

## Walking the Sacred Healing Circle

by Vivette Jeffries-Logan

*Mecou mima taluk nawa Kanahabnen Tabunitckia.*

*Henigu Yesah.*

*Henigu nonc yagile peti.*

*Greetings, my name is Morning Star.*

*I am Yesah.*

*I am She Who Carries the Fire*

The greeting above is how I am required to introduce myself. I am a member of the Occaneechi *Band of the Saponi Nation*, the Indigenous Peoples of Orange and Alamance counties in North Carolina. In our language, we call ourselves Yesah, which means The People. My borrowed name is Vivette Jeffries-Logan and I am also the founding Director of our Tribal Health Circle. The Health Circle is responsible for all aspects of Community Health; we honor the Indigenous belief that health is a balance of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of one's being and one's community. A state of *dis-ease* develops when any aspect is out of balance. The Health Circle is committed to restoring balance through capacity building, community empowerment, advocacy, leadership development, and decolonization for tribal members and our community. We are committed to *biwa Yesah*, healing the People using multiple methods that ensure wholeness. The Creation of our Health Circle is part of my path, chosen for me by Mahone (Creator), a path I have accepted and embraced, though this was not always the case.

Running from my path and dodging the responsibilities of Fire Carrier were feats I participated in and thought I had mastered for years. I did not think I possessed the skills necessary for such an honored position. "Let someone else do it" is what I thought and said aloud on many occasions. I did not understand that guidance would come from Creator and the Old Ones with my first and every subsequent step. I stopped running when I was a thirty nine year old student at Guilford College. I was enrolled in a class entitled Understanding Oppressive Systems, completed my first of many Undoing Racism trainings and was given instructions about critical thinking. It was during this time that I saw my path and my purpose light up before my eyes and I knew running was no longer an option. I also began to see, understand and experience the world in a new way. I grew to understand that we have all been socialized to view the world through the eyes of oppressors and not through our own. I grew to understand myself and embrace the circular worldview of my People and our culture. In a circular worldview everything is connected, a state of interdependence. We are a community based, collectivistic People. I am a part of Creation, not apart from or superior to Creation. Everything I do to Creation I am doing to myself. There is no delineation; no separation of secular life and spiritual life, my path is a spiritual journey. I began to see the world around me with new eyes. With my

new eyes I saw the imbalance in my community and was able to articulate and define what I was seeing with the knowledge I was acquiring during my matriculation at Guilford College. I began to understand the connectedness of all oppressions. However, the concept of intersectionality was difficult for me to grasp because intersections involve lines and I think in a circle. I understood that the restoration of balance in my tribal community would necessitate work to bring balance to each community member *and* our community as a whole. This view is manifested in the fact that “I” and “we” are the same word in your native language

I am employed by the NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence as a Diversity Consultant; I serve as a facilitator/trainer with dismantling Racism Works, and a member of the Orange County Human Relations Commission. Though I wear many hats, I bring my whole self into each of these organizations because I am struggling to ensure equity for all. When we are forced to choose and place our allegiance with one organization, entity or movement, is this not another weapon of an oppressive system? Why must we choose which part of our identity we lift up in certain organizations or movements?

In mainstream social justice organizations and movements there is a tendency to separate each social justice issue into its own category, something I have heard referred to as the Silo Effect. These separations and divisions do not reflect my circular worldview nor do they support social change; they are attempts to use an existing framework to solve and eliminate issues created by the existing framework. Audre Lorde writes “The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.” It is imperative that we begin to think critically about the ways in which we continue our struggle.

In mainstream domestic violence work, safety may require that either the victim or the batterer leave the community. This approach may not be successful in my community for several reasons, the first being the fact that victims and abusers are a part of a larger community and they do not exist in isolation. That which impacts any community member, impacts us all. Also, the labels of victim and batterer tend to reduce each person to a one dimensional being, any other aspects are erased and replaced with the labels. Thirdly, once removed from the community, access to traditional holistic healing methods may be significantly reduced or no longer feasible. In my community each member has a path chosen for them by Mahone (Creator) and if one person fails to walk their path, then we as a People cease to exist. Each path is a spiritual journey and each person's path is different but no one's path is superior to another's. Each person must walk their path, a path towards wholeness. If all community members are on their paths to wholeness, then our community is on its way to wholeness-balance. Removing either person from the community will place our community in jeopardy. In our community healing encompasses every individual and our community approach is imperative for our existence.

Our Health Circle is working in our community because we believe our most profound work begins at home. However we understand that balance, healing and wholeness in our

community will affect balance, healing and wholeness in the larger local community, the State Community, National community and International community like ripples in a pond. We do this work for all creation because we know *huk winedewahe* (we are all related).