

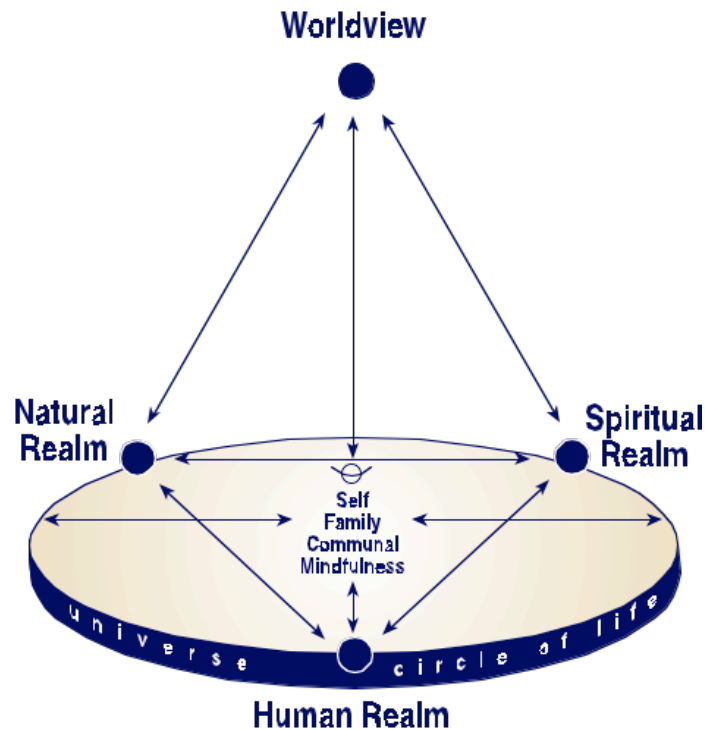
## Blowing in the Wind

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*Sharing Our Pathways*, Vol. 9, Issue 2

There are messages for us, as a Native people, blowing in the wind that are older than any of our Native languages. I think one message is telling us that we can make change for the better in our lives through dedication, motivation, tenacity and traditional creativity to overcome the limitations of the current education system. This means that we educate our Native people in their Native languages and English to become articulate in both. This will enable them to think in their own worldviews for answers to their problems and exercise the means of control of the modern world to clearly and effectively articulate demands for change.

I use the tetrahedral metaphor as a way of trying to explain the synergistic process of keeping balance in ones life. The base is a triangle with the human, natural and spiritual worlds as the foundation of the worldview. I have read a book which analyzes the number three as a “breaking through to a world of infinite possibilities” (Brailsford, 1999). He further points out that three symbolizes creation and that one and two are the parents of number 3, the first born. If I think of it in this manner then the triune God of the Bible comes into mind. For the tetrahedral, it is the spiritual power that is eternal and omnipresent. Mother Earth is created and from its rocks comes all life, including the human being, thus serving as the basis of all life. This process presents infinite possibilities of solutions for overcoming a mechanical worldview that is so destructive to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It then behooves the Native people to pursue education diligently in their own thought world as well as in the disciplines of the modern world. This enables Native people to use their own problem-solving tools as well as those of the mechanical world to effect change.



I have often said and heard that sense of place serves as the basis for identity and a home for the mind and heart. In some schools, students have been engaged in cultural mapping activities to identify the Native geographic names associated with the features of a particular place. This gives a cultural grid to place over the land, that provides order, meaning and stability to those who live on that land. To know place is to know oneself, which empowers us to do things with courage and determination.

I have experienced a process in New Zealand whereby Maori Elders were taken to landmarks of the Waikato traditional lands. They were reviewing a booklet that had been prepared citing important places, what had transpired there and myths associated with that place. A guide was appointed who gave a running dialogue of points of interest and what was known about them, which the Elders then critiqued. The process was very constructive as it entailed correction of pronunciation of place names and added information to what was already known that sometimes led to significant revisions to the name and what actually happened there. This authentication process is needed as the Maori want to rewrite their history, not from the point of view of an outsider, but from within.

Wouldn't it be advisable for Alaska Native people to engage in a similar process? For urban areas such as Fairbanks, a group of knowledgeable Native Elders could be taken to various historical sites whereby the traditional Native name is given and the story told as

to its use, occupancy, burial places of leaders, old migration trails, battle skirmishes, peacemaking, kinship, alliances, particular resources and so forth. All this information would be recorded by video and audio tape, transcribed and edited and later the Elders would again gather to piece together a story acceptable to all. Some beginning examples of this are already available, such as the Minto Mapping Project ([www.ankn.uaf.edu/chei/mapproj.html](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/chei/mapproj.html)), the Angoon Cultural Atlas ([www.ankn.uaf.edu](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu)) and the traditional map and book assembled by Howard Luke (Luke, 1999).



*A portion of the traditional map included with Howard Luke: My Own Trail.*

I can foresee a caravan of snow machines transporting Elders to different areas such as camp sites, places of warrior skirmishes, hunting grounds and burial places where the correct name and what transpired there would be clarified. In the summer, boats loaded with Elders could be taken to significant sites agreed upon to tell their stories. I can envision a bus full of Elders slowly going around Bethel recounting the old sites of fish camps, the kasegiq, the original location of Mamtellrilleg south of the Kuskokwim River by the old Air Force airport, and the island that once was in front of the present site. They could explain why the original Yupiat did not settle in the present site, the history of Kepenkuk (now Brown Slough) and orutsaraq (place for gathering sphagnum moss for caulking), the location of old reindeer corrals and so forth. This would give our Yupiat a sense of kinship and belonging to a place that one could call home and mean it, because it has a well-documented story from the perspective of the Yupiat people.

I would encourage teachers to take their students out into nature whenever possible, where the local language and culture can come alive in natural ways. By doing this, you are not limiting what is taught to knowledge alone, as the school typically does, but paying attention to the deeper needs of the student and the community. Within the classroom, the natural rhythms of life can be tapped into through singing, dancing and drumming, as well as other traditional activities that are acceptable to Elders and parents. The essential balance that is represented in the tetrahedral metaphor requires attention to all the realms of life, including the human, natural and spiritual. This message is blowing in the wind—a message older than our Native ways.

## References

Brailsford, Barry. *Wisdom of the Four Winds*. Stoneprint Press: Christchurch, NZ, 1999.

Luke, Howard. *Howard Luke: My Own Trail*. Fairbanks: Alaska Native Knowledge Network. 1999.