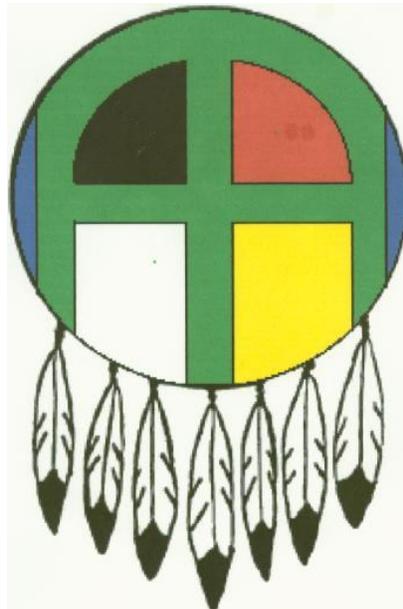


NAIGSO-AA Winter 2016 Solstice Edition



NAIGSO-AA

Four Directions Newsletter



Native American Indian General Service Office of

Alcoholics Anonymous

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The Seven Feathers of Recovery

Those of us who follow the Red Road of recovery most often hear of the four directions. But the Medicine Wheel way I have been taught speaks to the seven sacred directions. The seven feathers on the AA shield of our logo is symbolic of the Seven directions that I live and teach. The four cardinal directions encourage us to reach out to the four corners of the earth and all the races of humanity and the four elements of the human condition; physical (N), mental (E), emotional (S), and spiritual (W), to observe the four seasons, the four stages of life, and the four times of a day. The fifth direction is downward and reminds me of my connection to our Mother Earth (No`eh yeja'te) and keeps me in touch with my own mortality. The sixth direction reminds me of my connection to the universe and that my spirit will leave this earthly plane and travel somewhere "out there". But I have been taught the most sacred of all the directions is the inward direction. It is **within** that our Creator, of each our own understanding, dwells. It is **within** that I find all the answers to my questions and problems in life because now I "trust infinite God rather than our finite selves". (Big Book, p.68)

The principles of AA and sobriety speak to all these directions. The Big Book and 12 & 12 tells us we should live in peace and harmony with one another. Over and again it tells us our problem was a *thinking* disease and that alcohol was but a symptom. Our AA literature speaks to us of emotional hangovers as well as being a soul sickness which leads us to "the gates of insanity or death". (BB p.30) But more than anything else, AA tells us this is a spiritual program, and that, our recovery from our addictions are "contingent upon the maintenance of our spiritual condition". (BB p.85)

The reality **all** Native tribes must face is that the alcohol problem among our people is resulting in the loss of our identities, loss of culture and heritage, loss of languages, and most importantly our connection to the Creator and Spirit of the Universe. And when the spirit of the individual dies, one-by-one, under the throes of alcoholism, so does the wisdom of our ancestors. We must unite in our efforts to discourage others from indulging in the lies and deceptions that alcohol uses to defeat its victims. Tradition One of AA speaks to unity. It states "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity." (12 & 12 p.129) Our greatest enemy is not from without; our greatest enemy is from within.

Perhaps this is why my teachers spoke so strongly to me about the seventh direction. The seventh direction is where all my power rests. I can tap into that power to use for the good of all, or for self. If I choose to do the wrong thing, i.e. in opposition to the Creator's will for me, "I become restless irritable, and discontent." The Big Book tells me that as a result of the 12 steps I have been given the gift of choice. **Choice**, i.e. free will, **is a gift from our Creator**. "I am no longer at the mercy of a disease that tells me the only answer is to drink." (BB p.317)

As Indigenous People around the world, the preservation of all we know through the wisdom of our ancestors, is "contingent upon the maintenance of our spiritual condition" (BB p. 85)...as a whole, not separate and apart from one another. My tradition instructs me that I must serve my Creator first, my community second, my family third and individualism is last. At an individual level our



3.

first tradition tells us, “the AA member has to conform to the principles of recovery” and that, “his life actually depends upon obedience to spiritual principles. If he deviates too far, the penalty is sure and swift; he sickens and dies.” It also says, “**the group must survive, or the individual will not.**” (12&12 p.130) This is in line with the tribal philosophy of selflessness that I speak of. One-by-one our tribal members and non-card carrying Native Americans, as well as those who are friends outside our “bloods”, who believe they can drink with impunity face the assurance of jails, institutions and death. It is the responsibility of every recovering alcoholic who believes in the principles of this program and has thoroughly worked the steps on a daily basis, to carry the message of hope and recovery. We must vigorously address this problem within our councils, our pow-wows, talking circles, or any gathering within or outside our communities to the alcoholic who still suffers. Our very existence depends upon it.

We must remind others of the spiritual nature of our selves and the seventh direction. I can tell people, “I am this”, or, “I am that”. But this is superficial and describes me only as a “what” ... an object... and not as a “WHO”! “**What**” I am may be defined by humankind in various, and perhaps, bigoted terms. But “**WHO**” I am can only be defined by myself and my Creator. It is only when I **choose** to share this part of myself with others that they begin to truly know me. And as I share these things with others, they begin to emerge out of darkness and ignorance and begin to walk in the sunlight of the Spirit. They begin to abandon their prejudices and discriminations and love their fellows as equal and spiritual beings. We must recognize, and teach with vigor, the wisdom of our ancestors, “I am not a physical creature having a spiritual experience. I am a Spiritual creature, having a physical experience.” (Black Elk)

AA provides me a sense of purpose. And **if I choose** to listen to the way of the AA Spirit and integrate it into my own tribal beliefs and philosophies, I will be guided and directed along a path that is sacred, respectful of all life forms, selfless, and full of serenity, peace, and harmony. What a wonderful way!Jamie T-H, Seneca, Cherokee, Chickasaw

Note from Jamie T-H, Four Directions Editor:

Will you share this joy of recovery with others and encourage those who still suffer that there is a better way? This is the way of the Medicine Wheel Path as I understand it and live it. How about you? **What is it that works for you in your own personal recovery?** Please send your own personal stories to us in the **Native American way** that *you* practice and let us know if you have a tribal affiliation or if you are an important supportive friend to us. Our newsletter is just starting to get up and running again so keep us in mind whenever you have an AA event or new group starting. Thank you all sisters and brothers.

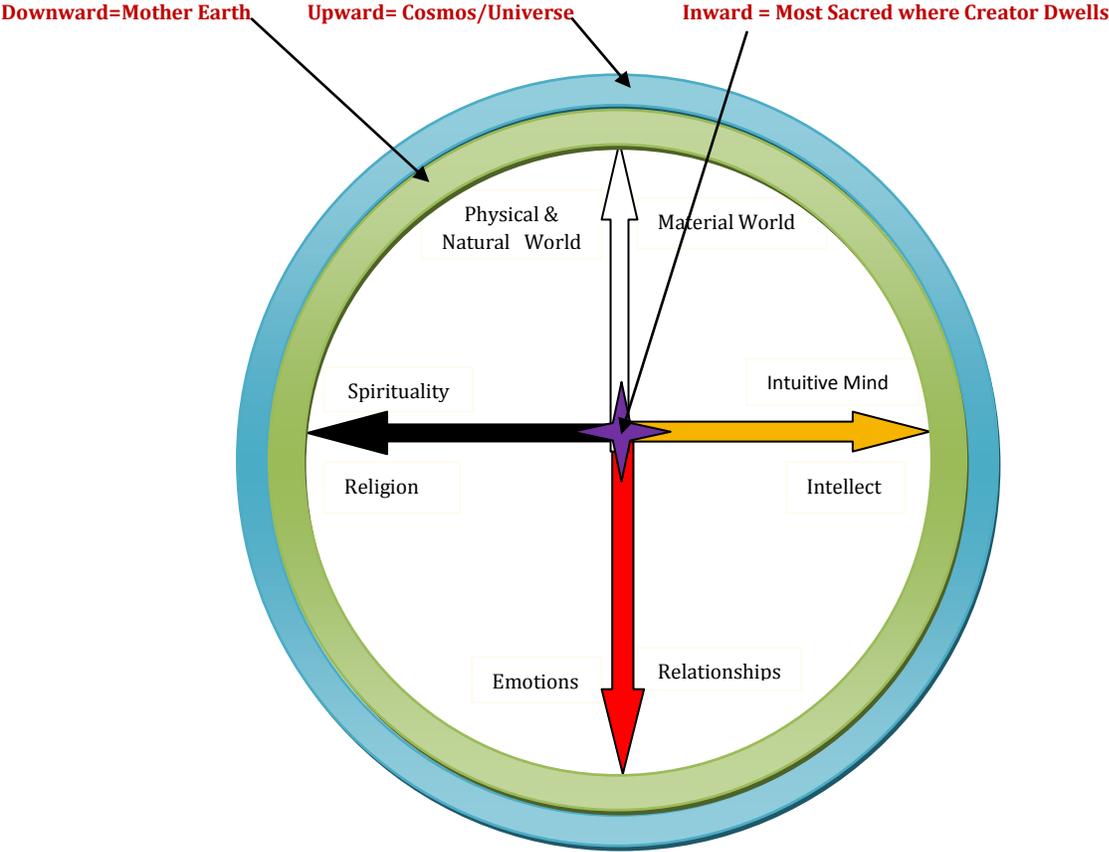




***Creator's Way to Recovery?
....OR....
Man's Way to Relapse?***

A Native American Medicine Wheel Approach to Sobriety by Jamie Terra Hawk

©jthawk





5.

To all my relatives...Ak`wate:na`ke (Seneca), Mitakuye oyasin (Lakota), this message is from one of our ancestors:

“Touch not the poisonous firewater that makes wise men turn to fools and robs the spirit of its vision.” - Tecumseh of the Shawnee, c.1800:

Which Way Will You Go?

Below is a verse in Seneca according to The Four Gospels in the Seneca Language by Asher Wright, 1878.

Gospel of John(Oi`wah)- Chapter 14 vs.17

Nehsho sha`ganeh **No`thwa`is hiyo`oh, ne Gai`wa gwani`io; (Spirit of Truth)**
nehi`gah`na`gee heyo aja deh ta`ah de`o gwani`io na`o goh, ne`yo i`wah he ta`ah deogah,
tah`ah gwa huh deo`yan do ih: negwa niis neshwa yan`de`ih; neh sah`ah na`eh dyo
gondeswa di neh huh, gwa huh a`o`yah da`dahk he swa`yah da deh.

Even the Spirit of Truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but you know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

Gai`wa gwan ni`io sah`ah nek swan oh. **(Thy Word is Truth)**

Early in recovery, most of us do not want to hear or see the truth about the nature of our spiritual malady. The verse above declares that those who are worldly or materialistic are incapable of receiving the Spirit of Truth. The Big Book tells us we are selfish and self-centered and that “is the root of our troubles.” It tells us we create our own troubles as a result of, “extreme examples of self will run riot.” It says we have to quit playing God. (these quotes all from BB p.62) Instead, we must begin to rely on the God of each our own understanding for help from our spiritual malaise.

Is it coincidence, do you think, that the ancient Medicine Wheel path speaks to the indwelling of our Creator and Jesus speaks to us that the, “Spirit of Truth...dwelleth **with you**, and shall be **in you**”? Or, is it evidence that the Creator and Spirit of the Universe has always been with us from time immemorial *waiting* for us to ask for Its help? The greatest part of this is that the Creator of each our own understanding allows us a free will to choose the path we would go...even when it causes us great distress.





AA has shown me how to be free from the bondage of self and how to joyfully serve those who still suffer. Jesus shows me how to love those who hate me and to forgive them because the Truth is not in them and “they know not what they do”. I must ask myself, “Did I know the truth in my drunkenness and addictions?” My Native traditions show me a logical and orderly philosophy which guides me and leads me down *many paths* (ush`ka waso’) of spiritual fulfillment. These many paths include all the great faiths and philosophies of the world. And, just as we say in AA meetings, “I take what I can use and leave the rest.” This way I receive the best, most profound, altruistic, and sacred ways of all the earths’ prophets and teachers. It is a good way for me. I have learned from the Medicine Wheel that there is God’s way and there is man’s way. One way leads me to new life and the other leads me to destruction. There are many paths our many people may travel to get to the mountain top, but the view from the top is the same. Which way will you choose?....Ush`ka Waso’

Please share your thoughts with us!

Send your articles on Native America and your own personal recovery from alcoholism to:

Newsletter@NAIGSO-AA.org



Do you have a Native American in Recovery event coming soon? Please let us know and we will gladly print it in our quarterly NAIGSO-AA Newsletter

Send your fliers or applications to us in Word format to:

Newsletter@NAIGSO-AA.org



We are a diverse group of Native American people, tribes, and bloods in recovery from the disease of alcoholism who advocate that “love and tolerance is our code”. Please remember that whatever opinions are expressed in this newsletter they belong to the author of that article. Peace and serenity is our goal so please keep an open mind to other schools of thought. Thanks from the editor.





Sobering Thoughts About Alcohol Related Deaths Among Native Americans

(CDC statistics)

- 12 percent of deaths among Native Americans and Alaska Natives are alcohol-related — more than three times the percentage of the general population
- 11.7 percent of deaths among Native Americans and Alaska Natives between 2001 and 2005 were alcohol-related, compared with 3.3 percent for the U.S. as a whole.
- two leading causes of alcohol-related deaths were traffic accidents and liver disease
- 6.6 percent of alcohol-related deaths by homicide
- suicide (5.2 percent)
- injuries in falls (2.2 percent)
- 66 percent were younger than 50
- more than 68 percent of Native American alcohol-related deaths were men
- 7 percent were less than 20 years old.
- Native Americans suffer much higher death rates of most leading causes than the rest of the country. Besides alcoholism and drug use, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and suicide also are high.



6 Words: "To thine own self be true."

So, all my relatives...Ak`wate:na'ke (Seneca)...what must we do? Is it not a critical problem which we must not ignore? I have been taught I must serve my Creator first and AA has taught me the same thing. I must work on myself to stay clean and sober and this requires me to adopt the six words of this program, "To thine own self be true." In doing so, I can be of greater service to my Creator and be used as "a channel of His peace" as instructed by our 11th step prayer. (p.99, 12&12) I cannot give what I do not possess.





8.

Second, I am told by my teachers that I must serve my community. I can only effectively serve my community if I possess the wisdom of my elders, of my ancestors, and of the AA principles. The 12th step is my responsibility to my community. I must carry the messages I have received in recovery and teach others how to obtain the most precious gift I have to share. Four years into my recovery a very wise teacher of mine, who has since walked on to the Spirit World told me, "Jamie, you must give back to others the gift of your presence." Joe (Whitefeather) M. told me I must drop the sack of rocks that held me back from giving this gift to others.

And, even though I was 4 years sober, I thought I had nothing of value to give anyone. I was self-deprecating, full of dark depression, and not happy in my sobriety. I was that "boy/girl whistling in the dark to keep up his/her spirits." (BB p.152) I did not know how to rid myself of the baggage I was refusing to let go of because I was keeping the secrets of my past and present of being **a two-spirit person**. Fear was my *imagined* enemy. Fear of being rejected, fear of judgments from others, fear of being beaten and abused, but mostly fear of being condemned to this "Hell" I had been indoctrinated with by religionists from an early and innocent age. I had no idea how to free myself from the bondage of self until Whitefeather gave me silent permission to do this thing which tormented me throughout my entire life. He was the only one who knew my secrets and he did not judge me or condemn me. He told me I must give back to others what had been freely given to me. He told me there were others just like me and that I could be of service to them only if I overcame my own fears. He strongly told me "**This, you must do!**" or I would never be happy about my sobriety.

I listened to, and loved my teacher. And I thanked him on that last day as I sat on his bedside waiting for that whirlwind spirit of his to leave that physical body wracked with cancer from his many years of smoking. I told him I had followed his advice and was now carrying the message of AA to many still tormented by the disease which had consumed us for so long. That was in January of 1999 that he "*walked on*". But his spirit visits me frequently. And I listen with calm and serenity as he, and many other spirits, continue to instruct me from the Spirit World. I found that "release from care, boredom and worry" ...my "imagination was fired" ... and "life will mean something at last." ...and that, indeed, "The most satisfactory years of your existence lie ahead." (BB p.152) "Then you will know what it means to give of yourself that others may survive and rediscover life. You will learn the full meaning of 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.'" (BB p.153)

The members of our tribal communities are dying from the disease of alcoholism. We can deliver the message of hope through **O`kashe`wakon Manitou, the Great and Holy Spirit**, that there is a better way. It is our responsibility to educate all our relatives about the lies and deceptions of hopelessness, helplessness, and haplessness, produced by the consumption of mind and mood altering substances. These are the lies of **Hanisee`ono, the Evil one**.





9.

The Winter solstice is a time of rest and renewal for all of creation. Spend your time in your hogans, tipis, longhouses, lodges, and kivas, desperately and ardently praying for the promises of recovery to come to everyone in our communities. And, perhaps in the Spring time, we will see new spiritual growth and new life in sobriety springing forth from our homes. It is our responsibility to carry the message to others and to be sponsors, yes....**But**...we must also practice these principles in all our affairs by encouraging those new in recovery to find a sponsor, or to offer yourself if they have none. *Talk the talk of recovery.* But more importantly, **Walk the Walk** of recovery in front of all you meet. It is my way. It can also be yours...Ush`ka Waso



“We move forward and become like that which we think about. Isn’t it time we began to think about what we’re thinking about?” – Don Coyhis, Mohican 1993

“Crisis changes people and turns ordinary people into wiser or more responsible ones.” – Wilma P. Mankiller, Cherokee 1987

The Eskimo asked the local missionary priest, “If I did not know about God and sin, would I go to Hell?” ...”No”, said the priest, “not if you did not know.”“Then why did you tell me?” asked the Eskimo earnestly. – Arctic region story, Unknown author

And, for all those who think we are ten feet tall and bullet-proof: “The smarter a man is the more he needs God to protect him from thinking he knows everything.” – George Webb, Pima, 1959





10.

The Hard Line!....Self Examination

Dr. Paul O. wrote one of the most widely quoted chapters in the Big Book. Originally it was titled “Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict” in the 3rd edition, beginning on page 439. In the fourth edition it was re-titled “Acceptance Was The Answer” and was moved to page 407. How many times have we heard in meetings, “And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because some person, place, thing, or situation—some fact of my life—unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God’s world by mistake.” (BB p. 417, 4th ed., or p. 449, 3rd ed.)

The hard line for Dr. Paul came when he realized how critical he had become of his wife’s personality. When he was criticized by a member of his group and suggested that he “had the lenses in his glasses backwards” he began to understand the concept of the “courage to change” in the serenity prayer. The necessity to change himself, not others, started the process of self examination.

It is not always easy or comfortable to take a look in the mirror and admit your own character defects, shortcomings, or other addictive behaviors or addictive substances we may be consuming in our everyday lives. Dr. Paul was also an addict addicted to various types of narcotics and which he justified using *when he created in his mind the symptoms* that required the drug to be taken. He recognized that alcohol was not his only problem and found he could utilize the 12 steps of AA to help him overcome his other addictions. He says, “**Today, I find I can’t work my A.A. program while taking pills, nor may I even have them around for dire emergencies only.....Giving up alcohol alone was not enough for me; I’ve had to give up all mood- and mind-affecting chemicals in order to stay sober and comfortable.**”(see p.411, 4th ed., or p.443,3rd ed.)

*For myself, this is one of the most compelling statements in the Big Book which convinces me that **self examination and inventory must begin the moment I arise in the morning and greet my Creator.***





11.

I had to stop making excuses about smoking cigarettes when I knew for a fact that they were killing me. And even though tobacco is one of our sacred herbs, I have come to realize the tobacco of our ancestors was sacred and only used in a sacred manner. Once commercialized, it became big business and all types of chemicals and preservatives were added to its basic ingredient. But even there, I could not justify my smoking because *nicotine* is naturally occurring in tobacco and *is an extremely addictive drug and it kept me smoking!* Today when the pipe is passed I honor the pipe but do not allow it to touch my lips...because today...I know I am an alcoholic and addict. Using the 12-steps of AA I have been nicotine free for 16 years this month. And, no matter what the ceremony may be, I cannot allow *substances which once owned me* to touch my lips. For this same reason, I do not participate in the peyote ceremony because, at one time in my life, peyote was a recreational drug for me and my friends, and there was nothing sacred about it. I quit using street drugs over 34 years ago but I continued using alcohol.

My last relapse on alcohol was the day before my second daughter's 16th birthday when we attended the Episcopal church together. I had over 11 months sober and had refused the sacramental wine all those months. But...today was special...we were celebrating her birthday! So, I decided it would be okay, *just this one time*, to allow the wine to touch my lips, nothing more. And for the rest of that service my mind was consumed over how I could have my daughter's party in our back yard and get away with a few drinks. I created a ruse to stop at my old local watering hole to pick up some soda for her party. I did...*and a 6-pack of beer*. But that was not enough. I went back later and got a 12-pack of beer and a bottle of brandy. I proceeded to humiliate and embarrass my daughter in front of her friends. That night she told me how she hated me when I drank. That was July 27th, 1995. The next day was her birthday and I got sober and stayed sober since that day over 21 years ago.

So, what's the hard line here? Do I believe what AA has taught me? Or, do I continue to rationalize and justify other bad habits *which I know* are detrimental to me in the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual elements of the human condition? My personal, daily inventory insures me against such thinking because it is "contingent upon the daily maintenance of my spiritual condition."





12.

*Rigorous honesty, rigorous open-mindedness, and rigorous willingness is required of me. When the speed limit says 30 MPH, do I drive 40 MPH? Do I text and drive endangering the lives of others? Do I talk on the phone while driving? Do I purchase tobacco or alcohol for others...even though I don't use them...when I know the problems they caused me? Do I treat and talk to others as I wish to be treated? Do I speak my truth to others even when it might be controversial or unpopular? Am I a **gantowisa** (Barbara Alice Mann; "Iroquoian Women-The Gantowisas"2000) representing strength to **all** other women and girls in recovery and carrying a message of empowerment and not co-dependency? Do I believe and share these thoughts?*

"AA has given me serenity of purpose and the opportunity to be of service to God and to the people about me, and I am serene in the infallibility of these principles that provide me fulfillment of my purpose. AA has taught me I will have peace of mind in exact proportion to the peace of mind I bring into the lives of other people, and it has taught me the true meaning of the admonition "happy are ye who know these things *and do them.*" For the only problems I have now are those I create when I break out in a rash of self-will." (BB p. 550-551)

I must never think that my thinking is without flaw. I must stop making excuses, rationalizing or justifying why the rules apply to everyone else, but not to me. I must not be "terminally unique" unto myself, but, "because of your own drinking experience you can be uniquely useful to other alcoholics. So cooperate; never criticize. To be helpful is our only aim."(BB p. 89) To be helpful effectively requires me to take the hard line with my own self examination. It is not always easy or comfortable to look earnestly into the mirror with the H.O.W. of this program. But it is always enlightening to our spiritual condition. So, as I carry the hard line of self examination I must encourage others to do the same. I cannot give what I do not possess.

I must never forget that alcohol...and other drugs...*and my thinking*...are still cunning, baffling, and more powerful than me. *But Loving one another never fails me!*....Ush`ka Waso'





Carrying the Message of Peace

“It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God’s will into all our activities. “How can I best serve Thee—Thy will (not mine) be done.” These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will.” (BB p. 85)

As I was taught, Winter is a time of cleansing, of rest and renewal, of purity. It is a time when our No’eh te’ja’té (Mother Earth) allows her plants, crawlers, and many four-leggeds sleep and rest to renew their life sources. Our Winter solstice edition of the Four Directions should remind you that we can take comfort near our home fires wherever they may be. But we must not become complacent in carrying our message to others. Even though the Great Bear hibernates, he only slumbers and can be aroused if disturbed. Many of us have known unfortunate drinkers whose addictions arouse them and they wander down frozen highways, valleys, and woodlands in search of their poison. Many will perish. That is the hard truth of alcoholism; “Some must die, that others may live.” The Mud’je`kewee`is (Grizzly Bear) of the West direction is the direction of spiritual experience, introspection, and strength. It slumbers, but it is never truly asleep. It is the Hot’ye Nok’ta (Creator/Spirit of the Universe) which will give us pause to enable our own free/self will, **but it never leaves us!** We can awaken it anytime we are willing to be open to its power and wisdom. We must never shut ourselves off to the sunlight of the spirit. Winter is hard for many of us, but our program of recovery tells us “This too shall pass.” And it will, if we listen to the wisdom of our ancestors, our prophets and spiritual leaders, and practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Spring equinox edition of the Four Directions Newsletter is just months away and we must be prepared to engage the new life which will surround us. Please prepare articles of your own understanding of recovery and send them to us. The next quarter will focus on steps 1, 2, and 3. Please tell us what these steps mean to you in the **Native American Indian way. We would love to hear from you!** Until then I leave you with this blessing:

Hot’ye Nok’ta tyo`he neh skge`no hagwa! May the Creator of the Universe guide you and bless you!-
Jamie T-H

