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POWER OF OUR WORD:

We are about to ring in yet another New Year, a time of festivities, and a time of ritual evaluation of our personal lives. Given the economic events of last year, to some, in their minds,... this New Year is a welcome relief for putting last year behind, with the hopes and dreams of a better year to come. On those TV newscasts, they interview people and folks say they can't wait for 2008 to be over. Is the next day, the first day of 2009 really a new moment in time? The Pagan God Janus in Roman times appeared with two faces, one face looking back, reflecting and reviewing the past, and one face looking forward, in hope of a good New Year. It is not by mistake the first month of the Solar year is named January after the God Janus. Here we are, face to face, with our future in the form of a New Year, a time when we look both backward and forward. We review the year and think about that which we want to leave behind; our hurts, our angers, our behaviors that do not serve us. Many of us juggle countless demands; family, friends, extended family, work, hobbies, home chores, volunteerism, causes for social justice. We look forward and vow to not eat a whole chocolate bar, or too much cake in one sitting, to eat carrot sticks each day, to go to support groups and yoga classes, to do aerobic exercise each day, to meditate each day, to not yell or have attitude towards the ones we love, to practice what we preach, and to not despise the neighbor who disagrees with us, because we respect his or her inherent worth and dignity. We want to lay these things to rest and not carry them into the New Year. Given all these challenges on our plate, there does still seem to be a perpetual human desire for self improvement. Hence the action once a year, to make resolutions that we hope will help us learn and grow and make us better people.

The special message I am getting for us in the New Year, is that we are to pay attention to and strengthen ourselves, our families, our extended families, and communities for this coming year. This is essential for us to weather these challenging and changing times. Today, I want to hone in and focus on, individual empowerment since each one of us is the roots and foundation of family and community. In indigenous communities, each individual is at the center of their world. To understand this concept, we have to step out of linear thinking. In this paradigm, we are the center, and that does not make us more important than the whole. It means that structurally, if we at the center are not empowered, the rest of the paradigm crumbles. If you can imagine concentric circles, you would put yourself in the center, the next concentric circle would be your family, then extended family, then the community, then your nation, then the world.

In looking at my role models growing up, especially but not always, the women served everybody before themselves, and even at the expense of themselves. This is not in accordance with natural law. It is important for us to address these incongruences, one, by one, by one, to transform each behavior that is not in synch with Mother Nature. The command or the dictate of our times, is to return to behaviors, practices and rituals that honor the interdependent web of life and existence. How important is it for us to take care

of ourselves in the center of the paradigm? (Well...TELL THE current day STORY OF THE AIRPLANE AND OXYGEN MASK AND THE nature lesson of the DEER FAMILY FEEDING BY MY WINDOW). At 58, I had no clue as to why the buck and the doe would kick the fawns, out of the way and eat first. I was horrified and had empathy for the baby deer. My perception was not correct and not in synchronicity with Mother Nature. I have learned so much by living with and in and around a struggling but still in tact ecosystem.

Today, I want to present one aspect that can strengthen and empower our self, the center and core of all that is. Again, thinking outside the linear box, because we are the core of our world, does not mean we are more important than any other relation. Since every relation on the planet has a spirit according to indigenous teachings, every relation should have the respect of its inherent worth and dignity. Today, we talk about our responsibility as a human relation, to be the strongest and best we can be. Since we are at the core, our strength then empowers the health of our families, extended families, communities, nations and the world.

Today we talk about the power of our word, and keeping our word, that creates personal integrity, that strengthens the core of all that is. At this time of year, we interface with keeping our word by making New Year's resolutions. Resolutions that studies have shown are usually broken within the first two months of our commitment. How depressing is that. Year after year we make them and break them, in a cycle of repetitiveness. I want to look at this ritual of New Year's resolutions; our word. We often make them with good intention. Life happens, and one reason or excuse after another, has us break our vow. This often happens in January/ February and then we get to wait a whole 11 or ten months to revisit yet another New Year's resolution only to continue the cycle. This may breed guilt, shame and render us disempowered for our lack of discipline and fortitude, to change what we need to change to honor our New Year's resolutions. It makes us feel small and not in control. What I want to address is this BIG wait for New Years, to make resolutions, and this BIG one year chance to change our ways. It is ok to use a year as a benchmark for reflection and change, but to wait one year for another chance to make necessary and wanted changes? A year is a very long wait and out of reach 364 days of the year. We lose control. We lose our power. Our power to choose is within our immediate grasp.

What if we took the concept of yearly resolutions, out of a year's time frame, and placed that concept and ability to reflect and pronounce a resolution into our lives on a daily basis? What if we truly understood, believed and had faith in the power of our tongue, the power of our word to manifest what we need and want in life? Would we just cast that power aside because we did not feel like keeping our word one day? Scripture says in Proverbs 18:21 "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Kipling says, "Words are of course the most powerful drug used by mankind."

Our U.S. culture promotes individualism, often at the expense of the whole. Many of us, not all of us, have a problem with the discipline to do what we say we want to do. The American way... We don't feel like it today. So we struggle with the power of keeping

our word. The Navajo believe that once you bring a word to the tongue and release it, that the word becomes an energy, and an entity, unto itself. Once it is said, and the word is released into the Universe, there is no taking it back, and no I am sorry-s. You have lost control of that word manifestation. That is how important the word is to their culture.

Sometimes the reason we fall short of our goals, is there is something we are attached to, or even addicted to, that we don't want to give up. For change often means, we have to make space or room for a new way. To make space or room there is... 'something we have to let go of' ... to welcome the new. This old thing to release may have become an embedded habit, a survival mechanism, and even a comfortable, uncomfortableness, because the territory is familiar. Even though we know it is time to operate out of the comfort box; the familiar territory we have created is a pull to keep our status quo.

My Mother was my first positive role model for keeping her word. Outside the family context, I was first introduced to the power of my word, at the National Black Theater where I took acting classes. To be rigorous in keeping my word really did empower me. Under their tutelage, I did not get the opportunity to change my word because of how I felt at the moment or that day, or because of circumstances, unless they were really beyond my control. The second source for understanding and practicing the power of my word came forth in Lakota traditions and ceremonies. We learned how important it was to keep our word, that you don't get to change a pledge to your self, others and causes. My more recent yoga teacher, Merilynn Blum, talks about the power of our word, and once we choose and make a resolution, we don't get to revisit that decision. It is now a done deal. Our word enhances our integrity and indeed manifests the change we want to be, and or, see in the world. This type of personal integrity empowered myself, those around me in family and community, and made a larger contribution to my soul's purpose and the world. I became earnest in keeping my word to others and causes. It was part of a process to strengthen the core of all that is; strengthening the microcosm of the macrocosm if you will.

What went un-noticed, for over 20 years of my life, was that keeping my word to myself, AKA New Year's resolutions, was just as important as keeping my word to others. I would never think of renegeing on my commitment to someone, some cause, outside of myself. And yet, I would think nothing of putting my resolutions for myself on the back burner. This is a big flaw, in the divine natural order of the interdependent web of life. "If I truly learned the lesson of the deer family, I would not be ignoring myself, for the center of my world is me. I am the core of all that exists. That core called the self, then radiates out in concentric circles to impact family, extended family, communities, nations and the world. If I am not 100% taking care of myself, and continually putting myself on the back burner, yielding to what I think is important outside of myself, I weaken the necessary infrastructure, the ME, that is the center. With all my strength, I then become a weak link.

For some of us, our strength can be our weakness. For some of us, we can be so strong that we can hold much outside of ourselves, and because of our phenomenal strength, we can endure pain, and neglect. In first caretaking my Mother, my friend Judith pointed out

to me, your Mother is thriving against all odds, and you are a wreck! How true that was. It is a time of great giving on my part, but if I collapsed, my Mother would not survive, so I had to find that balance, in this time of great giving, to make sure I take care of myself. If the core, the center fades away, so does everything that core supports. The Lakota indigenous culture taught me it is not selfish to take care of myself, in fact, it is my responsibility.

A famous Buddhist quote states that, "Words have the power to both destroy or heal. When words are both true and kind, they can change our world." As author, engineer, motivational speaker and corporate teacher, Anil Bhatnagar states, "Words are sound symbols that tend to represent concepts and images. Words are sounds with meanings. Every time we fail to follow through with our words we deprive them of their meaning. This takes power away from us and our words." Words coupled with action, strengthens our power to manifest what we want in life; the same as the Navajo believe.

To help us keep our word, we might start with one simple thing and follow it through to completion. Do it for many days so it is no longer a challenge but a part of our daily repertoire. Pick up a slightly more difficult resolution, and follow that through with the corresponding action. We will begin to get more confidence in our power to manifest, and we get a glimpse of accruing more personal power. As Bhatnagar paraphrased says, we begin to feel a romance with ourselves that births a desire to fulfill our dreams to manifest our lives, not merely live our lives.

It is very important to replace the following words from our vocabulary such as if, perhaps, may be, I'll try, probably, with words such as, I choose to, definitely, absolutely, positively, certainly etc. Give examples. We will be surprised how this gives our intentions and words the power to manifest. Affirmations are a helpful tool as well. Choosing these techniques will increase our ability to do what we say we want to do and increase our personal power.

When times are threatening or uncertain, it is time to pull up our strength, resilience, our sense of humor, and a time to proclaim to recommit to our higher purpose. In these unsettling times, times when the chickens are coming home to roost, times when we are forced to face and engage in imperative changes for humanity to survive, times for us to 100% walk our talk, times that require introspection and meticulous examination of our personal lives, times where we cast off what we don't really need, and I'm not just talking about possessions. Times to release unnecessary drama in relationships, time to stop chasing an unnecessary standard of living, times to focus on and give energy and actions to what is really, really important. Times to pay attention to the simple and essential things in life, and times to nurture, strengthen and put creative and sustaining energies into empowering ourselves, our families, our extended families and communities. Today communities are not just geographical locations. We may participate in several different communities. Choose the most important to us, and do our part to make sure they have strong roots, for these communities will be the arenas to support and help us through these shape shifting times. It is in these family support systems and communities that we will have control over our immediate destiny, by the power of our

word and our choices, to weather these transitional times. This is the year to pay attention to, and strengthen ourselves, our families and our communities.

Some of us humans are more conscious than others, but I think we all on some level, were waiting for someone else to fix it. Our comfortableness creates a sort of inertia, to change. Necessity is the Mother of invention, and the CATALYST for change. Our country and global economies are reaping what was sown. Those of us who had the foresight to know this would be inevitable, may have had a "maybe tomorrow, Scarlet O'Hara," mindset. Knowing, yet feeling disempowered to change the course of events, and perhaps hoping we could stretch the impending deadline for drastic change.

I have talked about Beverly Little Thunder's teachings that there is a positive and negative to everything in life. And once again, that reality is hitting me over the head with its truth, and another understanding of that truth.

This current change was and is inevitable. We can't keep defying Mother Earth, biting the hand that feeds us, and expect infinite business as usual. We can't operate in opposition to the synchronicity of Nature, and expect the finite aspect of her nature to be available for ever. Yes, all of us, on some level, have sown these seeds that have yielded "trouble in River City."

We are charged with the task, for ourselves, our children, and children's children, we are charged with the task, of transitioning our human behaviors, and basic needs, back into being in synchronicity with Mother Nature. We will see sacrifice through these changes, some worse than others. Not to be glib about it, but there is no such thing as a free lunch. We have and will continue to pay the high price of materialism. Some of the relations have, and will, continue to pay the price; for many... the loss of jobs, pensions, homes, and health care. People and other relations will be hurt for our past actions. There is no instant remedy to our situation without some sacrifice. We might wonder as Rabbi Kushner says, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Life unfolds and we get to deal with the hand that was dealt to us; some of it our creation, and some of it not; as my friend Tom put it, "if we are out in the rain we are going to get wet." There will be much less sacrifice if we address the issue, work together, and plan for change. Through planned ingenuity, our desire to save our species, our desire to heal the planet Earth for our children, our spirit evolution, our families and communities coming together to support each other, will yield an inevitable and necessary positive change, so we sow new healthy, in synchronicity with Nature, seeds, so the chickens will then come home to roost in a positive way.

An eco-theological movement is a good way to go. This movement, in values and principles, umbrellas the diversity of many already existing entities: religions, environmental groups, Live Simply, so We Can Simply Live... It won't take much to connect the dots and create a huge momentum of concurrent values already existing in many forms of social structure.

We can not escape working in total synchronicity with Nature. We cannot escape scaling back our current standard of living. We can not escape choosing between material value, and treading lightly on Mother Earth, taking just what we need, in a sustainable way, and not a drop more. We have been raised in a materialistic society, and all of us are victims and survivors of this system. We have to retrain ourselves, and come home to ourselves. In some venues, we will be forced to change. In others, we can inventory our lives, and make voluntary changes.

"Our generation" is charged with, in this moment and this time, releasing the old ways and shifting into a new paradigm that supports the longevity of humanity. We have the foresight, intellect, and understanding to feed the momentum to create a contagious change. A change that honors The Mother and Nature before Money. A change that honors family, community, children, and elders before money. A change in which each word, deed and action is inventoried for its immediate and long term effects on Nature and future generations. It will take a deeper understanding of the context of sacrifice, of taking what we need to sustain our species within the order of Nature, and not to take more than what we really, really need.

We (I) call upon our ancestor wisdom, we (I) call upon our personal spirit guides (even if they appear as words and wisdom of our transitioned elders and loved ones), we call upon those teachings from observing nature or those from the more ethereal worlds. We (I) call upon all messengers of light and truth. Today, it is not just about one beacon of light. There are many avatars in this world and right here in this room there are many bearers of light and truth. We (I) we call upon each one of our spirit purposes, our reason for our privileged existence on this Planet, to be the catalyst for our personal change to initiate the necessary changes in ourselves, our families, extended families and communities to save humanity. Yes unsettling and daunting times, but times for a glorious spiritual and life saving revolution/evolution. Time for us to walk our talk, time for us to show the cosmic force that we are resilient and made of "the stuff it takes" to weather this storm before the calm. This will be the revolution/evolutionary shape shifting of our times. It is in our hands. We can do it. We will do it. We must do it. This is our charge.

Blessed Be.