

Holy Wind, Holy Spirit

By Eloise Hart

Although we live with the wind daily, delight in its blessings and suffer its wrath, how often do we question what it is or where it comes from? How often do we consider its composition or the fact that the cosmic wind gives breath and sustains life as it circulates within and among celestial bodies in the vast spaces of Space?

Encyclopedias provide pages of information telling us, for instance, how winds stretch out thousands of miles and follow definite patterns of movement. Dictionaries tell us that wind is related in meaning and function to air, breath, and spirit, all having to do with that which moves, which surrounds and pervades. Though unseen, secret, and appearing as nothing, wind purifies, refreshes, and bestows life, suggesting that it is more than moving air: that it is a form of intelligence that acts with purpose and will.

We take for granted the miracle of breathing: that each breath we inhale invigorates and keeps operational our heart, mind, and entire constitution from the first moment of life until our demise. But how is this accomplished? By what elixir is life sustained? Obviously by more than oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon dioxide; more, too, than by microorganisms carried to us by the winds from near and far. Perhaps this life-giving elixir is part of that mystical Spirit or Breath of God that Christians refer to. After all, spirit comes from the Latin word *spiro* which means "to breathe." Many ancient cultures regarded wind as one of the first and highest expressions of the divine Spirit.

Native Americans of the Southwest would agree, for to them wind is a Holy Spirit, as James Kale McNeley brings out in his book *Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy* (The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1988). But first he reminds us of the limitations of our language: that no English translation can express the philosophical depths of certain Navajo terms. *Nilch'i*, as an example, is translated in English as "air, wind, or atmosphere," but to the Navajo it refers to Sacred Wind, Holy Spirit, even to the Supreme Creator that pervades the cosmos and gives life, thought, speech, and the power of motion to all living things and serves as the means of communication between all elements of the living world. -- p. 1

According to their tradition, Wind appeared in the first world as a cloud of light which "misted up" from the horizons of the four cardinal directions, each mist with its associated color and mountain, in which there was an inner form "just like a real breathing human." Then, as one singer/informant related, these Winds

passed through the bodies of men and creatures and made the lines on the fingers, toes and heads of human beings, and on the bodies of the different animals. The Wind has given men and creatures strength ever since, for at the beginning they were shrunken and flabby until it inflated them, and the Wind was creation's first food, and put motion and change into nature, giving life to everything, even to the mountains and water. -- pp. 8-9

Later, Wind as guide and mentor gave these ancient people words so they could tell things to each other, language by which their minds were awakened. Since that time Wind comes to each individual at the moment of conception when the winds of the father and mother unite into one and give the child-to-be the vital breath of life. As he matures, other winds endow him with awareness and the capacity to control his life. This thought is expressed also in *Genesis*:

And the Lord God formed man . . . and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. -- 2:7

Soon after their birth, Navajo babies are ceremoniously presented to their "parents," the winds who reside in the North, South, East, and West, who give them a "Little Wind" which, hidden in their earfolds where it cannot be seen, thereafter guides them -- not with words but with thoughts -- along the path of harmonious behavior. It reminds them that the life and breath that sustains them is the same life and breath that sustains all living beings; that their intentions and actions are part of the intelligent purpose of larger actions and motions; and that the wind that dwells within them is inextricably entwined with the Holy Wind that encompasses the cosmos. In this way Navajo youngsters come to feel a compassionate responsibility for all of creation. The idea of a Little Wind hidden in our ears is reminiscent of a belief of the Skagit tribes of America's Northwest, that Wind primarily is a teacher -- as is anyone who, like it, imparts *kwadhakk*, the "voiceless blowing sound" that brings important information or instruction. To these people, the spiritual quality of sound is more important than the information the sound imparts, so if they do not understand something they hear, rather than asking questions they "listen within," quietly reflecting on the subject until insights come.

Big Wind Painting (from Oakes & Campbell, *Where the Two Came to Their Father*, Stanford University Press)

These and other Native American ideas are surprisingly like those of the Tibetan Buddhists, who also describe the progress of mankind through a series of "worlds" which were successively destroyed by cataclysmic windborne floods and fires. Survivors migrated to fertile lands where they established new civilizations under the guidance and protection of their gods. In the Tibetan world view each of the past periods was emanated and presided over by buddhas who descended from higher spheres. The first was initiated by Vairochana, the "One Who Makes Things Visible"; the second by Akshobhya, the "Unshakeable One"; the third by Ratnasambhava, the "Jewel-born One"; the fourth world-reality by the Buddha of Boundless Love, Amitabha, who, presiding over the human buddhas, helps guide mankind to enlightenment. (See *Navajo & Tibetan Sacred Wisdom: The Circle of the Spirit* by Peter Gold, Inner Traditions, 1994.) In the Navajo account of five worlds, higher beings also help humanity: when mankind had emerged into the fourth world period, Holy People, whose bodies were of light and haloed with sunbeams, arrived on a rainbow to counsel them and give them the skills of civilization.

In the current period, when humanity has unusual opportunities to develop its spiritual potential, Tibetans and Navajos use sand-painted mandalas for teaching and healing, and mantras to help them keep focused on higher values. Before the Chinese invasion, *Om mani padme hum* was found throughout Tibet, carved, painted, and embroidered in homes and temples, and sounded on the lips of even the youngest. "Om, the jewel in the lotus" implies that the divine is in us and we are in it. A Navajo mantra, *Sa'ah Naghai Bik'eh Hozho*, translates roughly as "Let us journey into old age by the path of spiritual harmony." This also is expressed in their benediction:

With beauty all around me, I walk.

In beauty, I walk.

With beauty before me, I walk.

With beauty behind me, I walk.
With beauty above me, I walk.
With beauty below me, I walk.
With beauty all around me, I walk.
With beauty within me, I walk.
It is finished in beauty. . . .

The idea here is that when we think and act with beauty and truth, we become expressions of the harmonious forces that keep the universe in order. These forces are expressions of what H. P. Blavatsky termed *fohat*, which on our human level is the breath of life and carrier of mind. Fohat is the informing and guiding intelligence behind all the forces of nature. Like the Navajo wind it is the

ever-present moving-power and life-principle, the vital soul of the suns, moons, planets, and even of our Earth. . . .

. . . Fohat, in its various manifestations, is the mysterious link between Mind and Matter, the animating principle electrifying every atom into life. -- *The Secret Doctrine* 1:602, 16

It too "traces spiral lines," which

refers to the evolution of man's as well as Nature's principles; an evolution which takes place gradually . . . as does everything else in nature. . . . Fohat, in his capacity of Divine Love (*Eros*), the electric Power of affinity and sympathy, is shown allegorically as trying to bring the pure Spirit, the Ray inseparable from the ONE absolute, into union with the Soul, . . . -- *Ibid.* 1:119

Again and again Tibetan and Navajo teachings emphasize the importance of maintaining a harmonious balance between thought and behavior. Should any of our vital currents become unbalanced by disturbing thoughts and emotions, illnesses or "accidents" occur until balance is restored. Likewise, should a country's psychic or electromagnetic conditions become dangerously out of balance, restoration is effected, according to Eastern scriptures, by either Narada or the Four Maharajas (Great Kings) who, presiding over the four quarters of space, control and use the vital efflux and influx between Earth and the stellar hosts to guide and protect Earth's creatures. We find these forces in Christian writings, where equilibrium is reestablished by the actions of the Four Horsemen of the *Apocalypse*, the proverbial famine, pestilence, war, and death. Their actions, no matter how disastrous, are always in accordance with karma and in the end prove beneficial.

In India the winds that circulate through our human constitution are called *pranas*. These vital forces sustain life throughout our bodies and souls, stimulating our instincts, emotions, thoughts, and aspirations. The most familiar of these pranas are those that control our automatic inbreathing and outbreathing whereby vital substances are brought into our bodies and destructive substances expelled. Other pranas control digestion and assimilation, carry on various chemical processes, maintain the circulations of our blood and nervous fluids, and keep us healthy and shapely. There are also pranas that direct our vital currents upwards toward the higher centers of our heart and mind, a process involving aspiration and inspiration: aspiration meaning "to breathe toward spirit, to ascend, to soar," and inspiration, "to draw in, being infilled with spirit, divinely inspired."

Still higher pranas exist, but are seldom mentioned lest harm befall those unprepared to use them. Medieval alchemists evidently knew of such forces, for they claimed that the man who has mastered their use has attained "treasures which exceed all riches." What are these

treasures? Possibly the powers of spiritual telepathy and clairvoyance, of protecting and healing others from any distance, and of controlling natural and stellar forces.

In *The Voice of the Silence*, a book H. P. Blavatsky translated from ancient texts she studied in the East, it is recommended that before one attempts to develop higher powers, he purify and harmonize his nature throughout and gain the protection of his indwelling Spirit:

Before thou set'st thy foot on the ladder's upper rung, the ladder of the mystic sounds, thou hast to hear the voice of thy *inner* GOD [the Higher SELF] in seven manners. -- p. 9

These "seven manners" refer to the seven states of consciousness in which illumination must be attained. For only then the soul

becomes the breath of the ONE-SOUL, the voice which filleth all, thy Master's voice.

'Tis only then thou canst become a "Walker of the Sky" who treads the winds above the waves, whose step touches not the waters. -- p. 9

A "Walker of the Sky" is that man or woman whose nature is completely spiritualized, his body "formed of the wind," and thus able to traverse realms unknown to ordinary men and behold truth free of all shadow: he

beholds the things beyond the seas and stars; he hears the language of the Devas and comprehends it, and perceives what is passing in the mind of the ant. -- p. 77

One who has achieved such ability has undoubtedly listened to the "Little Wind" in his earfolds, to the mystical "Voice" of the silence, and sought to blend his soul with what the Christian hymn by Edwin Hatch (1878) refers to as the Breath of God:

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what thou dost love,
And do what thou wouldst do.
Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with thee I will one will,
To do or to endure.
Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly thine,
Till all this earthly part of me
Glows with thy fire divine.

The Breath of God, like the Navajo Holy Wind, is the Divinity that surrounds and infills us with every breath we breathe. Vitalizing our minds, inspiring our souls, it gives us from its strength the power to accomplish wonders. This force, this sublime Presence, is something we may feel and know if we listen to its "voiceless blowing sound" -- for it and we are One.

(From Sunrise magazine, April/May 2001; copyright © 2001 Theosophical University Press)

<http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/world/america/am-elo4.htm>