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## SEEKING LIFE

*Tito Naranjo*

A Hopi potter, Al Qoyawayma aptly expressed Pueblo reverence for the land when he said about earth and clay, “I know that some of the clay may even contain the dust of my ancestors — so — how respectful I must be and think, perhaps I too might become part of a vessel, someday!” (Trimble 1987).

The Tewa Pueblos of north central New Mexico practice a philosophy of daily life that they refer to as *Gi Woatsi Tuenji*, “We are seeking Life.” Complementary to Seeking Life are the concepts of *Tsigikan*, *Tsekana Kanpo* or “We have been loved, we have been honored (by our supernaturals).” These concepts signify actualization and fulfillment in Seeking Life.

Seeking Life is process, practiced in a relative and bounded sense by children, adolescents and young adults, who have yet to “blossom” as Tewa. Flowering occurs sometime in adulthood when individuals become full Tewas. This flowering renders them completed or “finished” people: life’s many experiences have taught the adult Tewa the multiple meanings of Seeking Life.

Life experiences in traditional contexts are necessary keys to this Tewa processual way of living. A primary experience necessary for actualization (the process that leads to “flowering”) is connectedness with the land, *Nambi Gia*, our Mother Earth. Every Tewa adult has learned the spiritual essence of all so-called “inanimate” objects and living organisms, which include dirt, rock, trees, grass, sky, clouds, air and animals; all move in synchronized cycles of life. One’s own life also becomes an extension of these generalized yet specific life forms. A natural consequence of this perspective is reverence for the entire context, which in contemporary America is called the ecological environment.

Another example of the implications of Seeking Life is taken from the sky, when a cloud is not a cloud. A cloud is personified as a spirit, and so when thunderheads amass over Southwest summer skies, a Tewa will say, “They (supernaturals) are preparing to visit us. We hope they will bless us today.” While on a walk, the same Tewa may find a stone of pleasing shape or colors. With cupped hands, the stone is swooped past his open mouth as air surrounding the stone is

inhaled. The stone may be returned with these words, “Thank you, you have shared your spirit and life with me today.” Taking breath, *haa honde*, recognizes the spiritual essence of supposedly inanimate objects.

Religious ceremony and dances bring life to individuals and the community in a ceremonial completion of Seeking Life. Any dance with religious significance must include the use of *Tse*, or evergreens, which symbolize the circularity of life and especially of water. Of all evergreens, the douglas fir is revered as an intermediary to supernaturals who bring Tewa the good life. A small douglas fir always stands in kiva corners during practices for ceremonial dances and receives the cornmeal offered to it by all dancers. After the tree is so used, it is returned to the Rio Grande, whose water takes the spirit of the fir and recycles it — through the circularity of water — to ocean, to clouds, to rain and to its return back to all fir trees. Sometime in a person’s late maturity in Tewa thought, all pieces of oral tradition come to fit together, and adults come to realize that they are a part of the context and everything in their context is a part of themselves.

On any ordinary day when a Tewa stands and offers cornmeal to thank supernaturals as the first glimmer of light defines the Sangre De Cristo Mountains on the eastern horizon, this prayer may be uttered.

Ye who are not humans  
Ye who are spiritual beings  
I thank you for strength  
strength given to my arms  
strength given to my legs  
strength to think good thoughts.  
I thank you for life today.  
May it be in unity with  
this ground upon which I stand.

A Tewa has been seeking life. A Tewa has found life.

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### *Citation*

Trimble, Stephen. 1987. *Talking with the Clay*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.