

**The Tree Letter**  
**Full Moon leaf from Forest**  
**halls**  
**March 3, 2007**  
**by Jane Valencia**



"Listening" - art by Jane and Amri from several years ago.

**Although we are edging toward spring and the time of balance** the skies still weep (at the least this past weekend), and I know of two grief rituals that took place at this time--one as a weekend workshop, and one spontaneously among a circle of women. This has led me to reflect on the nature of grief--and why it is considered such an important facet (addressing grief, diving in to it, honoring it, even celebrating it) in numerous practices or ecologies that have at their heart the reembodying ourselves as creatures of the natural world, deepening our relationship with Spirit, growing our unique selves, and reweaving a culture of belonging. It seems to me that Grief is inherent to our human condition--even when you think you have nothing to grieve about, at times we carry grief anyway!

So what is *that* all about? Many folks would say this carrying of grief that may not seem to relate to your circumstance is a symptom of our severe disconnect in this culture from what is most meaningful in our human condition--that we *are* beings of the natural world, physiologically, biologically, emotionally, and spiritually wired to

receive information, and interact with the many aspects and creatures of the natural world in countless ways. This is hardwired into our structure and essence, and to be so disconnected from this large and whole world around us debilitates us in ways we cannot identify until we start moving along those latent, unhooked threads.

The same with our yearning for a culture and community of belonging--a weaving of our human village that strives to see us as we truly are, and to support us in bringing our unique gifts and story into the world. A human village or tribe that knows that what we are all about in the heart of our nature is essential to the survival of the whole--whole family, village, ecosystem, nation, planet.

A community of belonging welcomes the child into the world, and strives to discern what gifts that child brings. It knows that even behavior that is 'undesirable' is telling it something important about what the child needs, what story is woven in her or him, what that child came into the world to express. Our whole lives are a story, or deep dream, or bright image woven into our being--so the old tales say in various ways. A community of belonging will be attentive to that story--to the bits that are revealed.

Or not. Because I think a sense of disconnect or exile is part of our growing into our full humanity. into our fully-woven nature. I think even in the most nourishing of communities we will find that we are not fully seen, or that we are disconnected from something vital to our spirit, or experience that our whole world is profoundly out of alignment in some way. And this is where struggle--the essential wrestling with oneself slams us against our boundaries, forces us to break through our edges--or at least glimpse something very different to us on the other side. I once heard that when people grieve--when

they can't stop crying--when they are filled with sorrow--they are in a place of vision. I never really understood what that meant, and probably still don't. But part of this notion lies in the reality that individuals in these dark, weeping places are in mystery. Any or all presuppositions can be called into question, because, for them, the world has turned inside out, and something is very different from what they had assumed before. That's certainly what it feels like. I find that when I am in those places any question I hear or ask myself is significant. You question your assumptions and your assumptions about your questions! In the end, you surrender, because quite likely there is nothing you can figure out for sure right then. And that is where vision opens, I think. Because one realizes that anything in experience, inner or outer, can provide you with the keys you need to step forward and reframe a small or large part of your life. You don't want to miss anything!

But if you are to be in the 'vision' of grief, you must first be in a place and circumstance where it is safe to grieve--to go as far into the deep as you must go. For that to happen, it *must* be safe, and you need to be held in some very real way, I think. And though a single person can offer this sanctuary, I think it also needs to come from community -- whether a small group like a circle, or a large one like a village.

A huge question for our place and time is how to provide for those sanctuary containers for grief--and then offer it. We as a culture are afraid to express grief or to witness it--that true grief that opens to the bones of the heart. We don't know what to do next, and to be with it, and then when the luminous moment opens, to allow it to shapeshift and compost into the rich source of new steps forward.

As I understand it, the Haudenosaunee have a ritual that is part of their gatherings, as essential to beginning any decision-making, as their Thanksgiving Address, where they "bring their minds together as one" by offering thanks to the beings of the earth and universe and to the Creator for the blessings they bring us. In the first Tree Letter I introduced the Peacemaker Principles of these people (such as I understand them). Enclosed in this Tree Letter are the Three Condolences, which they also practice.

The idea of the **Practice of Condolence** is that when we come together we must address and clear our grief, so that there can be clear vision, open/true hearing, and strong voice. Healing must happen before you can move on. It must happen before you can truly be in a place of Peace. I leave it to you to uncover the beauty of this gesture -- or something similar -- in your own lives.

### The Three Condolences

If you see someone crying, reach to heaven and bring down the softest fawnskin to dry their tears and say "Tomorrow, may this person have clear vision".

If someone's head is bowed, and they don't seem to hear, reach to heaven and pull down a soft feather, and brush their ears to clear the blockage, so they can hear. "Tomorrow, may this person hear again what is around them."

If someone has a choking throat, reach to heaven and pull down a cup of the purest water. "Tomorrow, may this person have a strong voice."