

Living Holistically: Practicing the Navajo Principles of *Hózhó* and *K'é*

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Abstract

In this article the author introduces the Navajo (Diné) principles of *Hózhó* and *K'é* as a foundation for holistic learning and living. She tells how her grandfather's life represented these principles and how he manifested them in the world. She shows how his model reveals that holistic education is about living holistically as was foundational to Indigenous cultures prior to colonization. She offers her grandfather's way of being as a model for holistic living.

Keywords: Navajo, indigenous worldview, Chic Sandoval, indigenous education, holistic living, family

Diné Self-Introduction

Yá'át'ééh Diné Shik'éí, I am *Diné* of the *'Áshijí* (Salt clan), born for *Tł'izí Łání* (Many Goats clan), my maternal grandfather is *Kin Łichí'í'nii* (Red house clan) and my paternal grandfather is *Tó Dích'í'í'nii* (Bitterwater clan). Miranda Jensen Haskie *yinishyé* (my name). I am from Lukachukai, Arizona on the Navajo Nation. I was raised at a time when western education was encouraged and the completion of a college degree was expected in my family since both my father and mother completed their bachelor's degrees. However, to attain and complete the western education, it meant I had to leave home – my home among the four sacred mountains. I spent my junior high and most of my high school years attending school on the Navajo Nation. I spent my senior year of high school and my undergraduate years off the Navajo Nation in western schools.

In time, I realized everything I needed to succeed was inherent in my Navajo culture; yet, the colonizing educational experience led me to believe otherwise. The colonizing perspective soon had me view my world from a linear approach. In western education, I was trained to complete my formal education according to this linear model. While away, I constantly longed to return home; with the support of *shimásání* (my grandmother), uncles and

sisters, I remained in Albuquerque, New Mexico to complete my bachelor's degree. Upon completing my Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of New Mexico, I returned home to Lukachukai, Arizona. Now that I was home, I had no desire to ever leave home again, but I knew I wanted to eventually earn a graduate degree. I wondered whether an accredited graduate degree program was available to me without leaving home.

Fielding Graduate University was the graduate school that allowed me to continue in my career at Diné College while pursuing a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Change. The faculty and curriculum at Fielding were unique in that I was encouraged to apply my indigenous worldview in my doctoral studies. For my dissertation, I conducted a grounded theory research study on the life of my grandfather, *Shicheii*, Albert "Chic" Sandoval, Sr. (1892-1968). I respectfully refer to him as *Shicheii* or by his nick-name, Chic, throughout this writing.

Chic lived in the early 20th century and was an accomplished interpreter and translator of the Navajo language. He lived and worked to preserve our culture, practicing the Navajo principles of *Hózhó* and *K'é*. *Hózhó* is the Navajo principle of beauty and striving for harmony and balance. As Diné

people, we continually strive to practice and achieve *Hózhó* daily. *K'é* is the Navajo principle of establishing and maintaining relationships with all in our environment.

Many Diné people continue to practice *K'é* daily. It is an all-encompassing practice that pervades every aspect of Diné daily life. These Diné principles have been practiced time immemorial and remain as valuable today as they were historically. In this article, I discuss how *Shicheii* lived holistically practicing the Navajo principles of *Hózhó* and *K'é*. This practice can be important for all Diné educators, education administrators, and students.

The Navajo Basket symbolizes living holistically and offers a way for educators to teach *Hózhó* and *K'é* (harmony, balance, and good relationships with all). It represents the holistic connection of people in multiple ways as taught in centuries-old Navajo tradition. It has many interpretations. One relates to the interconnectedness between self, family, community, culture, nation, and universe.

Self – living the Navajo Principles of *Hózhó* and *K'é* (live in harmony and establish a relationship with oneself) including that of knowing oneself at many levels (emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and socially)

Family - practicing the principles with family (nuclear, extended, and clan family)

Community - living in harmony and establishing a relationship with those in the community where the individual resides (local level)

Culture - living in harmony and establishing a relationship with members of the same ethnic or cultural group (for example, Navajo)

Nation - living in harmony and establishing a relationship with the nation in which the individual resides (from the Navajo Nation to the United States, U.S. being the nation)

Universe – living in harmony and establishing a relationship with mother earth, father sky, and natural elements in our environment (continuous; on-going)

My grandfather, Chic, practiced *Hózhó* and *K'é* to live holistically as it relates to each of these. Commencing with the *self*, he learned to live in harmony by coming to know himself emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and socially. From this, he was able to practice *Hózhó* and *K'é* with *family*. Family comprised his nuclear family, extended family, and clan relatives. Clan relatives in the Navajo culture refers to those relatives a Navajo is related to by Navajo clanship. The Navajo people exercise clanship in relationship with each

other. The Diné people engage in a highly sophisticated application of establishing clan relationships with one another. *Hak'éí* is a relative by blood or clanship (Young & Morgan 1987). Chic's maternal clan was *Kin Łichíí'nii* (Red House clan). To demonstrate the complex system of Navajo kinship, the clan relatives of the *Kin Łichíí'nii* (Red House clan) include *Deeshchii'nii* (Start of the Red Streak clan), *Tł'ízí Łání* (Many Goats clan), *Tł'ááshchí'í* (Red Bottom People clan), *Tsé nahabí'nii* (Sleep Rock People clan), *Tsí'naajinii* (Black Streak Wood People clan), and *Naashashí* (Bear People clan) (Young and Morgan 1987).

Owing to Chic's ability to live according to *Hózhó* and *K'é*, he eventually became a cultural intermediary and a vanguard for his people. This relates to the *community* stage. The practice of the Navajo principles, the language, and his work as an interpreter and translator, helped him preserve the Navajo *culture* on behalf of the Navajo Nation, the *nation*. He did this while maintaining an intimate and harmonious relationship with the *universe*, *Nahasdzáán Shimá* (mother earth) and *Yádithit Shitaa'* (father sky).

Chic's modeling and teaching about living in balance in each domain inspired others to do so (Haskie 2002). At the first level, the '*self*', he was generous and kind. He was always willing to help anybody that asked him. In level two, Chic demonstrated an uncompromising commitment to *family*, often attending ceremonies for helping relatives. Relating to level four, *culture*, he valued *Hózhó* and encouraged his cultural practices. This sense of culture also inspired the Navajo government which led to his engagement at level five of *K'é*, the *nation*. Chic had many good friends throughout the Navajo nation and treated everyone as members of the Tribe. He often brought gifts such as mutton and returned home with presents like bread or pottery.

Chic's prayers speak to level six of *K'é*, *universe*. He understood the importance of the *Diyin* and the wonder of the universe. He knew the interconnection about the importance of reciprocity on Earth applied throughout the cosmos.

Thus, living holistically by practicing the principles of *Hózhó* and *K'é* is that we realize that the individual is inseparable from the universe and everything in it. At the same time, it embraces the beauty all around no matter the difficulties one encounters. Chic, my revered grandfather, was a model for such holistic living and never stopped seeing the beauty

in others and inspired others to see the beauty in themselves.

Shitsiji' hózhóq doo
Shikéédeé' hózhóq doo
Shiyaagi hózhóq doo
Shik'igi hózhóq doo
Shinaagi hózhóq doo
Shizaad hahózhóq doo
Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhó Nishíí doo

English Version

Let there be blessing before me
Let there be blessing behind me
Let there be blessing below me
Let there be blessing above me
Let there be blessing all around me
Let there be blessing through the words I speak
I have become one with the spirit, I am what the spirit
wants of me.
Let there be blessing
(Office of Diné Culture, Language & Community
Services, 2000)

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Author Bio

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