

The Message

Good morning, and Happy New Year! Before I begin, I'd just like to say a big thank you to Marilynn and Tom Cullison for all of their help with and work on this service.

A couple of months ago, Marilynn Cullison and the Worship Committee were asking for ideas for worship services. Almost automatically, my mind recalled something--a word--I had seen briefly on a computer screen before I switched to the next webpage. The word was "hozho." (In researching this concept, I have found it is also called, or spelled, "hozro" just about as many times as it is called "hozho." I am not sure which one to use, so I will use "hozho," as that is the first one I saw; but "hozro" is equally appropriate.)

Why the word caught my eye was, first of all, because the webpage said it was the Navajo word for "harmony." As a musician, I aspire to harmony. In music, harmony is considered two or more different notes played at the same time and having a relational measure that is pleasing, or familiar, to the ear. Pythagoras discovered, mathematically, using a string, the harmonies of the octave, the fifth, and the fourth. And, as a musician, there is a satisfaction that occurs when I land that fifth or when I hear that octave and the wavelengths align.

Pythagorus also theorized that celestial bodies like the Sun, Moon, and the planets each emit their own unique hum based on their orbital revolutions; and scholars and philosophers of his day and far after him theorized that there were not only tones to the motions of the celestial bodies but harmonies. They sometimes referred to the Music of the Spheres to discuss this harmony--a beautiful, polyphonic music that the Creator had set in place with mathematically precise proportions at the beginning of creation. This philosophy, when I first learned of it in college, seemed very beautiful to me. While it did not seem very scientific, it explored some of the Mysteries of the universe, and I could accept it on those grounds.

The second reason "hozho" caught my eye was because of an experience I had in 2005. Many of you know that I have identical twin daughters, Rilla and Maggie. However, most of you did not know me during my pregnancy. It was difficult. Maggie grew in utero at a much slower rate than Rilla. The doctors speculated there was Twin-to-Twin-Transfusion Syndrome, but they could not be sure; and Twin-to-Twin-Transfusion Syndrome could have killed Maggie. Also, Rilla had a bad kidney, which the doctors saw when she was at least 19 weeks in utero and for which the doctors could do nothing more than watch. I was on bedrest for four months. I went into early labor on February 15, 2005 and stayed in Pitt Memorial Hospital until March 11, 2005 when the doctors decided to deliver the girls. While I was in Pitt, I was visited every morning by several different groups of student doctors. One group of three young ladies came every morning with a midwife, who, despite the name mid-"wife" was a man. And one day, that midwife slipped into my room alone, sat in the one uninviting plastic chair, and said he just wanted to sit and talk with me.

As we chatted, I asked him how he had come to train to be a midwife. One of the things he told me was that he had studied with the Navajo for a time. I asked him if he had learned about natural remedies from them. He said he had learned that the Navajo often don't try to "heal" a sick person's disease but rather try to lead a sick person to accept the way things are.

When I started studying the Navajo concept of "hozho," I learned more about what that midwife had told me. "Hozho" means "harmony"; but it also means beauty, goodness, success, blessedness, wellbeing, ideal, order, balance. It reminds me of the Sanskrit term "Shantih," which means "the peace that passeth understanding." It stems from the mythologies that base the worldviews of the Navajo people. According to Ray Baldwin Lewis's website "Navajo Culture,"

the Navajo people call themselves the Diné, which means simply “the people.” The Dine believe there are two classes of beings: the Earth People and the Holy People. The job of the Earth People is to keep humans, animals, plants, etc. in balance with the Earth. The Holy People have the ability to help or harm the Earth People.

To flesh out a little more the way the Dine see the world, here is an excerpt from *The Fundamental Law of the Navajo Nation* (2015). It says:

The Holy People ordained
Through songs and prayers,
That
Earth and universe embody thinking,
Water and the sacred mountains embody planning,
Air and variegated vegetation embody life,
Fire, light, and offering sites of variegated sacred stones embody wisdom.
These are the fundamental tenets established.
Thinking is the foundation of planning.
Life is the foundation of wisdom.
Upon our creation, these were instituted within us and we embody them.
Accordingly, we are identified by:
Our Diné name,
Our clan,
Our language,
Our life way,
Our shadow,
Our footprints.
Therefore, we were called the Holy Earth-Surface-People.
From here growth began and the journey proceeds.
Different thinking, planning, life ways, languages, beliefs, and laws appear among
us,
But the fundamental laws placed by the Holy People remain unchanged.
Hence, as we were created with living soul, we remain Diné forever.

In some accounts, the Dine received guidance from the White Shell Woman when the Dine were first established on Earth; and the guidance White Shell Woman gave was what the Dine now call “hozho.” It means all those words I said earlier--beauty, harmony, balance, etc. It is a “complex wellness philosophy” as Michelle Kahn-John and Mary Kolthan call it. It is balance, it is being in right relationship with the world, it is changing the human psyche to be content with things beyond one’s control, it is adjusting our inner self instead of trying to change the outer world. It is not easy to define, but it is easier to understand intuitively.

With this underlying worldview of “hozho,” if and when the Dine, or the Navajo, find that they are not in balance with the Earth, they must find a way back to that balance. When they are sick, when there is drought, when there is chaos of any kind, then the Dine must realign with hozho. S/he must go internally to restore him/herself to harmony with the Earth, with life on Earth. It is not necessarily a situation in which the Dine tries to overcome the sickness or prays for rain to end the drought. Rather it is the Dine reclaiming a sense of balance; it is the Dine

remembering that they cannot control the Earth. They can only live on the Earth; they can choose to live harmoniously on the Earth and for the Earth.

Donna Haraway, in her book *Staying with the Trouble*, relays a Dine story about First Woman and First Man--some of the first people on the Earth. First Man and First Woman were rationally planning the position of the Sun and Moon, the seasons, and the months for the good of the people when Coyote, or First Angry as he is also named, came and disrupted their plans, scattering stars in random-ness across the sky. Ever since then, all people on Earth have been living amidst the carefully designed work of First Man and First Woman and also the angry, chaotic work of Coyote, First Angry. "Hozho" is maintaining oneself "within [this] tricky balance of order and chaos"; it is "staying with the trouble."

Let me offer you another example. In the book titled *Alone*, Antarctic explorer Admiral Richard E. Byrd describes his struggle to survive five months in absolute solitude and polar darkness at Advance Base in 1934 while desperately ill and near death from gas fumes given off by the generator and stove in his cabin. In the beginning, sounds were his only companions. But these were awful, crushing, frightful noises that Byrd described as 'a senseless explosion of sounds; and you are reduced to a crawling thing on the margin of a disintegrating world...'

Yet, in the mind of Byrd, the sounds began to change and became soothing companions with a deeply spiritual presence. He wrote: "Harmony, that was it! That was what came out of the silence---a gentle rhythm, the strain of a perfect chord, the music of the spheres... The universe is a cosmos, not a chaos."

When I myself was on bed rest and in the hospital with my twins, I learned very quickly, too, about the cosmos and also about the chaos. There was absolutely nothing I could do to help my twins grow and be born healthy other than to lie around and do nothing. Also, I didn't know what outcome was to be the best outcome for them. Furthermore, it was not my choice to make or even to pray for. The Earth would make these decisions for me and for the girls whether I wanted them or not. To maintain my sanity, I had to learn to let go and live in the powerful hands of the Earth. Believe it or not, this letting go brought me much peace. I would call this peace "hozho."

In this past year of what has seemed like so much chaos, we can still manifest "hozho." While we look forward to a vaccine for COVID-19 or, better, a cure, we know that that is a ways off in the future. What about right now?

The Earth and the universe have mysteries beyond our knowing. They have pasts beyond our knowing and futures beyond our knowing. We are positioned in the midst of all of this, and we must acknowledge our place. What can you do to balance yourself amidst the order and the chaos? Meditate, read a book, talk to someone you love, do something kind for your neighbor, take a walk in the woods, sing in harmony. The idea is that searching for your balance will bring health to you and to the Earth; the health is in realizing your harmonious relationship with the great Earth.

May it be so.

Byrd, Richard E. *Alone*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1938.

Gladd, Joel. "Hozho." Pressbooks. Viewed January 10, 2021. <Hózhó – Open Anthology of Earlier American Literature (pressbooks.com)>.

Lewis, Ray Baldwin. "Navajo Culture: Navajo Belief." *Discover Navajo*. Viewed January 10, 2021. <<https://www.discovernavajo.com/navajo-culture.aspx>>.