



One Earth Sangha

Teaching from Pennie Opal Plant and Casey Camp-Horinek

from Indigenous Cosmology and System Change webinar

Transcript of 0:00-31:21

Shannon Biggs: Good morning everybody. We are going to officially get started. My name is Shannon Biggs. I'm a co-founder of Movement Rights, along with Pennie Opal Plant. We also are joined by Casey Camp-Horinek who I assume everybody knows. Casey is a Ponca elder and will give a fuller introduction of herself shortly. Also we're honored to have her as the chair of the board of Movement Rights, among many other many other roles: mother, grandmother, traditional drum keeper.

Today we're going to be talking about rights of nature in the context of Indigenous peoples and the sacred system of life, looking at the ideas of original instructions, looking at Indigenous cosmology and how rights of nature plays a role in that, as well as to look at where we've come from or gone as a society away from these original instructions and the role of corporations and colonization, and how do we make our way back, how do we create the system change that needs to be? So that's the context for the conversation today. I think it's going to be really lively. I'm really excited to be a part of this webinar. Clearly there was such tremendous response to this that many of you are also hungry for this conversation. So we're gonna dive right in. And then, near the end, we're also going to talk about how to take next steps. Because it's one thing for us to share and have this conversation on Zoom, but especially in these times of COVID, how do we take those next steps? How do we actually create that system change, although we've seen it all around us over these last weeks and months.



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Movement Rights is an organization started by Pennie and I, even though Pennie and I have worked together - let's see, I was skinny and Pennie had brown hair - so it's been a while. We've been working together for a very long time. We officially launched Movement Rights to work to align human laws with the real laws of Mother Earth. We work with Indigenous tribes around rights of nature, we work with communities, we work globally, we're in the streets, we're at actions, we're in the courts, we're all over the place, even though we're actually pretty tiny. But tiny doesn't matter. We're all powerful together.

So that's the introduction of who Movement Rights is. We'll be sharing more information as we get started but to officially sort of open this session, I'd like to ask Casey if you would start us off in prayer. Thank you.

Casey Camp-Horinek: Computers are tricky. I just figured out I'm muted. Good morning, all. Good morning Shannon and Pennie, and so many friends that have been popping up on the bottom and saying these nice things. It would be nice to hold you and hug you and see you shining faces and feel your energy up close and personal, but it also feels really really good to be joining you today in this other way, this other web of life, this webinar that allows this time to come together.

In my feelings I feel this large circle. I feel this large energy of all of us together in this huge circle. I was speaking a moment ago about a film I was in called DreamKeeper where I had the honor of playing Sky Woman, a sacred being of the Six Nations. She lived in that other place, in the ethers, and yet she was very connected to earth as the ethers are. And that's what it feels like where you and I are right now. All of us who have joined together in this circle today are in the ethers, and we have this magical way of connecting that is new to me and very powerful.



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It's always an honor to be asked to say a prayer, so I'm asking all of you if you would help me, please. I've told my children I'd be with you today and my grandchildren, and I know that from where they are they're sending their energy and their understanding of the new generational way to connect. So in that way I'm gonna light this cedar and sage.

My my oldest son Mekasi is at our Sundance grounds right now. We're not able to be there with him because of this new wave. But a strange thing happened a week ago and I actually wrote it down, which is rare for me. Because a voice came. I don't hear voices, I'm not a channeller or any of that stuff. But this voice said, 'Awaken to the new world.' Never had that happen. But it was so profound that I kept it in my mind and my heart and my spirit. I believe that was about five days ago, I'm not real sure about that. But it helped me to understand who we are, the collective we, and what's going on.

So at this time I have the sacred water present. I have sweetgrass, sage, tobacco, and cedar here, and I'm asking them to help me. This is my little water pitcher, the tiny folks and little people and sacred water.

[Speaks in Ponca]

Great Spirit, sacred one. Sacred earth, our mother. Relatives, grandchildren, children, elders, men, women. Sacred waters. Corn. Four-legs. The wings, the eagle. And all of those that are giving of their energies today to bring us together in a sacred way. We ask you to overlook our shortcomings as two-legs, as human beings. We ask when we look to the west, to the north, to the east, to the south, above and below, and in the beginning and the end, that you guide us today, guide our minds, our thoughts, our feelings, our sharing. If there are things we've overlooked,



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help us to find that. We give thanks that the sun rose today, that the moon guides the rhythms. We ask this red road be open to us and that we truly send love and help and health to all those in need through this time, this thing they call a pandemic. We ask a blessing on that very little virus itself. Let it take pity on us and help us to learn too this time, how [indistinct] that we are, so that we can stand strong and not encroach on our relatives' territory, but to hold them up, those without voices. And to take care of each other in the manner in which we were taught in our original ways. There are many in the hospitals and the nursing homes. There are many unborn listening to us. There are many ancestors guiding this moment. We turn to them and open ourselves to the welcoming of this new world. Help us to walk with honor, dignity, respect. [Speaks in Ponca], thank you. In all directions we ask these things, for all of our relations.

Shannon Biggs: Thank you, Casey. Thank you so much for opening us in such a beautiful and good way. We send prayers out to all of those who are impacted by the virus at this time, and those who are struggling, and those who have passed. And to recognize what a special period of time that we're in as a planet, and why we are all called to be here together at this time as well.

Casey, I'd like to ask you to start the conversation with some of the things that you mentioned in your prayers, to just share a little bit about the original instructions and Indigenous cosmology, and briefly how rights nature fits in with these ideas.

Casey Camp-Horinek: Yeah, it's an interesting concept to try to conceptualize such a large way of being that is actually so simple. Of course I come from the Ponca nation, here in Oklahoma. We are related to five tribes and the [indistinct] tell us that we are Siouxan. Our relatives, the Lakota, are people that we Sundance with, my brother Leonard Crow Dog.



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It can be summed up so simply, and yet it's a complex understanding of: we're all related, we are all related, and Wakonda, the great mystery, placed human beings in a sacred circle along with others. Not separate from, not above, not below, but in a circle manner that keeps us all and moving in harmony.

The original ways that my mom used to tell us when I was young was about being part of the Star Nation. Our people were, our folks are, before they embody on earth. She said that we don't know when because time doesn't really exist except in the Gregorian calendar and these man-made clocks, but some time there was an entity called Red Star Child, and this entity would gaze and with longing at this blue green star and see the beauty there, see the sun rising, see the moon circling, see the buffalo, see the fish streaming in the waters, see the light flowing from the volcanoes, watch the flow of all harmony, and longed to be part of it, and asked Wakonda over and over, "Let me be there, let me be there." Red Star Child eventually was given that honor, to become part of the sacred cycle of life, as long as there was this understanding that Red Star Child - human being - had to fit into that sacred cycle in a harmonious way and would be allowed to be here in this sacred place we call our Mother Earth, [speaks in Ponca].

And so that way, in the Ponca way, we understood that this place that we live is a temporary place, but it's a permanent place for our ancestors and children to participate. And one of the things we've talked about in Movement Rights, that we are not here protecting nature; we are nature protecting itself. And that's how we came about. That is part of the indigenous cosmology from this place that I live. And in many places - the living jungle, the sacred mountains, the ice caps, the sweeping Plains - all have been given a gift of existing in those places. All have their own



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cosmology, but it comes from a similar understanding, that we are part of not separate from that is.

And that's why, within Movement Rights, we've come to understand that if we have to work within a man-made structure, a human-made structure I should say, that rights of nature can be a way that we can move forward with helping others to understand that there is a criteria that we are called to uphold as humans, and that is to recognize our portion of being part of all that is, not separate from. Hope that works, Shannon.

Shannon Biggs: Always perfect, Casey, I promise. Pennie, taking from this, how did we get so far away from this understanding that we are all so deeply connected with the earth and these ideas of original instruction? Maybe you could share with us the journey of humanity away from these beautiful ideas of living in balance with the earth, and as well how do we begin to make our way back?

Pennie Opal Plant: Hello, everyone. Thank you all for being here. Thank you, Shannon and Casey. It's a beautiful day here in the San Francisco Bay where I live. The fog has rolled off of the bay and it's very shiny and beautiful outside. For those that don't know me, I was born and raised here in the Richmond/San Pablo area. My mom was Yaqui and my dad was undocumented Choctaw, Cherokee, and European.

Before I dive into this very long story that needs to be very short, I just want to say that in my family, when my grandson asked me a question, I always start at the beginning of the beginning of the beginning. This is a really important beginning of how how we got to this point in time, but I'm going to go through a lot of information and try to keep it kind of short, and you might want to, if something is interesting to you, you might want to do a little bit of research yourself on it.



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When I was a little girl, I looked around and saw that things were not right. Things were out of balance, and there was feelings that were so destructive around, and there were birds falling out of the sky when I was a little girl from the DDT. And so from a very young age, I I started asking myself, 'What happened here? How did this happen? Because this isn't the way it's supposed to be.' Something inside of me knew that this isn't the way it's supposed to be.

So as I poked around here and there in trying to find information about what happened in this history where I knew that human beings had lived a very different way, that we lived within the sacred system of life, not separate from it, or we were a part of it. As a result of these lifelong questions, I've come to believe that part of what's happened is that colonization started a few thousand years ago at the very least with the people in Asia and Europe. When I think about colonization, I think about - it changed the way people relate to the system of life that we're simply a tiny tiny little part of. But because we have these giant brains, some of us think that we're in control. I think the time that we're living in right now - and Mother Earth has given us all time out, and some people are refusing to take that time out - that we hopefully are understanding who's really in charge here, and it's certainly not us.

So when I looked at the people who arrived here in the 1400s and on, the late 1400s - actually, I found out there were people up in the north coast of North America way before Columbus got here, and probably some of you know that, but they didn't come the way he did. In 1493, Pope Alexander the Sixth created the Doctrine of Discovery that essentially gave Europe nobles - at first it was just Spain and Portugal - the permission from the Pope to go wherever, and if there weren't Christians there, to enslave them if they wouldn't convert to Christianity, to Catholicism in the beginning: that



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they could be essentially treated like animals and anything could be done with them. They came into North America on land that was so beautiful that in the first 100-200 years or so, they thought that it looked like parkland. But that's because the original people here knew how to live within those laws of Mother Earth and how to participate in a reciprocal, respectful way.

So that was the beginning of this very long thread that has wound up where we are today. And because of that very out of balance way of thinking that essentially colonized almost everyone here, we have this system of law. Laws didn't exist here; there were no laws before colonization. I'm just going to leave that there for a few minutes and you all can ponder that in the next days, weeks, and years.

But when the propertied, wealthy men in the Thirteen Colonies got fed up with England taxing them and basically being in control of them, the Crown, they decided that they were going to break away and that's when the Declaration of Independence rolled out that basically called us merciless savages, when I think at this point you know who the merciless savages were. And when they started to create the government that they wanted for themselves - because it was really only for white men of property - they were really nervous about corporations because the corporations had been an arm of the Crown around the world, the East India Corporation. So they wanted to, when they created this government, to make sure that corporations were not going to be powerful here. So in the beginning, corporations were only chartered for a limited period of time, and they had to get permission from the legislature if they were going to be able to continue after that limited period of time. They could only have a specific amount of money to use on that project, and the projects had to be for public good. There were all these boundaries around corporations at the times because the concern was that they would become too powerful.



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And here we are in this time that we're living in, and we're basically living in a corporatocracy. We wind up here in this place where corporations can take your land, they can poison your water, they can destroy the air that you breathe, and not just here in North America but all around the world because the United States has exported that around the world. We know these big multinational corporations that were started here, they're around the world harming our relatives on other continents.

What else did they bring? They brought the idea of property rights. Chief Seattle said, 'How can one sell the air?' Well, now we know how they can sell the air. They're using it to measure the amount of carbon that trees sequester, and that program is harming Indigenous forest-dwelling people around the world. But they finally figured out how to sell the air. It's just outstanding to me. We didn't have those kinds of concepts at all. I think, when Chief Seattle said that, it was especially strong message about how Indigenous people, essentially in North America - people are different, Indigenous people in other parts of the world - but in North America, by and large, people had no property rights. They didn't own land. Everything was held in common. In some tribes here on the Northeast coast, the most wealthy families, to be considered the most honorable, would give everything away in a sharing economy.

They also brought hierarchical systems that a lot of tribal nations here didn't have. There was an equal balance of power and responsibilities that were different, and authority between male and female and all the ones in between. They were respected. After the White House was built, the Zuni people sent their most respected diplomat to the White House, and that was a two-spirited person. So this was early on - I'm sorry, I don't know the year - probably at least 150 years or so ago. And those white men in the White House, they didn't even know what to do with this person. They hadn't ever seen any person like that, that was honored and respected.



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So I'm just giving you a little bit of information about this clash of cultures that happened, that was so profound and so severe and so shocking that it took Indigenous people a while to get to where we are today, seeing that what has happened has impacted the entire world - what's happened in the United States - because of the wealth and the power here that was gained by stealing an entire continent and then making this country rich on the backs of kidnapped and enslaved people from Africa.

Here we are in this amazing moment; it's a such a powerful moment. When Casey said that about - was it, 'Welcome to the new world,' I think you said, Casey? - I got chills. I think that that's what we get to deal with right now. We get to reimagine something that is based on ancient ways of understandings and ancient...how we're supposed to be, this is just how we're supposed to be.

So I think that I've covered it except to just say that the rights of nature movement, the rights of Mother Earth movement, it is such a paradigm-shifting movement and moment that we're in right now. It is a way forward that pulls from all of the wisdom and knowledge and experience to go forward in a way that is safe and sustainable, where we create regenerative communities, where we clean up the mess that humanity has caused and remember our place within this sacred system of life

Oh, I just want to add one thing that I forgot before you go on. So just really quick. So Casey right before you made your prayer, where my office is in my house, I look out over the bay and we're on the hill, and right before you started your prayer, this hawk flew from the north to the south. It was like bringing that wisdom right into us for this these moments that we get to be together.