



The Four Colors

Hopi People - USA

There was the cycle of the mineral, the rock. There was the cycle of the plant and now we're in the cycle of the animal ... coming to the end of that and beginning the cycle of the human being. When we get into the cycle of the human being, the highest and greatest powers that we have will be released to us. They will be released from that light or soul that we carry to the mind. But right now we're coming to the end of the animal cycle and we have investigated ourselves and learned what it is to be like an animal on this earth.

At the beginning of this cycle of time, long ago, the Great Spirit came down and He made an appearance and He gathered the peoples of this earth together – they say on an island which is now beneath the water – and He said to the human beings,

'I'm going to send you to four directions and over time I'm going to change you to four colors, but I'm going to give you some teachings and you will call these the Original Teachings and when you come back together with each other you will share these so that you can live and have peace on earth, and a great civilization will come about.'

And he said:

'During the cycle of time I'm going to give each of you two stone tablets. When I give you those stone tablets, don't cast those upon the ground. If any of the brothers and sisters of the four directions and the four colors cast their tablets on the ground, not only will human beings have a hard time, but almost the earth itself will die.'

And so he gave each of us a responsibility and we call that the Guardianship. To the Indian people, the red people, he gave the Guardianship of the earth. We were to learn during this cycle of time the teachings of the earth, the plants that grow from the earth, the foods that you can eat, and the herbs that are healing so that, when we came back together with the other brothers and sisters, we could share this knowledge with them. Something good was to happen on the earth.

To the South, he gave the yellow race of people the Guardianship of the wind. They were to learn about the sky and breathing and how to take that within ourselves for spiritual advancement. They were to share that with us at this time.

To the West He gave the black race of people the Guardianship of the water. They were to learn the teachings of the water which is the chief of the elements, being the most humble and the most powerful. (...)

To the North He gave the white race of people the Guardianship of the fire. If you look at the center of many of the things they do you will find the fire. (...) The fire consumes, and also moves. This is why it was the white brothers and sisters who began to move upon the face of the earth and reunite us as a human family.

And so a long time passed, and the Great Spirit gave each of the four races two stone tablets. (...)

So we went through this cycle of time and each of the four races went to their directions and they learned their teachings. □

Adapted by Lee Brown, member of the Cherokee Nation and the Wolf Clan (1986).

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Comments

Lee Brown, adapter of this Hopi myth and member of the Cherokee Nation, is an expert in emotional education of the University of British Columbia. He has been director of the Institute of Aboriginal Health and the Indigenous Doctoral Program of the Department of Educational

Studies in this same university and keynote speaker in over one hundred Aboriginal conferences.

The Hopi myth which Dr. Brown versioned above is an excerpt from a well-known and much longer talk that he gave in 1986 during the Continental Indigenous Council in Fairbanks, Alaska (Joel Smith, 2015). In that famous speech Brown spoke of the Hopi prophecies that, according to the Elders of many native peoples of the Americas, relate to our times.

Brown commented at the time that the First Nations had twice tried to warn the nations of the world of the hard times ahead if the four colours of the Hopi myth did not unite in a single circle of speech. The first time they tried it was in the 1920s, at the League of Nations, where they were not listened to. The second time they tried it was after the Second Shaking of the Earth – corresponding to World War II – in what in the prophecies they had called the House of Mica – the current United Nations building in New York, which looks like a glass building. On this second occasion, in 1992, they were allowed to speak before the United Nations General Assembly, but the aboriginal peoples of the Americas were not allowed to enter the international body as full nations, as they had requested in order to close the circle of the four colours of the Hopi myth.

Finally, Brown commented that there would be a Third Shaking of the Earth not long after the white race put a ‘house in the sky’ – something the Elders have associated with the International Space Station. After discussing this, Brown remarked:

And so they say there’s going to be the Third Shaking of the Earth. It’s not going to be a good thing to see but we will survive it. We will survive it.

And when we survive it, then there’s going to be another attempt to make a circle of the human beings on the Earth. And this time the Native people will not have to petition to join but will be invited to enter the circle because they say the attitude towards us will have changed by then, and people will let us into the circle and all the four colors of the four directions will share their wisdom, and there will be a peace on earth. (Brown, 1986)

In a way, the Hopi myth of the four colours could be part of what in this Collection and in some academic circles we have called the Myths of the Future (Cutanda, 2022),¹ and perhaps it would be pointing to the serious environmental crisis of which other myths spoke, such as the Cree legend of the Warriors of the Rainbow, also in this Collection.

Sources

Blog Talk Radio. (2014, April 12). *Lee Brown, Cherokee prophecies: 1986 – Continental Indigenous Council in Fairbanks* [Audio]. Available on <https://www.blogtalkradio.com/prophecykeepers/2014/04/12/lee-brown-cherokee-prophecies-1986-continental-indigenous-council-in-fairbanks>

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Cutanda, G. A. (2022). *The Earth Stories Collection – Vol. 1: The Myths of the Future*. Granada, Spain: TESC Press.

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Associated text of the Earth Charter

The Way Forward: In order to build a sustainable global community, the nations of the world must renew their commitment to the United Nations, fulfill their obligations under existing international agreements, and support the implementation of Earth Charter principles with an international legally binding instrument on environment and development.

¹ In this work we explained the difference between prophecies and Myths of the Future.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.

Preamble: We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.

Preamble: Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Preamble – The Challenges Ahead: We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment.

Preamble – The Challenges Ahead: The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world.

Preamble – Universal Responsibility: We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked.

