore harmony. The singer must sing them exactly, with perfect pitch and rhythm, or the power will not flow.

<sup>8</sup> The ceremony is not just for the patient. It is for the whole community. When one person is ill, the harmony of the whole is disturbed. The ceremony restores balance not just to the individual but to everyone who participates.

<sup>9</sup> By the end of the chant, the patient is healed. The soul has been restored, the illness has been removed, the harmony has been reestablished. The people return to their lives, grateful for the healing power, grateful for the sacred songs, grateful for the Good Red Road.

## **The Vision Quest**

<sup>1</sup> In the old days, when a person reached the age of understanding, they would go out into the wilderness alone. They would fast and pray, seeking a vision that would guide their life. This is the vision quest, the journey into the unknown, the search for the spirit that will be their companion.

<sup>2</sup> The vision quest is not undertaken lightly. The person must be prepared by the elders, taught the sacred ways, given instruction on what to expect and how to respond. They must be ready to face the spirits, ready to receive a vision, ready to accept the power that will come with it.

<sup>3</sup> The vision seeker goes to a sacred place, a place of power where the spirits are near. It may be a mountain, a cave, a lonely butte, a place where the ancestors have gone before. The seeker chooses a spot, a place to sit for the duration of the quest, a place to wait for the vision.

<sup>4</sup> The vision seeker fasts, eating nothing, drinking nothing. They pray, calling to the spirits, asking for guidance. They stay awake, watching, waiting, staying open to whatever comes. The days pass slowly, one after another, until the vision arrives.

<sup>5</sup> The vision may come in many forms. The seeker may see a power animal, a spirit in animal form. The seeker may hear a song, a chant that will be their personal medicine. The seeker may receive a name, the name that will identify them in the spirit world. The seeker may have a revelation, a glimpse into the meaning of life.

<sup>6</sup> The vision is not always pleasant. The seeker may face fears, encounter challenges, struggle with doubt. The spirits may test them, see if they are worthy. The seeker must hold on, must stay open, must trust that the vision will come.

<sup>7</sup> When the vision arrives, the seeker returns to the community. The elders welcome them, listening to their story, interpreting the vision for them. They are given a new name, a new identity, a new purpose. They are no longer a child but an adult, a person of power, a carrier of the sacred way.

<sup>8</sup> Some people go on only one vision quest, the one that marks their passage to adulthood. Others go many times, seeking new guidance, new power, new understanding. Each quest brings them closer to the spirits, deeper into the sacred way.

<sup>9</sup> The vision quest is not an adventure, not a test of endurance. It is a sacred journey, a meeting with the spirits, a transformation of the soul. It is the path to becoming a full person, a true member of the community, a walker on the Good Red Road.

## **The Sacred Pipe**

<sup>1</sup> The pipe is the most sacred object of the people. It is not a thing to be used casually, not a symbol to be displayed. It is a living being, a messenger between the worlds, a gift from the spirits that connects the people to the Great Mystery.

<sup>2</sup> The pipe is made of two parts, the bowl and the stem. The bowl is stone, representing the earth, the place of life and death. The stem is wood, representing the sky, the place of spirit and wisdom. When the two are joined, the whole of creation is brought together, and the power of the spirits is present.

<sup>3</sup> The pipe was given to the people long ago. The story says that a beautiful woman came to the people, a woman from the spirit world. She carried a pipe, the first pipe, the gift of the buffalo people. She taught the people how to use it, how to fill it with tobacco, how to offer it to the spirits, how to smoke it in prayer.

<sup>4</sup> The pipe is used for all the great ceremonies. When the people make a treaty, they smoke the pipe. When they pray for healing, they smoke the pipe. When they ask for rain, they smoke the pipe. When they give thanks, they smoke the pipe. The smoke rises to the heavens, carrying the prayers of the people.

<sup>5</sup> The pipe is filled with tobacco, a sacred plant. The tobacco is not smoked for pleasure but for prayer. It is offered to the four directions, to the earth below, to the sky above, to the Great Mystery that is all things. The smoke carries the prayers, the breath of the people, to the spirits.

<sup>6</sup> The pipe ceremony is simple but profound. The pipe is prepared with prayers and offerings. The people sit in a circle, passing the pipe from hand to hand. Each person prays, each person smokes, each person sends their heart's desire to the Great Mystery.

<sup>7</sup> The pipe is also used for personal prayer. In times of trouble, a person may light the pipe and pray alone, asking for guidance, offering thanks, connecting with the spirit world. The pipe is a comfort, a companion, a way to reach beyond the visible world.

<sup>8</sup> The pipe is not just a symbol of faith. It is a covenant between the people and the spirits. When the people smoke the pipe, they are renewing their promise to walk in balance, to care for the earth, to live in harmony with all life. And the spirits renew their promise to help the people, to guide them, to protect them.

<sup>9</sup> The pipe is sacred. It is never touched by the unworthy, never used for selfish purposes, never disrespected. It is kept in a special place, wrapped in cloth, treated with the care due to a living being.

<sup>10</sup> When the people smoke the pipe, they are not just praying. They are entering into the presence of the Great Mystery, joining the circle of all life, connecting with the ancestors and the generations yet to come. The pipe is the way to the sacred, the path to the spirit, the door to the Good Red Road.

<sup>11</sup> The Sacred Hoop: Walking the Good Red Road

<sup>12</sup> A Guide to Native American Spiritual Teachings

## **The Land as Teacher**

<sup>1</sup> The land is not just ground beneath our feet. It is alive, breathing, speaking to those who know how to listen. The old ones understood this in their bones. They walked upon the earth with reverence, knowing that every step was a prayer, every place a teacher.

<sup>2</sup> The land teaches us who we are. The mountains teach us about standing strong through the storms. The rivers teach us about flowing around obstacles, persisting until we reach our destination. The trees teach us about patience, about putting down deep roots, about reaching for the sky. The animals teach us about family and community, about hunting and gathering, about living in balance with our environment.

<sup>3</sup> The old stories are written on the land. Every hill, every valley, every butte and canyon has a story to tell. Here is where the people emerged from the underworld. There is where the great flood swept across the land. Yonder is where the hero fought the monster, where the ancestors had their vision, where the spirits first appeared to the people.

<sup>4</sup> The land is a sacred text, a scripture written in stone and water and living things. Those who know how to read it can trace the path of the ancestors, understand the meaning of the ceremonies, find their way in the world.

<sup>5</sup> The people knew this from the beginning. They did not just live on the land. They lived with the land, in relationship with it, as part of it. They spoke to the land, listened to the land, learned from the land. They understood that the health of the land was their health, the sickness of the land was their sickness.

<sup>6</sup> This is why the people never sold their land. It was not something they owned. They belonged to the land, and the land belonged to them. It was their mother, their provider, their identity. To sell the land was to sell their mother, to give away their heritage, to lose themselves.

<sup>7</sup> Chief Seattle of the Suquamish people spoke of this when the newcomers asked to buy the land. He said that every part of the land was sacred to his people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove had been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. The very dust upon which the newcomers stood responded more lovingly to the footsteps of his people than to theirs, because it was rich with the blood of their ancestors.

<sup>8</sup> This is the sacred bond between people and land. It is not a bond of ownership but of relationship. It is not a contract but a covenant. The people care for the land, and the land cares for the people. They are partners in the sacred circle of life.

## **Sacred Places**

<sup>1</sup> Some places on the earth are more sacred than others. They are places where the spirits are especially present, where the veil between the worlds is thin, where the people can go to pray and receive guidance. These places are not chosen by the people. They are chosen by the spirits, revealed in visions and dreams, passed down through generations.

<sup>2</sup> The sacred places are many. There are mountains where the people go to fast and seek visions, places of power where the ancestors received their gifts. There are lakes and springs where the healing waters flow, places of purification and renewal. There are caves where the spirits dwell, places of mystery and initiation. There are buttes and hills where the ceremonies are held, places of gathering and celebration.

<sup>3</sup> In the Southwest, the Navajo have their sacred mountains. Blanca Peak in the east, Mount Taylor in the south, the San Francisco Peaks in the west, Hesperus Peak in the north—these are the four mountains that mark the boundaries of the Navajo world. They were placed there by the holy people at the beginning of time, and they continue to hold the power of creation.

<sup>4</sup> The Hopi have their sacred mesas, the places where their ancestors emerged from the underworld. The Kachinas come from these mesas, the spirit beings who bring the rain and the harvest. The Hopi return to these places again and again, performing ceremonies, keeping the connection alive.

<sup>5</sup> In the northern plains, the Lakota have the Black Hills, the place of their origin. Bear Butte is there, where the people go to seek visions, where the spirits speak to those who are open. The hills are the heart of the Lakota world, the center of the sacred hoop.

<sup>6</sup> The people of the Northwest coast have their sacred places along the shore, where the salmon run and the cedar grows. The spirits of the salmon and the cedar are honored, their gifts received with gratitude.

<sup>7</sup> The people of the woodlands have their sacred places in the deep forests, the places where the spirits of the deer and the bear are present. The ceremonies are held there, the prayers offered there, the connection with the spirits renewed there.

<sup>8</sup> The sacred places are not just historical sites. They are living places, places of ongoing power. When the people go to these places, they are not just visiting the past. They are entering into the presence of the spirits, renewing the covenant, receiving the blessings that have been offered from the beginning.

<sup>9</sup> This is why the struggle for the sacred places has been so important. When the people lose their sacred places, they lose their connection to the spirits. When the sacred places are desecrated, the covenant is broken. The land is not just real estate. It is the heart of the people, the soul of the tradition, the place where the sacred lives.

## **The Cycle of the Seasons**

<sup>1</sup> The old ones lived by the seasons. The turning of the year was not just a matter of weather, not just a matter of crops and hunting. It was a sacred cycle, a journey through the sacred hoop, a time of ceremonies and prayers.

<sup>2</sup> In the spring, the earth awakens. The snow melts, the buds appear, the animals give birth. The people celebrate the renewal of life, the return of the sun, the promise of the harvest. They perform ceremonies to welcome the new season, to ask for the blessings of growth and abundance.

<sup>3</sup> The spring ceremonies are joyful, full of dancing and singing. The people thank the spirits for the gift of life, ask for protection for the young, pray for the strength to make it through the growing season. They plant the corn, the beans, the squash, the sacred seeds that have been passed down through generations.

<sup>4</sup> In the summer, the earth is alive. The sun is high, the days are long, the crops are growing. The people perform ceremonies to bring the rain, to protect the harvest, to ensure the continued abundance of the land. The Sun Dance is held, the great ceremony of renewal, the sacrifice that keeps the world turning.

<sup>5</sup> The summer ceremonies are intense, full of sacrifice and dedication. The people dance and pray, fasting and offering themselves for the good of the community. They ask for the continued blessing of the sun, the rain, the earth, the life that sustains them.

<sup>6</sup> In the autumn, the earth gives its gifts. The harvest is gathered, the corn is stored, the game is hunted. The people perform ceremonies of thanksgiving, honoring the spirits who have blessed them, giving back to the earth that has given so much. The Green Corn Ceremony is held, the celebration of abundance, the renewal of the covenant.

<sup>7</sup> The autumn ceremonies are solemn, full of gratitude and reflection. The people remember the ancestors who have gone before, the ones who taught them how to live on the land. They prepare for the winter, the time of rest and renewal.

<sup>8</sup> In the winter, the earth rests. The snow covers the ground, the animals sleep, the people gather together. The ceremonies of the winter are ceremonies of the inner life, the spirit world, the mystery of the dark. The people tell the old stories, sing the old songs, remember the teachings of the ancestors.

<sup>9</sup> The winter ceremonies are quiet, full of contemplation and vision. The people travel in the spirit world, seeking guidance for the coming year. They dream the dreams that will shape their lives. They sit with the elders and learn the wisdom of the ages.

<sup>10</sup> The cycle of the seasons is a sacred hoop. It turns and turns, never stopping, never ending. The people turn with it, living in harmony with its rhythms, walking the Good Red Road through the passage of the year.

## **The Vision of the Earth**

<sup>1</sup> The old ones had a vision of the earth that the newcomers never understood. To the newcomers, the earth was a resource, something to be exploited and used. To the old ones, the earth was a relative, a mother, a being to be respected and loved.

<sup>2</sup> The earth is alive. This is not a metaphor. The earth breathes, the earth feels, the earth responds to the actions of the people. When the people treat the earth with respect, the earth thrives. When the people treat the earth with disrespect, the earth suffers.

<sup>3</sup> The earth is the source of all life. The plants grow from the earth, the animals eat the plants, the people eat the animals. The earth gives them food and shelter, water and air, everything they need to survive. The earth is the mother, the provider, the giver of all gifts.

<sup>4</sup> The earth is also the receiver. When the people die, they return to the earth. Their bodies become part of the soil, nourishing new life. Their spirits return to the spirit world, but their bones remain, holding the memory of the people, keeping them connected to the land.

<sup>5</sup> The old ones understood this cycle of giving and receiving. They knew that they had to give back to the earth what they took. They knew that they had to honor the animals they killed, the plants they harvested, the water they drank. They knew that every action had a consequence, every choice had a price.

<sup>6</sup> This is why they performed ceremonies. The ceremonies were not just rituals. They were ways of maintaining the balance, of keeping the relationship with the earth healthy, of ensuring that the cycle of life would continue.

<sup>7</sup> The ceremonies were also ways of remembering. The people remembered where they came from, who they were, what their responsibilities were. They remembered the ancestors who had taught them the sacred ways, the spirits who had given them the ceremonies, the land that had sustained them.

<sup>8</sup> The vision of the earth was a vision of connection. The people were not separate from the earth. They were part of it, related to everything that lived and moved and had being. The earth was not a thing to be used. It was a community to be joined.

<sup>9</sup> This is the gift of the old ones. They saw the earth as sacred, and they lived their lives accordingly. They walked gently, took only what they needed, gave thanks for everything they received. They lived in harmony with the land, and the land sustained them for thousands of years.

<sup>10</sup> The challenge of the present is to recover this vision. The world is sick, and the sickness comes from our separation from the earth. We have forgotten that we are related to all life. We have forgotten that the earth is our mother, our provider, our home. We have forgotten how to walk gently, how to give thanks, how to live in balance.

<sup>11</sup> The old ones have not forgotten. The ceremonies continue. The sacred places are still there, waiting for those who know how to see them. The elders are still speaking, still teaching, still reminding us of the way. The path is open to all who are willing to walk it.

<sup>12</sup> The vision of the earth is a vision of hope. If we can recover the connection, if we can learn to walk the Good Red Road, we can heal the world. We can restore the balance. We can live in harmony with all life, as the old ones did, as the earth invites us to do.

## **The Circle of All Things**

<sup>1</sup> Everything in the universe is a circle. The sun circles the sky, the moon circles the earth, the earth circles the sun. The seasons circle from spring to summer to fall to winter and back to spring. Life circles from birth to youth to maturity to old age to death and back to rebirth.

<sup>2</sup> The circle is the shape of the sacred. It has no beginning and no end, no top and no bottom. It is whole, complete, perfect. It represents the unity of all things, the connection of all beings, the sacred hoop of life.

<sup>3</sup> The Medicine Wheel is a circle. It represents the four directions, the four seasons, the four stages of life. It represents the balance of male and female, of sky and earth, of life and death. It represents the journey of the soul through the world, the path of the spirit through the sacred hoop.

<sup>4</sup> The circle is also the shape of the community. The people sit in a circle, where everyone is equal, everyone can see everyone, everyone has a voice. The circle is the shape of the council, the ceremony, the prayer. It is the shape of the way.

<sup>5</sup> The circle is the shape of the sacred hoop. The sacred hoop is the circle of life, the connection of all beings, the unity of the people with the land, the spirits, and the Great Mystery. When the sacred hoop is intact, the world is in balance. When the sacred hoop is broken, disharmony follows.

<sup>6</sup> The old ones lived in the circle. Their villages were circles, their ceremonies were circles, their lives were circles. They understood that everything is connected, everything is related, everything is part of the sacred hoop.

<sup>7</sup> The circle teaches us about our place in the world. We are not the center of the circle, not the most important part. We are one part among many, one being among many, one voice among many. We have our place, but so does everyone else.

<sup>8</sup> The circle also teaches us about our responsibilities. When we stand in the circle, we are connected to everyone else. What we do affects everyone else. Our choices ripple through the circle, touching everyone, changing everything.

<sup>9</sup> The circle is the shape of healing. When we are broken, the circle brings us back together. When we are lost, the circle shows us the way. When we are alone, the circle reminds us that we are part of something larger.

<sup>10</sup> The circle is the shape of the Good Red Road. It is the path of balance, the path of harmony, the path of connection. It is the way of the people, the way of the ancestors, the way of all life.

<sup>11</sup> May we all find our place in the circle. May we all walk the sacred hoop. May we all live in balance with all life, as the old ones did, as the earth invites us to do.

<sup>12</sup> The Sacred Hoop: Walking the Good Red Road

<sup>13</sup> A Guide to Native American Spiritual Teachings

## **The Challenge of Memory**

<sup>1</sup> The people have not forgotten. Despite everything—the wars, the removals, the boarding schools, the attempts to erase their culture—they have held onto the old ways. The ceremonies continue. The songs are still sung. The sacred places are still honored.

<sup>2</sup> But the challenge is real. The old ones who carried the knowledge are passing on. The children grow up in a different world, surrounded by different influences. The language fades. The stories are told less often. The connection to the land is broken for many who have been forced from their ancestral homes.

<sup>3</sup> This is the challenge of memory. How do we remember what we have been taught? How do we pass it on to the next generation? How do we keep the sacred ways alive in a world that does not understand them?

<sup>4</sup> The answer is ceremony. The ceremonies are the carriers of the tradition. When the people perform the Sun Dance, they are not just dancing. They are remembering. They are making the connection with the ancestors, with the spirits, with the land. They are passing on the knowledge to the next generation.

<sup>5</sup> The ceremonies are also the healers. When the people are wounded by history, by oppression, by loss, the ceremonies restore them. The sweat lodge cleanses the pain. The vision quest gives them purpose. The healing chants bring them back to balance.

<sup>6</sup> The answer is also the elders. The elders are the ones who hold the knowledge. They are the ones who have walked the path the longest, who have seen the most seasons turn, who carry the wisdom of the ages. When the people listen to the elders, they remember who they are.

<sup>7</sup> The answer is the land. The land remembers. The sacred places are still there, holding the power of the ancestors, waiting for the people to return. When the people go to the sacred places, the land reminds them of the old ways. The spirits speak through the mountains and the rivers, through the trees and the animals.

<sup>8</sup> The answer is the children. The children are the future. When the children learn the songs and the stories, the traditions continue. When the children go to the ceremonies, they become part of the sacred hoop. When the children are raised with the old ways, they carry the tradition forward.

<sup>9</sup> The challenge of memory is a challenge for all of us. We must remember who we are. We must remember where we came from. We must remember the old ways. We must pass them on to the next generation.

## **The Two Roads**

<sup>1</sup> There are two roads in this world. One is the road of separation, the path of forgetting. The other is the road of connection, the path of remembering. The people call the second the Good Red Road.

<sup>2</sup> The road of separation says that we are alone, that we are separate from each other and from the earth. It says that the earth is a resource to be used, that the animals are objects to be exploited, that the spirits are myths to be forgotten. It says that the goal of life is accumulation, that we must take as much as we can and hold onto it.

<sup>3</sup> This road leads to suffering. It leads to loneliness, to greed, to violence, to the destruction of the earth. It leads to a world that is sick and broken, a world where nothing is connected to anything else.

<sup>4</sup> The Good Red Road says the opposite. It says that we are connected, that we are related to everything in creation. It says that the earth is alive and sacred, that the animals are our relatives, that the spirits are real. It says that the goal of life is balance, that we must take only what we need and give back what we can.

<sup>5</sup> This road leads to healing. It leads to community, to generosity, to peace, to the restoration of the earth. It leads to a world where everything is connected, where the sacred hoop is intact, where all life flourishes.

<sup>6</sup> The choice between these two roads is the choice of every person, every generation, every culture. Which road will we walk? Which road will we choose?

<sup>7</sup> The old ones chose the Good Red Road. They walked it for thousands of years, and it sustained them. They lived in balance with the earth, and the earth sustained them. They honored the spirits, and the spirits guided them.

<sup>8</sup> We can choose that road too. The old ways are still there, waiting to be rediscovered. The ceremonies are still there, waiting to be performed. The sacred places are still there, waiting to be honored. The spirits are still there, waiting to be acknowledged.

<sup>9</sup> The choice is ours. We can walk the road of separation, the path of suffering, the way of destruction. Or we can walk the Good Red Road, the path of connection, the way of healing.

## **The Return of the Sacred**

<sup>1</sup> There is a longing in the world today. People feel it in their hearts, a sense that something is missing, that they have lost something precious. They search for it in many places—in possessions, in relationships, in careers—but they cannot find it. They have lost connection with the sacred.

<sup>2</sup> The old ones know what the longing means. It is the longing for the sacred, the longing for connection, the longing for the Good Red Road. It is the longing for the world of the spirits, the world of the ancestors, the world of the sacred hoop.

<sup>3</sup> The longing is a gift. It is a sign that the spirit is awakening, that the soul is seeking, that the heart is ready to return. It is an invitation to step back onto the Good Red Road, to find the way to healing, to rediscover the sacred.

<sup>4</sup> The old ones welcome the longing. They know what it means. They know that it is the beginning of the journey, the first step on the path. They offer their teachings, their ceremonies, their presence to those who are seeking.

<sup>5</sup> The ceremonies are open to all who come with respect. The sweat lodge welcomes the seeker, cleansing them of the old patterns. The vision quest opens the way to the spirits, offering guidance

and purpose. The healing chants restore the balance, bringing the soul back into harmony. The sacred pipe offers connection to the Great Mystery, uniting the people with all creation.

<sup>6</sup> The sacred places are open to all who come with reverence. The mountains and the valleys, the rivers and the springs, the buttes and the caves—all are waiting for those who seek the sacred. The land remembers the old ways, and it offers them to those who are willing to listen.

<sup>7</sup> The spirits are open to all who come with humility. They are not exclusive, not possessive, not jealous. They welcome all who seek the sacred way, regardless of their origin, their language, their culture. The Good Red Road is open to all.

<sup>8</sup> This is the return of the sacred. It is happening all around us, in many places, in many ways. People are rediscovering the old ways, finding their way back to the Good Red Road. The ceremonies are being revived, the songs are being sung, the sacred places are being honored.

<sup>9</sup> The return is not easy. The road is long, the journey is hard, the obstacles are many. But the longing is strong, the spirits are near, the healing is real. The sacred is returning, and the world is being healed.

## **The Elders Speak**

<sup>1</sup> The elders have spoken, and their words are for all who will listen. They remind us of what we have forgotten, teach us what we have lost, guide us back to the Good Red Road.

<sup>2</sup> The elders say: "You are not alone. You are connected to everything in creation. The animals, the plants, the rivers, the mountains—they are your relatives. Respect them, honor them, care for them."

<sup>3</sup> The elders say: "Walk gently on the earth. Take only what you need, and give back what you can. The earth is your mother, and she sustains you. Care for her, and she will care for you."

<sup>4</sup> The elders say: "Honor the spirits. They are real, and they are near. They guide you, protect you, offer you their power. Listen to them, learn from them, thank them for their gifts."

<sup>5</sup> The elders say: "Remember the ceremonies. They are the way to the sacred, the path to the spirits, the door to the Good Red Road. Perform them with respect, pass them on to the children, keep them alive."

<sup>6</sup> The elders say: "Live in balance. Balance is the way of health, the way of harmony, the way of the sacred hoop. Balance your work and your rest, your giving and your receiving, your doing and your being."

<sup>7</sup> The elders say: "Love one another. The love you give is the love you receive. The kindness you offer is the kindness that returns. The connection you make is the connection that sustains you."

<sup>8</sup> The elders say: "Hope is real. The world can be healed. The sacred hoop can be restored. The Good Red Road can be walked. Do not lose heart. Keep walking."

<sup>9</sup> The elders speak, and we listen. Their words are ancient, but they are also new, speaking to the challenges of our time, offering guidance for the journey ahead. They remind us of who we are, where we came from, what we are called to do.

<sup>10</sup> We are the children of the earth, the relatives of all life, the carriers of the sacred way. We are the ones who will restore the balance, heal the world, walk the Good Red Road. The elders have shown us the way. Now it is up to us to walk it.

## **The Future of the Sacred Way**

<sup>1</sup> What will become of the old ways? Will they survive the pressures of the modern world? Will they fade away, remembered only in books and museums? Or will they continue, adapting to new times, speaking to new generations?

<sup>2</sup> The old ones are not worried. The sacred ways have survived so much—the wars, the removals, the attempts to erase them. They have shown their strength, their resilience, their enduring power. They will survive this time too.

<sup>3</sup> The sacred ways are not fragile. They are rooted in the land, in the ceremonies, in the hearts of the people. They are carried by the elders and taught to the children. They are lived in the daily practices of respect and gratitude, of balance and connection.

<sup>4</sup> The sacred ways are also adaptable. They have changed and evolved over the centuries, responding to new circumstances while maintaining their core teachings. They will continue to adapt, speaking in new ways to new generations, while keeping the sacred hoop intact.

<sup>5</sup> The sacred ways are needed now more than ever. The world is sick, and it needs healing. The sacred ways offer that healing, the restoration of balance, the connection with all life. They are the medicine the world needs.

<sup>6</sup> The future of the sacred way is in the hands of those who walk it. Every person who returns to the ceremonies, who honors the sacred places, who lives in balance with the earth, is carrying the tradition forward. Every child who learns the songs and the stories, who participates in the ceremonies, is keeping the sacred ways alive.

<sup>7</sup> The future is not determined. It is being created in every moment, by every choice, by every action. The old ones have given us the teachings, the ceremonies, the way. Now it is up to us to walk it, to carry it forward, to pass it on.

<sup>8</sup> The Good Red Road stretches out before us. It is the path of the ancestors, the path of the spirits, the path of all life. It is the path of balance, of connection, of healing. It is the path home.

<sup>9</sup> May we walk it with respect. May we walk it with gratitude. May we walk it with courage. May we walk it together, as one people, one family, one sacred hoop.

## **The Way of the Heart**

<sup>1</sup> In the end, all the teachings come down to one thing: the way of the heart. The ceremonies, the songs, the prayers—all are meant to open the heart, to connect us with the sacred, to help us live in balance.

<sup>2</sup> The heart is where the Great Mystery dwells within us. It is the seat of our deepest knowing, the source of our true guidance, the place of our connection to all life. When we live from the heart, we walk the Good Red Road.

<sup>3</sup> The heart is not the same as emotion. Emotions come and go, shifting like the wind. The heart is deeper, more constant, more reliable. It is the place of wisdom, of compassion, of love. It is the place where we are most ourselves, most connected, most alive.

<sup>4</sup> To live from the heart is to live with awareness. We are aware of our connection to all life, aware of the impact of our actions, aware of the sacredness of every moment. We are aware of the beauty of the earth, the wisdom of the elders, the guidance of the spirits.

<sup>5</sup> To live from the heart is to live with gratitude. We are grateful for the gifts of the earth, the love of our families, the guidance of the spirits. We are grateful for the challenges that help us grow, the pain that teaches us, the joy that sustains us.

<sup>6</sup> To live from the heart is to live with compassion. We feel the suffering of others, and we respond with kindness. We see the woundedness of the world, and we work to heal it. We know that we are all connected, and we act accordingly.

<sup>7</sup> To live from the heart is to live with purpose. We know why we are here, what we are meant to do, where we are going. We are guided by our vision, our calling, our deepest desire to serve.

<sup>8</sup> The way of the heart is the way of the Good Red Road. It is the way of the ancestors, the way of the spirits, the way of all life. It is the way home.

<sup>9</sup> May we all find our way to the heart. May we all walk the Good Red Road. May we all live in balance, in connection, in the sacred hoop of life.