

GRASS BASKET

My Alaska family
my brothers and sisters of soul...
this human circle is a grass basket
that long ago fell into a vortex
called *forgetting* and lost its Truth
lost its essential weaving
and the grass strands came loose
and the human circle went wandering
away from the fire at the center
the only place where the light is bright
enough for us to peer across and see
each other for who we truly are



My grandfather Chief Seattle spoke to us
of who we are when his clear voice said:
human kind has not woven the web of life
we are but a strand in the web
what we do to the web
we do to ourselves

and now the sky grows dark
and we grow more forgetful
but the air is colder and children
are being lost in the wilderness
the wilderness of a sickness that
came here and said *you are less than*
human, a sickness that grew
as sickness does inside all those
exposed to it, until tribal children
were whispering to themselves
as they climbed the ladder to
adulthood: *I am less than human*

and now we have no choice
for the grass basket is so unwoven
it can no longer hold healthy water

and the night air has grown so cold
we are forced to come back to the fire
so that as we thaw the chill of illusion away,
the illusion that says we are separate
strands in separate webs, living
lives that do not touch each other
anywhere, as we melt this illusion away
and begin to see ourselves clearly again

in the light of fire, the fire of Truth,
and courage, and speaking Truth,
and drinking courage, as we do this
one dance we all avoid, we arrive
at an unseen place that cannot be measured
or altered by science and data and forms
and longitudinal study and focus groups
and steering groups and rollouts and RFPs
and funding streams and all other foreign
herds of bison and muskox running
with all their brawn toward a tall cliff

no instead in our dance of destiny
we arrive at an unseen place called *reckoning*
where we finally put down our armament of anger
and disrobe from our status and stature
and throw off our masks of composure
and stare at each other the way the old ones
cared enough to stare at each other
and we say: Here I am, this is me,
and my heart is hurting, and my spirit
daily keeps deserting, and here in my palm
is my pain, and here on my tongue is my story

I am tired of this tirade and torture
this endless season of treason against our young
I surrender now to the force of Life
and muster faith that its Greatness will suffice

I remember my grandfather, Chief Crow and his
words of silence that said: *In you are natural powers*
You already possess everything necessary to become great

and so I give up to you, colleague to colleague,
advocate to advocate, human to human, I give
up to you the naked Truth of me, and trust that you
will do the same, trust that in our humbled state,
knees in the cold clay of transformation
we will find a compassionate fate
that takes our frayed grass strands
and in its Divine hands weaves
us back together again

so that we can become a grass basket
that holds healthy water

for the collective son
and the collective daughter

you see before you a man, the truth is
I stand a man-ghost of the child I was:
born from mother womb straight
into the system, that long parade
of paperwork that strains to make
a childhood work

and that child spirit inside my being
looks out through the window in this chest
and sees our world of children walking
over thin and melting ice, rowing seal boats
that leak, sleeping on empty stomachs
of soul, waking with thirsty throats
of spirit, looking with wide young eyes
across the valleys like prey birds
dying to spot a meal of substance
dying to locate a grown man or woman
who will stand in the cold wind
and the long night with a strong torch
and words that sooth and a heart
that cares enough to bleed
into a river of courage
that the children can walk beside
big hand holding small hand
until small hand reaches
the meadow where the ground
does not shake, and the trees
do not fall, and the sky
does not split, and that
tender child heart can slow its drum
for Peace is come, Peace is come

you are that drum

you in your determination to
look inside your archival self
and lose the paperwork deep
in your soul that since birth
has transcribed this world and all
its illusions, you in your determination
to take stock, self-assess, recognize,
acknowledge, process, purify, excavate,
eradicate all the false files filling
up the soul space where you could have Love
flowing freely like an Alaskan waterfall
into an Alaskan sea

you who knows that when you spear a whale
you feed family upon family for week upon week
but when you spear the truth of disparity
the truth of why these children pour
like a violent hemorrhage into the basin
of displacement and despair
when you spear the truth of *this*
you feed generations with the breaking
of dysfunction's calloused and calcified cycle

when you speak the truth
dare the truth
share the truth
honor the truth
you break the cycle

and the cycle *must* break now
for our ancestors grow weary...
two great ones meet on the dust road...
Geronimo asks: *what is in your heart?*
Chief Joseph answers: *I will fight no more
forever*

there is no other medicine for this breaking
of the ancient cycle but truth reckoning
and it is you today who fills your drum
with medicine and pours from a deep well
of compassion filled by sun

you in your determination
to sing again today, and sit at this long table
in this long house, and stare through the fire
at your kindred strands of grass and see them
truly see them, you in the blood you bleed
today, you in the breath of compassion you
breathe out today, you in your stance of
warriorhood, standing fast and rooted against
the hordes of fear that would have you run
away from this work, this task, this ancestral
assignment to cure your circle, you in your
flowering of Light, your epiphany of soul,
your surrender to Love so that your old
wounds can finally heal, and your old trauma
can finally feel that it has a purpose to serve
a purpose like salt-curing slabs of pain
into a meal of motive, a river of reason
to serve these children, these families,
this community, this tribe, this Alaska,

this humanity, serve it all in the spirit
of the mountains that rise, and the trees
that grow, and the rain that falls, and the sun
that shines, and the moon that glows,
which is to say the spirit that lives,
the spirit that lives

you because on this day you choose to
truly open your soul doors to fresh air
of healing and harmony, because you
choose to live, you take your moth-state-of-heart
and metamorphose that flower into a butterfly-heart
of servitude, one not afraid to feel and endure
the raw pain of reality that comes from dipping
our spirit in the cold water of what is *authentic*
and drowning there, never again walking
in rhetoric or going through the motions
of making change but never pulling up the
persistent roots of illness necessary before
tasting change

you butterfly heart who fills the sky with
the colors of beauty coming home to the fire and
the circle and finding that Peace is come

you are that drum
because on this day *you choose to live*

soon the sun will rise,
its face of light a glacier of heat
burying the sky in the hum of hope
blistering away the old wounds
and the old ones who walked here before
walked this vast and silent Alaska

this night the old ones will sleep a deep sleep
painted in smiles and reassured heart
knowing that their long weeping children
now walk an unmistakable road
to wholeness, a road of free crystal rivers
called *healing* that falls like water

into the lagoon of promise
that spills into the bay of destiny
where sea birds draft the winds
and a people gather to shed their
skins of woundedness
and barter their dreams for priceless
coins of beautiful moments

where a people gather to share
their drink of story
and pass around the fire
their meal of story
and dance their light and Love
deep into the earth of story

where a people gather
not needing mismatched intervention
or foreign medicine or desperate
formal measures

for they live now in the valley
of their heritage and all its treasures
untarnished by a dehumanizing
cultural cloth, unstolen, unmuted,
unrevoked, fully cloaked in its essential
weathers of broad sky above and
at the knee children growing
swiftly into tall pines
to keep the circle
whole and thriving

Spirit speaks these things through
our sacred circle of grass basket today

soon we will hold healthy water
and never let it go again

this is what we live
this is what we serve
this is what we pray.



Text and artwork Copyright © 2011 Jaiya John
September 20 draft

JAIYAJOH.N.COM | FACEBOOK.COM/JaiyaJohn | YOUTUBE.COM (Jaiya John)

Spirit-written in the morning dark, by the river, beside the mountain, for a tribal leadership and healing
summit and the brave ones who stand in the wind. Seward, Alaska, September 20, 2011.