



Radical Hope

Kurunna Mwarre “Make My Spirit Inside Me Good”

Jonathan Lear in a book called *Radical Hope* writes about the need for radical hope in the face of working through an end of civilisation and he wrote about the Crow Indians. ...

The Indian Crow had a conception of a **good life** but there was no longer a way to live according to the traditional understanding of the good life.

Plenty Coups, the Chief, refused to speak of his life after the passing of the buffalo. He said:

I have not told you half of what happened when I was young. I can think back and tell you much more of war and horse stealing. But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground and they could not lift them up again. After this, nothing happened. There was little singing anywhere. Besides you know that part of the story as well as I do. You saw what happened to us when the buffalo went away.

With the disappearance of the buffalo a traditional way of life came to an end.

The Crow people became depressed; things ceased to matter to them. They had lost :

First the **loss of concepts** (eg those associated with hunting and war)

Second the **loss of events** (eg those associated with preparations for hunting and warfare)

Third the **loss of mental states** (eg those associated with intending to go hunting or intending to go to battle)

Fourth, the **loss of identity** (eg no longer a Chief or warrior or medicine man) .

The story of Plenty Coup, Chickadee and Radical Hope

The dream

The Crow people set alot of store on their dreams. The Chiefs sent Plenty Coup out to dream one night. Plenty Coups had a dream. First through a hole in the ground all the buffalo disappeared. Second Plenty Coups was told that the Four Winds were going to cause a terrible storm in the forest and only one tree would be left standing, the tree of the Chickadee-person. He sees an image of an old man sitting under the tree, that lone tree, and is told, in the dream, that that person is himself. Finally he is told to follow the example of the chickadee:

He is at least in strength but strongest of mind among his kind. He is willing to work for wisdom. The Chickadee-person is a good listener. Nothing escapes his ears, which he has sharpened by constant use. Whenever others are talking together of their successes and failures, there you will find the Chickadee-person listening to their words. But in all his listening he tends to

*his own business. He never intrudes, never speaks in strange company, and yet **never misses a chance to learn from others.** He gains successes and avoids failure by learning how others succeeded or failed, and without great trouble to himself.*

This dream was recounted to the wise men in ceremony and Yellow Bear “the wisest man in the lodge” interpreted it to mean that in Plenty Coup’s lifetime the buffalo would disappear and their traditional way of life would come to an end. The spotted buffalo were the white man’s cows and they would take over the plains. The **role model for the Crow should be the Chickadee**, that remarkable bird who is able to **learn from the wisdom of others.** By following this model, the Crow will be able to survive the upcoming storm and keep their lands.

Plenty Coups said the white man “too often promises to do one thing and then he did another..he is someone who fools nobody..he is smart but not wise”. Plenty Coups told his people: “With what white man knows he can oppress us. If we learn what he knows, he can no longer oppress us again.”

What helped him to survive the cataclysmic rupture that is about to occur-*become a chickadee!*

The chickadee had an established position in traditional life but in the dream the chickadee was put to new usage. Young Plenty Coups’s dream gave the tribe imaginative tools with which to endure a conceptual onslaught.

What helped him to survive the cataclysmic rupture that is about to occur-*become a chickadee!*

The chickadee had an established position in traditional life but the dream put to the chickadee to new usage. Young Plenty Coups was told to acquire the skills of listening and learning from others. The chickadee virtue is that **if one listens and learns from others** in the right way-even in radically different circumstances, even with the collapse of one’s world-something **good** will come out of it. (ie may learn failures and successes of white man)..

Plenty Coup was told to acquire the skills of listening and learning from others. The Chickadee became the symbol to the way forward for the Crow. Plenty Coups became the designated mourner.

Plenty Coups become the designated mourner. The Crow did endure a cultural catastrophe.

Plenty Coups in a USA ceremony—At the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier- ceremonially in full Chieftain headdress ceremonially laid down his coup-stick (fighting stick). He buried it on the US steps and laid it to rest. The Crow decided to collaborate. The Sioux did not and made an enemy of the US government. The laying down of the coup stick was a symbol marking the end of a traditional way of life. The Crow set up the Chickadee school – Little Big Horn College-for their children so they could learn Crow customs and white ways finding a new way forward in changed circumstances.

The Crow had **radical hope**:

Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it.

The Crow had courage:

Aristotle: Five fields of courage:

1. A courageous person has a proper orientation toward what is shameful and what is fearful?
2. Courage must turn to what is fine ie good motivation
3. A courageous person must through experience exercise good judgement
4. Courage involves the risk of loss and enduring certain pains
5. Bold acts that derive from optimism (and not genuine courage) are not courageous.

Reality needs to be faced and there needs to be a call for concepts

The courageous person is someone who is excellent at taking those risks.

Courage requires that one be able to regulate shame and a sense of honour.

Crow-old time courage:

There were two features of Crow warfare ;

- 1) the planting of a coup-stick
- 2) counting coups

The use of a coup-stick was for a warrior to mark his boundary. Each of the clans of the tribe had their own coup stick. A fundamental principle of honour and courage was this: if in battle a warrior stuck his stick in the ground, he must not retreat or leave his stick. A Crow warrior must hold his ground or die losing his coup. The planting of a coup stick was symbolic of the planting of a tree that could not be felled. In effect it marked a boundary across which a non-Crow enemy must not pass.

This was a paradigm of courage....why honour this form of **standing fast**? In the time of the buffalo the coup stick and courage was about-

- The struggle is not simply for survival but also for **recognition**.—ie you were the victor before you struck him down.
- There is **no chance** of a non-Crow **imposing his will** upon the Crow. ie saying there is a fate worse than death.
- One needed to not only destroy the enemy but it was crucial that **the enemy recognise** he was about to be destroyed.
- One hits ones enemy with a coup stick before harming him.
- Hitting one with a coup stick in first instance is to **mark** a boundary and then one kills one because he has violated it.

When the Crow were confined to the reservation they were confronted with a stark choice: either they had to give up the idea that there was any longer a courageous way to live or they had to alter their conception of what courage is.

Plenty Coups asked:

What counts as real leadership now?

Among the Crow-Is there a Crow?

Plenty Coups told his story in order to preserve it and he did so in the hope of a future in which things might start to happen.

Crow: New courage

Plenty Coups laid down his coup stick. He was burying it. But this extraordinary act makes the general point. There was still room in these radically changed circumstances to think about what was appropriate to do. And it was still possible to formulate a stunning answer. The Chickadee. If

Plenty Coups succeeded at this imaginative task then he would never feel shame if he allowed himself to learn from others and he would show a new courage. He carried some of the old forms of courage into the new achieving **recognition, independent territory, a marking of territory culturally and with lands and fought domination.**

It was in this context that Plenty Coups drew on the traditional resources-the chickadee-to formulate new ideals of radical hope and courage. These ideals helped them endure a loss of concepts. It gave the Crow a basis of hope at a time when it was unclear what they could hope for...if they followed the wisdom of chickadee then they could survive and hold onto their lands, laws and culture and transmit them to future generations.

Thru his dream vision Plenty Coups was able to take a valued and honoured spiritual force and to put it to creative uses in facing new challenges. This although Plenty Coups was advocating a new way of life for the Crow, he was drawing upon the past in vibrant ways. Plenty Coups offered the Crow **a traditional way to go forward.**

This resource and further information about Creating A Safe Supportive Environment is available to download at www.casse.org.au/resources.

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