

A Convenient Truth

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The other day I went for a walk with a friend in my town of fifty in Montana. “I’ve got to be back in an hour,” she said. “I’ve got bread rising.” That simple comment struck me.

Time. How different it is when measured by the rising of bread. Organic time. When the soil is ready for planting or when it is time to harvest. Calving time. Sheep shearing time.

Later, I listened to a lecture by Victor Masayesva, Jr., a Hopi filmmaker, on “Indian Time.” He described a conflict among the people in his Hopi village over the solar and lunar calendars and the subtle shift away from organic lunar time. There had always been watchers in the kivas keeping track of the solar and lunar cycles. He went from village to village to see if anyone was still watching. Was anyone still keeping track? No one was. “What’s the point?” they said. Everyone had shifted over to the Western calendar and holidays. It was more convenient.

We pay a lot of attention to the months in which things happen or are supposed to happen . . . and definitely the reasons for why they happen in those times . . . and it’s quickly being forgotten. Now we do things on weekends because it’s convenient. We’re not doing things when we’re supposed to; when those beings are present that are there to help us.¹

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
 3 FRIDAY - 4:24 Cancer	 2 SUNDAY - 1:21 Aries	 2 MONDAY - 9:29 Taurus	 1 WEDNESDAY - 9:13 Gemini	 7 THURSDAY - 9:01 Libra	 5 FRIDAY - 9:25 Ophiuchus	 5 SUNDAY - 4:31 Sagittarius	 3 MONDAY - 9:31 Capricorn	 2 WEDNESDAY - 5:7 Aquarius	 1 THURSDAY - 1:32 Cancer	 8 SATURDAY - 9:21 Leo	 8 TUESDAY - 9:52 Leo
 10 FRIDAY - 9:10 Gemini	 9 SUNDAY - 7:31 Leo	 9 MONDAY - 9:37 Leo	 8 WEDNESDAY - 7:48 Virgo	 14 THURSDAY - 9:21 Capricorn	 13 SATURDAY - 4:43 Aquarius	 12 SUNDAY - 1:44 Pisces	 11 TUESDAY - 1:24 Aries	 10 THURSDAY - 9:48 Taurus	 10 SATURDAY - 4:57 Gemini	 15 SUNDAY - 5:26 Leo	 14 MONDAY - 9:14 Ophiuchus
 17 FRIDAY - 1:04 Virgo	 15 SATURDAY - 2:24 Libra	 16 MONDAY - 9:51 Sagittarius	 14 TUESDAY - 2:34 Sagittarius	 22 FRIDAY - 9:7 Taurus	 22 SUNDAY - 4:40 Gemini	 20 MONDAY - 9:18 Cancer	 19 WEDNESDAY - 2:19 Leo	 17 THURSDAY - 1:01 Virgo	 16 FRIDAY - 9:55 Virgo	 22 SUNDAY - 4:25 Aquarius	 21 MONDAY - 2:20 Pisces
 24 FRIDAY - 12:14 Capricorn	 23 SUNDAY - 9:41 Aquarius	 24 TUESDAY - 9:39 Pisces	 23 THURSDAY - 2:01 Cancer	 30 SATURDAY - 1:02 Leo	 28 SUNDAY - 1:19 Virgo	 27 MONDAY - 1:18 Virgo	 25 TUESDAY - 1:43 Libra	 24 THURSDAY - 1:18 Sagittarius	 23 FRIDAY - 9:51 Capricorn	 30 MONDAY - 9:43 Taurus	 30 WEDNESDAY - 7:18 Gemini
			 30 THURSDAY - 2:28 Cancer						 31 SATURDAY - 9:22 Aries		

2020 Annual Lunar Calendar. Fernando de Gorocica, Wikimedia, CC-BY-SA-4.0

¹ Victor Matayesva, Jr., “Indian Time,” May 11, 2015, ASU Libraries, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCzmKrCCr2c>.

The idea that “there are beings there to help us” is an expression of a living relationship to nature and to the cosmos that is at the core of Hopi tradition. The first beings created were the twin boys, Palöngawhoya and Pöqáñghoya. Pöqáñghoya was given the task of keeping the world in order and Palöngawhoya, the task of sending out a call across it: “All the vibratory centers along the earth’s axis from pole to pole resounded his call; the whole earth trembled; the universe quivered in tune. Thus he made the whole world an instrument of sound, and sound an instrument for carrying messages, resounding praise to the Creator of all.”² Each twin was stationed at one of the Earth’s poles to keep it rotating properly.

In the Hopi account, humans were created with the same axis, as a vertebral column with vibratory centers that echoed this primordial sound of life throughout the universe or sounded a warning if anything went wrong. The first of these was the *kópavi* or “open door” on the top of the head through which humans heard the voice of their Creator, Taiowa. “There is only one thing I ask of you: to respect the Creator at all times. Wisdom, harmony, and respect for the love of the Creator who made you.”³

Over time, the first people “lost the inner vision of the *kópavi* on the crowns of their heads: the door was closed to them.” When this happened, the account tells us, the Creator had no choice but to destroy the world. There were still a few people in each village who heard the warning from the Creator through their *kópavi* and instructions on what they must do to survive.

Those saved eventually emerged into the Third World where the Creator again reminded them: “You must always remember the two things I am saying to you now. First, respect me and one another. Second, sing in harmony from the tops of the hills. When I do not hear you singing praises to your Creator, I will know you have gone back to evil ways.”⁴

In time, “instead of singing joyful praises to the Creator, people began to sing praises to the goods they bartered and stored.” The Third World was destroyed by flood, though once again the people who followed the Creator’s instructions were saved, to emerge into this, the Fourth World.

This is where the Hopi account merges with so many ancient flood stories around the world. Noah is saved because he found favor with God (Genesis 6:8). The same story is told in the Quran and there is a version in the Sumerian Gilgamesh epic. In India, the *Satapatha Brahmana* tells us that Manu was chosen for rescue because he had won the favor of the Lord of heaven by penances and prayers.⁵ In China, the Emperor Yu first made his mark on China’s history as the brilliant engineer who tamed the great flood by

² Waters, Frank. *The Book of the Hopi* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977). 4.

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁵ Friedrich Max Müller, ed., *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 12, Julian Eggling, trans., *The Satapatha-Brâhmana according to the Text of the Mâdhyandina School*, Pt. 1, Bks. 1 and 2 (Brookline, MA: Adamant Media Corporation, 2006), 216-230.

building dikes and waterways and was later famous for his counsel on the virtues essential to a wise and benevolent ruler.

There is a common theme here across vastly distant times and cultures. In all the stories, the survivor was the one who still maintained an inner connection to essential virtues. Victor Masayesva, Jr., voices a contemporary concern:

We're really sensitive to the natural world when things happen. So it's my idea that this information is important. We need to know it because climate change is happening It's common Hopi knowledge that it's our behavior that's affecting it. . . . We *are* climate change. We're not distant from it. We're connected to it. We are the plants. We are the universe. . . . These months are our gateway into that knowledge and those connections.

The idea of humans being in (or out of) synch with the cosmos and its Creator is very old. The ancient Chinese also saw dramatic changes in climate as indications that the human had fallen out of harmony with the way of Heaven and Earth. "The way of the Creative works through change and transformation, so that each thing receives its true nature and destiny and comes into permanent accord with the Great Harmony: this is what furthers and what perseveres."⁶

What is it that we, as modern humans, can fall out of harmony with? What have we abandoned for *convenience*? Where have we lost our relationship to the Great Harmony, or even of a sense of what that might be. How many of us have an open door to our own higher voices? While many still preserve this in their religions and spiritual practices, the challenge to the society and its future remains.

In a recent talk at CERN, Juan Enriquez, founder of the Life Sciences Project at Harvard Business School, described some of the latest scientific miracles and their future prospects: life forms in which you can program cells as you program your computer chip; consumer empowerment to make personal decisions, like obtaining read-outs of our DNA; redesigning species.

And that brings up the interesting question: How and when should we redesign humans? One of the debates going on at the National Academies today is [around the power we have] to put a gene drive into mosquitoes so that you will kill all the malaria-carrying mosquitoes. . . . Why is this debate so complicated? Because as soon as you let this loose in Brazil or in Southern Florida—mosquitoes don't respect walls. You're making a decision for the world when you put a gene drive into the air.⁷

Debates going on in the National Academies among experts is one thing. But the prospect of bringing these things to the consumer, to individuals in the society at large, is another. Trying to sort through the claims and counter-claims of political candidates

⁶ Richard Wilhelm and Cary Baynes, trans., *I Ching* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 371.

⁷ Juan Enriquez, "Mind-boggling New Science," TED Talk, February 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUvXogAxxYg>.

while glued to our Facebook pages, Instagram, and 24/7 news, we are awash in fake news and shocking disclosures. Are these the consumers who are going to make such critical decisions about the life and future of the planet? Are we really, individually and collectively, prepared for this?

When I receive an email with someone's good news, Gmail now gives me the choice of clicking on "Congratulations," "That's Great," or "Glad to hear it!" As a writer, this is the ultimate insult. As a human being, it is the ultimate threat: That we would relinquish the capacity to express feelings from the heart or thoughts from the soul for, yes, convenience.

The good news is that many scientists are presenting us with a new paradigm that affirms Thomas Berry's famous statement that the universe is not a collection of objects but a communion of subjects. Physicist Fritjof Capra insists that Earth and the universe are not a collection of isolated objects but a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. "Ultimately deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness . . . understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels a sense of belonging, or connectedness, to the cosmos as a whole."⁸

Here is Creation vibrating with life and energy, worthy of the praise that rings through our venerable traditions. I still have childhood memories of our favorite song of praise each Thanksgiving and the holiday is completed by it to this day.

*For the beauty of the earth
For the beauty of the skies
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies
Lord of all to thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise.*

We must return in time for the rising of the bread, convenient or not.

⁸ Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 7.