



# The Legend of the Rainbow Warriors

*Navajo, Hopi, Ojibwe, Cree, Anishinabe, Lakota*

In Native American traditions, the rainbow symbolically occupies a special place-

Walk on a rainbow trail; walk on a trail of song, and all about you will be beauty. There is a way out of every dark mist, over a rainbow trail.

—Navajo Song

Certainly, it is a symbol of the Spirit and the union of peoples:

As Native Americans, we believe the Rainbow is a sign from the Spirit in all things. It is a sign of the union of all people, like one big family. The unity of all humanity, many tribes and peoples, is essential.

—Thomas Banyacya, late spokesman for the Hopi traditional elders from Hotevilla

Native prophecies say that mixed-blood and white people who grew their hair long and wore beads would come to the Native healers and ask for guidance... The prophecies say that they would return as the Rainbow people in bodies of different colours: red, white, yellow and black. The old ones said that they would return and unite to help restore balance to the Earth.

The story of these Rainbow Warriors is told by many peoples in many different ways. We feel that we are in that time now when the Rainbow Warriors are coming about. (...) So it is a time where we



have to acknowledge that we are all human beings upon the same planet and that's what the Rainbow Warriors is all about.

—Sun Bear, Ojibwe teacher and author

A good summary of the different legends of the Rainbow Warriors is found in Steven McFadden's book *Legend of the Rainbow Warriors*, written in 1987. Here McFadden states that these legends were transmitted generations ago by Native American 'visionaries.'

Light-skinned people will come out of the eastern sea in enormous canoes powered by huge white wings (...). The people who get off these boats will also be like birds (...). One of their feet will be like that of a dove, the other like that of an eagle. The foot of the dove will represent a beautiful, new religion of love and kindness, and the foot of the eagle will represent strength, technology, and power. The sharp foot of the eagle will dominate (...) they will claw at the Red Nations with their eagle feet, exploiting and enslaving them.

After offering mixed resistance to this clawing, the Indians would seemingly lose their spirit and be herded into small, barren enclaves. This would be the way of their world for many years: poverty, suffering, disrespect. Then in time the world would become sick. Because of unrelenting greed, the Earth would be filled with deadly liquids and metals, the air would be rendered foul with smoke and ash, and even the rains (...) would plummet in poison drops. Birds would fall dead from the air. Fish would turn belly up in the waters. Forests would begin to wither. A hole would open in the sky. Wars would circle the globe. Weather would wobble wildly. There would be mounting chaos (...) in the world.

When these things begin to happen, the Indian people would be all but helpless. But then Light would come from the East, and the natives would begin to find their strength, their pride, and their wisdom. So would many of their brothers and sisters of the other nations –white, yellow and black– who would feel strongly the calling of Spirit. They would understand the basic fact that it is the Earth which gives us the water, food, clothing, shelter and beauty necessary for the circle of life. These awakened souls would find each other, and together they would teach all the people of the world to have respect for the Earth Mother, of whose very stuff human beings are made. Respect would prevail.

Under the symbol of the rainbow all the races and religions would band together to spread the great wisdom of living in harmony with each other and with all the creations of the world –and thereby

restore the Sacred Hoop. Those who teach this way would be the Warriors of the Rainbow, but they would do no harm. Using peaceful means alone, and by becoming examples of right living, after a great struggle they would bring an end to the destruction and desecration of the Earth.

The tasks of Rainbow Warriors would be many and great. There would be mountains of ignorance to conquer and they would meet prejudice and hatred. They must be dedicated, unwavering in their strength, and strong heart. They would find willing hearts and minds that would follow them on this road of healing. Peace and plenty would then reign through a long and joyous Golden Age.

But there is a version of the legend that has a very close relationship with traditional stories and storytelling. This is the version of the Cree People, conveyed by the Cherokee-descent writer Lelanie Fuller-Anderson in 2011. The Cree version of the legend says:

There was an old lady, from the 'Cree' tribe, named 'Eyes of Fire,' who prophesied that one day, because of the white mans' or Yo-ne-gis' greed, there would come a time, when the fish would die in the streams, the birds would fall from the air, the waters would be blackened, and the trees would no longer be, mankind as we would know it would all but cease to exist.

There would come a time when the 'keepers of the legend, stories, culture rituals, and myths, and all the Ancient Tribal Customs' would be needed to restore us to health. They would be mankind's key to survival, they were the 'THE WARRIORS OF THE RAINBOW.' (...) all the peoples of all the tribes would form a New World of Justice, Peace, Freedom and recognition of the Great Spirit.

(...)

'THE WARRIORS OF THE RAINBOW' would show the peoples (...) how to make the Earth (...) beautiful again. These Warriors would give the people principles or rules to follow to make their path right with the world. These principles would be those of the Ancient Tribes. 'THE WARRIORS OF THE RAINBOW' would teach the people of the ancient practices of Unity, Love and Understanding. They would teach of Harmony among people in all four comers of the Earth.

(...)

Their children would once again be able to run free and enjoy the treasures of Nature and Mother Earth. Free from the fears of toxins and destruction, wrought by the Yo-ne-gi and his practices of greed.

The rivers would again run clear, the forests be abundant and beautiful, the animals and birds would be replenished. The powers of the plants and animals would again be respected and conservation of all that is beautiful would become a way of life.

The poor, sick and needy would be cared for by their brothers and sisters of the Earth. (...) Those who demonstrated their love, wisdom, and courage and those who showed that they could and did work for the good of all, would be chosen as the leaders or Chiefs. (...)

The tasks of these 'WARRIORS (...) are many and great. There will be terrifying mountains of ignorance to conquer and they shall find prejudice and hatred. They must be dedicated, unwavering in their strength, and strong of heart. They will find willing hearts and minds that will follow them on this road of returning 'Mother Earth' to beauty and plenty –once more.

The day will come, it is not far away. The day that we shall see how we owe our very existence to the people of all tribes 'THE WARRIORS OF THE RAINBOW' that have maintained their culture and heritage. Those that have kept the rituals, stories, legends, and myths alive. It will be with this knowledge, the knowledge that they have preserved, that we shall once again return to 'harmony' with Nature, Mother Earth, and mankind. It will be with this knowledge that we shall find our 'Key to our Survival.'

(...)

Without using the term Rainbow Warriors, but offering a certainly similar narrative of events, the Anishinabe Nations, from the Great Lakes area, speak about the Seven Fires Prophecy. This prophecy is prior to the arrival of Europeans, and is recorded and spiritually encoded in the Wampum Belt of the Seven Fires. This is a ritual and ceremonial object composed of bead strings, which has been passed from keeper to keeper for hundreds of years. In the book by Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*, 1988, speaking of the last prophet, this prophecy says:

The Seventh Prophet that came to the people long ago was said to be different from the other prophets. This prophet was described as 'young and had a strange light in his eyes' and said:

'In the time of the Seventh Fire New People will emerge. They will retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail. Their steps will take them to the Elders who they will ask to guide them on their



journey. But many of the Elders will have fallen asleep. They will awaken to this new time with nothing to offer. Some of the Elders will be silent because no one will ask anything of them. The New People will have to be careful in how they approach the Elders. The task of the New People will not be easy.

If the New People will remain strong in their quest the Water Drum of the Midewiwin Lodge will again sound its voice. There will be a rebirth of the Anishinabe Nation and a rekindling of old flames. The Sacred Fire will again be lit.

It is this time that the light skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire, an eternal fire of peace, love brotherhood and sisterhood. If the light skinned race makes the wrong choice of the roads, then the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back at them and cause much suffering and death to all the Earth's people.'

Commenting on the prophecy, William Commanda, carrier and custodian of the Wampum Belt and the Seven Fires Prophecy, and founder of the Circle of All Nations, said:

In the time of the Seventh Fire, a New People would emerge. They would retrace their steps to find the wisdom that was left by the side of the trail long ago. Their steps would take them to the elders, who they would ask to guide them on their journey. If the New People remain strong in their quest, the sacred drum will again sound its voice. There will be an awakening of the people, and the sacred fire will again be lit. At this time, the light-skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. One road is the road of greed and technology without wisdom or respect for life. This road represents a rush to destruction. The other road is spirituality, a slower path that includes respect for all living things. If we choose the spiritual path, we can light yet another fire, an Eight Fire, and begin an extended period of Peace and healthy growth.

In this regard, William Commanda said in August 2002: 'The time has come to light up the Eight Fire.'

Without using the term 'Rainbow Warriors,' but closely related to them, there is also another prophecy, that of Crazy Horse, the Lakota Oglala leader recognised for his courage in battle. He beat, together with

Chief Sitting Bull, General Custer's 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, in 1876. It is said that Crazy Horse was also a man of deep spirituality, something similar to what in European culture they would have called a mystic warrior. It is said (Brown, 1974; McFadden, 1989) that, four days before being killed by soldiers of the US army, while in prison and unarmed, the following happened:

This was passed on by Chief Joe Chasing Horse, a relative of the great Lakota warrior Crazy Horse. He translated it from the words of a grandmother who was present when the words were spoken.

This is a statement of Crazy Horse as he sat smoking the Sacred Pipe at Paha Sapa with Sitting Bull for the last time, 4 days before he was assassinated.

Many of these words are often repeated, but there is one line often left out, that of the 'young white ones.'

(...)

'Upon suffering beyond suffering; the Red Nation shall rise again and it shall be a blessing for a sick world.

'A world filled with broken promises, selfishness and separations.

'A world longing for light again.

'I see a time of seven generations when all the colors of mankind will gather under the sacred Tree of Life and the whole Earth will become one circle again.

'In that day there will be those among the Lakota who will carry knowledge and understanding of unity among all living things, and the young white ones will come to those of my people and ask for this wisdom.

'I salute the light within your eyes where the whole universe dwells.

'For when you are at that center within you and I am in that place within me, we shall be as one.'

He saw his people being driven into spiritual darkness and poverty while the white people prospered in a material way all around them. But even in the darkest times he saw that the eyes of a few of his people kept the light of dawn and the wisdom of the Earth, which they passed on to some of their grandchildren. He saw the coming of automobiles and airplanes and twice he saw great darkness and heard screams and explosions when millions died in two great world wars.

But after the second great war passed, he saw a time come when his people began to awaken, not all at once, but a few here and

there, and then more and more. He saw that they were dancing in the beautiful light of the Spirit World under the Sacred Tree even while still on Earth. Then he was amazed to see that dancing under that tree were representatives of all races who had become brothers, and he realized that the world would be made new again and in peace and harmony, not just by his people, but by members of all the races of humankind.

It is deeply striking that, for the Lakota People, each generation is counted for 20 years. With these words being pronounced in the year of the Crazy Horse's death, that is, 1877, the seventh generation that the Lakota leader speaks about would place us in 2017. □

### Sources

- Benton-Banai, E. (1988). *The Mishomis Book - The Voice of the Ojibway*. St. Paul, BC: Red School House Publishers.
- Brown, V. (1974). *Voices of Earth and Sky*. Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph.
- Fuller-Anderson, L. (2011). *Warriors of the Rainbow*. Kindle Publishing
- McFadden, S. (1989). *Legend of the Rainbow Warriors*. New York: The Harlem Writers Guild Press.

*Associated text of the Earth Charter*

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace...

