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Shalom: Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts - Chapter 1 of "Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision"

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CHAPTER ONE

Shalom: Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

A Large Story

Shalom is a large concept that requires us to ask large questions. Shalom living is how life is meant to be. When we ask how life is meant to be we are also concerning ourselves with the how and why of life's purpose, such as, "Where do we all come from?" "How did evil come into the world?" "What is the relationship between human beings and the rest of creation?" "How should people live with one another?" Western philosophy tends to require precise definitions and prior knowledge in order to fully discuss what is common to us all. When delving into such cosmological realms it may be easier to ask our questions in the same way a child would ask them, rather than to think "philosophy."

I remember as a pastor, when it was my turn to do the children's story, I would begin by telling the adults present, "If you can understand the message through the children's story, feel free to leave before I give the adult sermon." Well, I don't think anyone ever left early, but more often than not people would remember what was said during the children's message better than what they recalled about the adult message. Among our Cherokee people we have stories that address the big questions of life. No one story deals with every big question, but the one I am about to share speaks to many cosmological concerns, not only for the Cherokee but for all human beings.¹

1. There are different versions of this story, but this one, as recorded by anthropologist James Mooney, has the most detail.

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(Note: Even if you fully understand this first story, please continue reading the rest of the book!)

Long years ago, soon after the world was made, a hunter and his wife lived at Pilot Knob with their only child, a little boy. The father's name was Kana'ti (Lucky Hunter), and his wife was called Selu (Corn). No matter when Kana'ti went into the woods, he never failed to bring back a load of game, which his wife would cut up and prepare, washing off the blood from the meat in the river near the house. The little boy used to play down by the river every day, and one morning the old people thought they heard laughing and talking in the bushes as though there were two children there. When the boy came home at night his parents asked him who had been playing with him all day. "He comes out of the water," said the boy, "and he calls himself my elder brother. He says his mother was cruel to him and threw him into the river." Then they knew that the strange boy had sprung from the blood of the game that Selu had washed off at the river's edge.

Every day when the little boy went out to play the other would join him, but as he always went back again into the water the old people never had a chance to see him. At last one evening Kana'ti said to his son, "Tomorrow, when the other boy comes to play, get him to wrestle with you, and when you have your arms around him hold on to him and call for us." The boy promised to do as he was told, so the next day as soon as his playmate appeared he challenged him to a wrestling match. The other agreed at once, but as soon as they had their arms around each other, Kana'ti's boy began to scream for his father. The old folks at once came running down, and as soon as the Wild Boy saw them he struggled to free himself and cried out, "Let me go; you threw me away!" but his brother held on until the parents reached the spot, when they seized the Wild Boy and took him home with them. They kept him in the house until they had tamed him, but he was always wild and artful in his disposition, and was the leader of his brother in every mischief. It was not long until the old people discovered that he had magic powers, and they called him I'nage-utasvhi (He-who-grew-up-wild).

Whenever Kana'ti went into the mountains he always brought back a fat buck or doe, or maybe a couple of turkeys. One day the Wild Boy said to his brother, "I wonder where our father gets all that game; let's follow him next time and find out." A few days afterward Kana'ti took a

bow and some feathers in his hand and started off toward the west. The boys waited a little while and then went after him, keeping out of sight until they saw him go into a swamp where there were a great many of the small reeds that hunters use to make arrow shafts. Then the Wild Boy changed himself into a puff of bird's down, which the wind took up and carried until it alighted upon Kana'ti's shoulder just as he entered the swamp, but Kana'ti knew nothing about it. The old man cut reeds, fitted the feathers to them and made some arrows, and the Wild Boy — in his other shape — thought, "I wonder what those things are for." When Kana'ti had his arrows finished he came out of the swamp and went on again. The wind blew the down from his shoulder, and it fell in the woods, when the Wild Boy took his right shape again and went back and told his brother what he had seen. Keeping out of sight of their father, they followed him up the mountain until he stopped at a certain place and lifted a large rock. At once there ran out a buck, which Kana'ti shot, and then lifting it upon his back he started for home again. "Oho!" exclaimed the boys. "He keeps all the deer shut up in that hole, and whenever he wants meat he just lets one out and kills it with those things he made in the swamp." They hurried and reached home before their father, who had the heavy deer to carry, and he never knew that they had followed.

A few days later the boys went back to the swamp, cut some reeds, and made seven arrows, and then started up the mountain to where their father kept the game. When they got to the place, they raised the rock and a deer came running out. Just as they drew back to shoot it, another came out, and then another and another, until the boys got confused and forgot what they were about. In those days all the deer had their tails hanging down like other animals, but as a buck was running past the Wild Boy struck its tail with his arrow so that it pointed upward. The boys thought this good sport, and when the next one ran past the Wild Boy struck its tail so that it too stood straight up, and his brother struck the next one so hard with his arrow that the deer's tail was almost curled over his back. The deer carries his tail this way ever since. The deer came running past until the last one had come out of the hole and escaped into the forest. Then came droves of raccoons, rabbits, and all the other four-footed animals — all but the bear, because there were no bear then. Last came great flocks of turkeys, pigeons, and partridges that darkened the air like a cloud and made such a noise with their wings that Kana'ti, sitting at home, heard the sound

like distant thunder on the mountains and said to himself, "My bad boys have got into trouble; I must go and see what they are doing."

So he went up the mountain, and when he came to the place where he kept the game he found the two boys standing by the rock, and all the birds and animals were gone. Kana'ti was furious, but without saying a word he went down into the cave and kicked the covers off four jars in one corner. Out swarmed bedbugs, fleas, lice, and gnats, and got all over the boys. They screamed with pain and fright and tried to beat off the insects, but the thousands of vermin crawled over them and bit and stung them until both dropped down nearly dead. Kana'ti stood looking on until he thought they had been punished enough; then he knocked off the vermin and gave the boys a lecture. "Now, you rascals," said he, "you have always had plenty to eat and never had to work for it. Whenever you were hungry all I had to do was to come up here and get a deer or a turkey and bring it home for your mother to cook; but now you have let out all the animals, and after this when you want a deer to eat you will have to hunt all over the woods for it, and then maybe not find one. Go home now to your mother, while I see if I can find something to eat for supper."

When the boys got home again they were very tired and hungry and asked their mother for something to eat. "There is no meat," said Selu, "but wait a little while and I'll get you something." So she took a basket and started out to the storehouse. This storehouse was built upon poles high up from the ground, to keep it out of the reach of animals, and there was a ladder to climb up by, and one door, but no other opening. Every day when Selu got ready to cook the dinner she would go out to the storehouse with a basket and bring it back full of corn and beans. The boys had never been inside the storehouse, so they wondered where all the corn and beans could come from, as the house was not a very large one; so as soon as Selu went out of the door the Wild Boy said to his brother, "Let's go and see what she does." They ran around and climbed up at the back of the storehouse and pulled out a piece of clay from between the logs, so that they could look in. There they saw Selu standing in the middle of the room with the basket in front of her on the floor. Leaning over the basket, she rubbed her stomach — so — and the basket was half full of corn. Then she rubbed under her armpits — so — and the basket was full to the top with beans. The boys looked at each other and said, "This will never do; our mother is a witch. If we eat any of that it will poison us. We must kill her."

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When the boys came back into the house, she knew their thoughts before they spoke. "So you are going to kill me?" said Selu. "Yes," said the boys. "You are a witch." "Well," said their mother, "when you have killed me, clear a large piece of ground in front of the house and drag my body seven times around the circle. Then drag me seven times over the ground inside the circle, and stay up all night and watch, and in the morning you will have plenty of corn." The boys killed her with their clubs, and cut off her head and put it up on the roof of the house with her face turned to the west, and told her to look for her husband. Then they set to work to clear the ground in front of the house, but instead of clearing the whole piece they cleared only seven little spots. This is why corn now grows only in a few places instead of over the whole world. They dragged the body of Selu around the circle, and wherever her blood fell on the ground the corn sprang up. But instead of dragging her body seven times across the ground they dragged it over only twice, which is the reason the people still work their crop but twice. The two brothers sat up and watched their corn all night, and in the morning it was full grown and ripe.

When Kana'ti came home at last, he looked around, but could not see Selu anywhere, and asked the boys where their mother was. "She was a witch, and we killed her," said the boys. "There is her head up there on top of the house." When he saw his wife's head on the roof, he was very angry, and said, "I won't stay with you any longer; I am going to the Wolf people." So he started off, but before he had gone far the Wild Boy changed himself again to a tuft of down, which fell on Kana'ti's shoulder. When Kana'ti reached the settlement of the Wolf people, they were holding a council in the townhouse. He went in and sat down with the tuft of bird's down on his shoulder, but he never noticed it. When the Wolf chief asked him his business, he said: "I have two bad boys at home, and I want you to go in seven days from now and play ball against them." Although Kana'ti spoke as though he wanted them to play a game of ball, the Wolves knew that he meant for them to go and kill the two boys. They promised to go. Then the bird's down blew off from Kana'ti's shoulder, and the smoke carried it up through the hole in the roof of the townhouse. When it came down on the ground outside, the Wild Boy took his right shape again and went home and told his brother all that he had heard in the townhouse. But when Kana'ti left the Wolf people, he did not return home, but went on farther.

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The boys then began to get ready for the Wolves, and the Wild Boy — the magician — told his brother what to do. They ran around the house in a wide circle until they had made a trail all around it except on the side from which the Wolves would come, where they left a small open space. Then they made four large bundles of arrows and placed them at four different points on the outside of the circle, after which they hid themselves in the woods and waited for the Wolves. In a day or two a whole party of Wolves came and surrounded the house to kill the boys. The Wolves did not notice the trail around the house, because they came in where the boys had left the opening, but the moment they went inside the circle the trail changed to a high brush fence and shut them in. Then the boys on the outside took their arrows and began shooting them down, and as the Wolves could not jump over the fence they were all killed, excepting a few that escaped through the opening into a great swamp close by. The boys ran around the swamp, and a circle of fire sprang up in their tracks and set fire to the grass and bushes and burned up nearly all the other Wolves. Only two or three got away, and from these have come all the wolves that are now in the world.

Soon afterward some strangers from a distance, who had heard that the brothers had a wonderful grain from which they made bread, came to ask for some, for none but Selu and her family had ever known corn before. The boys gave them seven grains of corn, which they told them to plant the next night on their way home. If they sat up all night to watch the corn, they would have seven ripe ears in the morning. These they were to plant the next night and watch in the same way, and so on every night until they reached home, when they would have corn enough to supply the whole people. The strangers lived seven days' journey away. They took the seven grains and watched all through the darkness until morning, when they saw seven tall stalks, each stalk bearing a ripened ear. They gathered the ears and went on their way. The next night they planted all their corn, and guarded it as before until daybreak, when they found an abundant increase. But the way was long and the sun was hot, and the people grew tired. On the last night before reaching home they fell asleep, and in the morning the corn they had planted had not even sprouted. They brought with them to their settlement what corn they had left and planted it. With care and attention they were able to raise a crop. But ever since, the corn must be watched and tended through half the year, which before would grow and ripen in a night.

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When Kana'ti did not return, the boys at last decided to go and find him. The Wild Boy took a gaming wheel and rolled it toward the Darkening land. In a little while the wheel came rolling back, and the boys knew their father was not there. He rolled it to the south and to the north. Each time the wheel came back to him, and they knew their father was not there. Then he rolled it toward the Sun Land, and it did not return. "Our father is there," said the Wild Boy. "Let us go and find him." So the two brothers set off toward the east, and after traveling a long time they came upon Kana'ti walking along with a little dog by his side. "You bad boys," said their father. "You have found me when I didn't want to see you again." "Yes," they answered. "We always accomplish what we start out to do — we are men." "This dog overtook me four days ago," Kana'ti said, but the boys knew that the dog was the wheel they had sent after him to find him. "Well," said Kana'ti, "as long as you have found me, we may as well travel together, but I shall take the lead."

Soon they came to a swamp, and Kana'ti told them there was something dangerous there and they must keep away from it. He went on ahead, but as soon as he was out of sight the Wild Boy said to his brother, "Come and let us see what is in the swamp." They went in together, and in the middle of the swamp, they found a large panther asleep. The Wild Boy got out an arrow and shot the panther in the side of the head. The panther turned his head and the other boy shot him on that side. He turned his head away again and the two brothers shot together — *tust, kust, kust!* But the panther was not hurt by the arrows and paid no more attention to the boys. They came out of the swamp and soon overtook Kana'ti, waiting for them. "Did you find it?" asked Kana'ti. "Yes," said the boys. "We found it, but it never hurt us. We are men." Kana'ti was surprised, but said nothing, and they went on again.

After a while he turned to them and said, "Now you must be careful. We are coming to a tribe called the Anada'dvtaski ('Roasters'), and if they get you they will put you into a pot and feast on you." Then he went on ahead. Soon the boys came to a tree that had been struck by lightning, and the Wild Boy directed his brother to gather some of the splinters from the tree and told him what to do with them. In a little while they came to the settlement of the cannibals, who, as soon as they saw the boys, came running out, crying, "Good, here are two nice fat strangers. Now we'll have a grand feast! They caught the boys and dragged them into the townhouse, and sent word to all the people of

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the settlement to come to the feast. They made up a great fire, put water into a large pot and set it to boiling, and then seized the Wild Boy and put him down into it. His brother was not in the least frightened and made no attempt to escape, but quietly knelt down and began putting the splinters into the fire, as if to make it burn better. When the cannibals thought the meat was about ready they lifted the pot from the fire, and that instant a blinding light filled the townhouse, and lightning began to dart from one side to the other, striking down the cannibals until not one of them was left alive. Then the lightning went up through the smoke-hole, and the next moment the two boys were standing outside the townhouse as though nothing had happened. They went on and soon met Kana'ti, who seemed much surprised to see them, and said, "What! Are you here again?" "Oh, yes, we never give up. We are great men!" "What did the cannibals do to you?" "We met them and they brought us to their townhouse, but they never hurt us." Kana'ti said nothing more, and they went on.

He soon got out of sight of the boys, but they kept on until they came to the end of the world, where the sun comes out. The sky was just coming down when they got there, but they waited until it went up again, and then they went through and climbed up on the other side. There they found Kana'ti and Selu sitting together. The old folk received them kindly and were glad to see them, telling them they might stay there a while, but then they must go to live where the sun goes down. The boys stayed with their parents seven days and then went on toward the Darkening land, where they are now. We call them Anisga'ya Tsunsdi' (the Little Men), and when they talk to each other we hear low rolling thunder in the west.

After Kana'ti's boys had let the deer out of the cave where their father used to keep them, the hunters tramped about in the woods for a long time without finding any game, so that the people were very hungry. At last they heard that the Thunder Boys were now living in the far west, beyond the sun door, and that if they were sent for they could bring back the game. So they sent messengers for them, and the boys came and sat down in the middle of the townhouse and began to sing.

At the first song there was a roaring sound like a strong wind in the northwest, and it grew louder and nearer as the boys sang on, until at the seventh song a whole herd of deer, led by a large buck, came out of the woods. The boys had told the people to be ready with their bows and arrows, and when the song was ended and all the deer were close

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around the townhouse, the hunters shot into them and killed as many as they needed before the herd could get back into the timber. Then the Thunder Boys went back to the Darkening land, but before they left they taught the people the seven songs with which to call up the deer. It all happened so long ago that the songs are now forgotten — all but two, which the hunters still sing whenever they go after deer.²

Although there are many areas addressed by the story, at this time I simply want to draw your attention to the relationship between the human beings, animals, and plants. There is a symbiotic connection between the origin of the Wild Boy and the meat provided in a similar way, and between Corn Woman and the corn and beans. The former is made from the blood drained from the meat; the other produces food, both from her body and the seeds she leaves. In the case of the Hunter and Corn Woman, food was provided as a gift, but later, the gift would need to be sought with more effort. The gifts of the earth, supplied by the Creator, became costly, though still considered as gifts. In the end, the family was reunited, harmony was restored, and the benefits of the restoration were passed down to the generations who followed.

In our day we desperately need a restoration of harmony between human beings, the Creator, the earth, and all God provides through the earth such as plants and animals. Many species of plants and animals are going extinct at an alarming rate. Much of our fresh water is being made into a commodity while what is available is often unfit to drink or fish. Seafood is tainted and disappearing; urban development is ever widening, draining precious wetlands and forcing small farmers out of business. The bulk of our meat and vegetables is genetically modified, mostly grown on horrific industrial farm-factories and tainted by harmful chemicals. Today, the relationship between human beings, plants, and animals has been damaged tremendously and we are just now beginning to count the cost of abusing the precious gifts that the Creator has so abundantly supplied. A renewed understanding of living out shalom on earth, and the equivalent constructs found among indigenous peoples, is our path to restoring harmony in the world.

2. James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (New York: Dover, 1995), 242-48, and originally published by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., in 1900 as *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute*.

Shalom, More Than Peace

Shalom is a Hebrew word, often used in the Scriptures to mean “peace,” right? That’s correct only if you consider it correct to call the Grand Canyon “a large crack in the ground” or the Pacific Ocean “a large pool of water.” *Shalom* is much more than just a “large” term. There is likely as much residual breadth and depth to the meaning of *shalom* as there is residual expanse or residual water in the meanings of the aforementioned examples. Not only does *shalom* express much more than “peace,” but the kind of peace *shalom* represents is active and engaged, going far beyond the mere absence of conflict. A fuller understanding of *shalom* is the key to the door that can lead us to a whole new way of living in our world. As Terry McGonigal explains,

Although the word “peace” (Hebrew: *shalom*, Greek: *eirene*) appears over 500 times in scripture, this theme and its implications have been overlooked in biblical theology. God’s design for and delight in diversity are embedded in the creation narratives, which describe order, relationships, stewardship, beauty and rhythm as the essential foundations for *shalom*, “the way God designed the universe to be.”³

According to McGonigal, the biblical *shalom* construct should be understood as both natural and in every respect, God’s very Way, existing in and through all creation. There is a wide array of words and theological examples of *shalom* that give depth and flavor to the simple English word “peace,” as it is used in the Scriptures. Examples of various aspects of *shalom* include, according to one concordance,⁴ completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, and the absence of agitation or discord. Another concordance lists the word origin of *shalom* from *shalem*, meaning completeness, soundness, welfare, and peace and repayment. Words used to translate *shalem* in the NASB include close, ease, favorable, friend, friendly terms, friends, greet, greeted, health, peace, peaceably, peaceful, peacefully, perfect peace, prosperity, safe, safely, safety, secure, trusted, welfare, well, well-being, and wholly.⁵

3. Terry McGonigal, “If You Only Knew What Would Bring Peace”: *Shalom Theology as the Biblical Foundation for Diversity* (Unpublished, 2010), 2. Used with permission.

4. James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries* (Nashville: Royal Publishers, 1979), no. 7965.

5. *The NAS Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dic-*

In the Second Testament, the term *eirene* is used to mean “peace”; but again, Semitic writers of the New Testament would have likely understood its Hebrew correspondent to include the larger construct. Such a rich list of descriptors leans heavily into the concepts of love, justice, and God’s created intention, concepts that truly make the word *shalom* a profound construction.

A New World Order

Imagine, if you will, a new world order that has the power to enforce a decree stating we must live by all the words and concepts in the lists above. Such an action would change our world drastically. In this new world, historic wrongs would be righted; former enemies would come back together in love; through restitution, justice would be served to those who had been wronged for years; people with physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual afflictions and anguish would be healed; people would be at peace with one another; beasts would no longer stalk humans; plants would no longer be poisonous to us; pollution would cease; climate change would be thwarted; there would be no wars; and everyone and everything would be happy with the Creator and all creation.

Such images are not utopian in nature; as God’s intentions for all creation they are supposed to be reality. We need not think that such a world could only exist in the human imagination, because the Creator has embedded this desire deep within the core of our being. The Scriptures are replete with words and images of what such a world should look like. God’s preferred order of existence for our world is shown by such images in Scripture as the garden of Eden, the Sabbath system, and Jubilee. Other *shalom* descriptions come to mind from the prophets, such as God’s Holy Mountain and the Great Day of the Lord. Images of *shalom* in the Second Testament concern the advent of the Messiah, the kingdom of God, and the church.⁶ The Scriptures brim with images of and references to *shalom*.

tionaries (The Lockman Foundation, 1981, 1998). See also Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: The New Koehler and Baumgartner in English*, trans. M. E. Richardson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993-).

6. I assert that there is enough continuity in all the biblical constructs of *shalom* images and words, for the various writers to understand a crucial, national, and sometimes universal *shalom* motif. It may even be argued that *shalom* is the metanarrative of the Torah. The Talmud states, “The entire Torah is for the sake of the ways of *shalom*” (Talmud, Gittin

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But even the proper understanding of shalom simply as peace, exemplified below by Isaiah, is much greater than a mere absence of conflict.

Many peoples shall come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more. (Isa. 2:3-4)

Isaiah visualized a world where all the nations on earth would learn from the Creator how to enact true peace. The result of such learning means that peace could be the norm. So much so, that all the weapons of warfare in the world could be melted down into useful tools in order to be used for feeding the world's population. Not only does shalom, understood here as peace, accomplish the task of ending the bloodshed, but it appropriates the old war-making resources to solve the problem of world hunger. In such a world tanks, missiles, fighter jets, nuclear devices, smart bombs, and all other military weaponry would be recycled into useful, job-producing, and food-producing implements. Imagine driving a tank into a processing line and watching formerly unemployed people transform it into a tractor. Isaiah continues his understanding of shalom in peace trajectory in the following passage.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,

59b). Again in the Mishneh: “Great is shalom, as the whole Torah was given in order to promote shalom in the world, as it is stated, ‘Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are shalom’” (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *The Laws of Chanukah* 4:14). Working from a christocentric hermeneutic, I will show heuristically how I believe Jesus concurred with the understanding of shalom as the primary motif in the Hebrew Testament, and how Christ was viewed afterwards, in the New Testament, as the fulfillment of the same shalom motif. In other words, in the Second Testament, Christ fulfills the scriptural shalom metanarrative.

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the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:6-9)

Here, the prophet uses the image of children playing in the midst of wild beasts and deadly vipers to make the point that shalom means safety and security. Isaiah conjures up the images of the most deadly beast of his day and sets the people's progeny (their children) and their livelihood (sheep, goats, and cattle) among them.

Perhaps Isaiah is tweaking his image of shalom through the use of hyperbole, but nothing could be more frightening or more real to people living in a pastoral economy than exposing the things they value most to the things they fear most. In such an economy the point of wealth (as blessing) is the ability to secure livestock and land for one's progeny. Isaiah's point is well taken; shalom existence is based in a newfound security. In such a world of shalom as peace and security, we neither have to war anymore, nor do we need to exercise the daily worries over our children or livelihood. In shalom, warring over turf, wealth, or national security are extinct practices. In shalom, family wealth is no longer the point of blessing because living out shalom offers an alternative way for people to view wealth. The concept of blessing in a world based upon shalom is shalom itself.

As I mentioned, the Second Testament is also full of ways of describing shalom as peace. Second Testament imagery includes descriptors such as a body, with each part serving the other; a building, with each brick fitting the other; a new peaceable kingdom, with Jesus being the fulfillment of former images, to the point where he is named not only as the shalom bringer, but as shalom itself, "for he himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14a NIV). Paul's reference in Ephesians 2 may be drawing from the logical background of Judges 6:24a (NLT): "And Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and named it Yahweh-Shalom (which means 'the LORD is peace')."

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The writer of Colossians, presumably the apostle Paul, makes the transcendent connection with shalom by sharing the ways Christians should be treating one another in a shalom-based world. Paul's understanding of peace, and its antecedent shalom, is noticeable when one considers the ways he describes just how followers of Christ should live. Nowhere do Paul's views seem to be more in step with other scriptural actions of shalom.

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the [shalom] that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in [shalom]. And always be thankful. (Col. 3:12-15 NLT)

Again, like the Ephesians 2 passage, the image Paul creates in the above Colossians passage is one where shalom comes from Christ and one where Christ empowers us to live out shalom. Paul views the list of virtues, not as abstract moral commands, but as ways of describing people living out a shalom way of life.

At first glance all the images and the great list of words put together do not convey the full meaning of shalom. The Creator has ingeniously designed a world in which shalom is the foundational stuff that God uses to create proper order to the world. Put simply, shalom is originally located in God. Shalom is what we are to utilize each day as God lives through us. The responsibility of us as human caretakers of shalom living is to take these images, words, injunctions, and metaphors and apply them to our daily lives and to our world.

Shalom is meant to be both personal (emphasizing our relationships with others) and structural (replacing systems where shalom has been broken or which produce broken shalom, such as war- or greed-driven economic systems). In shalom, the old structures and systems are replaced with new structures and new systems. The universal expectation for all humanity to live out shalom has been given. Shalom has been decreed. God expects us to make the old way of living new. The Creator requires us to reshape the world we know into the world God has intended.

Shalom, Always Tested on the Margins

The task of creating communities where shalom is lived out may not be easy, but we can know whether or not we are successful in our efforts. How can a community tell if it is practicing shalom? Fortunately, a consistent standard is given throughout the sacred Scriptures. Shalom is always tested on the margins of a society and revealed by how the poor, oppressed, disempowered, and needy are treated. A huge gap between the wealthy and the poor may be a good indicator of the lack of shalom. Large discrepancies between wealth and poverty tend to lead to social oppression through injustice, which leads to other social ills like false imprisonment and disproportionate imprisoned populations of the marginalized (like minorities), unemployment, disproportionate military service by the poor and marginalized groups, high taxes (to support imperialism and the military), the opulence of the wealthy (and corporate tax welfare), children growing up without one or both parents, homelessness, prostitution, hunger, etcetera. These same social dynamics have remained unchanged in societies for thousands of years. As Jeremiah 5:28 notes in his day, “They have grown fat and sleek. They know no limits in deeds of wickedness; they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.”

A society concerned with shalom will care for the most marginalized among them. God has a special concern for the poor and needy, because how we treat them reveals our hearts, regardless of the rhetoric we employ to make ourselves sound just. Jeremiah 22:16 (NLT) equates the social task of caring to revealing a genuine relationship with God: “[King Josiah] gave justice and help to the poor and needy, and everything went well for him. ‘Isn’t that what it means to know me?’ says the LORD.”

Even a society with the abuse of wealth can find ways to meet the needs of the most needy among them. If not, the problem becomes systemic and eventually everyone, even the nonwealthy, are considered by God to be culpable. If injustice is left unchecked, “Even common people oppress the poor, rob the needy, and deprive foreigners of justice,” according to Ezekiel 22:29 (NLT). Amos 5:12 describes systemic oppression of the poor like this: “For I know the vast number of your sins and the depth of your rebellions. You oppress good people by taking bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.” And again in Amos 8:4-5 (NLT): “Listen to this, you who rob the poor and trample down the needy! You can’t wait for the Sabbath day to be over and the religious festivals to end so you can

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get back to cheating the helpless. You measure out grain with dishonest measures and cheat the buyer with dishonest scales.” Injustice against the poor reveals our own state of shalom and the posture God takes for us or against us.

Widows, orphans, and foreigners/strangers/resident aliens (depending on translation) appear as a triad throughout the Hebrew Testament representing the concerns of the poor, needy, downtrodden, oppressed, and disempowered. Why? In a patriarchal society the needs of these three are more apparent than others. A woman who has lost her husband has also lost all her legal and social standing. She is at the mercy of society. An orphan, having suffered a traumatic loss, is without an inheritance because he/she has no father and therefore no future. A foreigner, perhaps homeless from war or tragedy, is considered an outsider with no family ties and therefore no means of inheritance. A stranger does not know the ways of the people and is not easily trusted, so God commands immediate hospitality and eventual full acceptance for such people. The *disempowered triad* of widows, orphans, and strangers best represent God’s concern for those who have few material goods (food, clothing, shelter) and who are most easily oppressed (justice). Shalom addresses God’s concern for the socially marginalized.

In the culture of the garden of Eden, God provided all that humanity needed for survival through the superabundance of nature. The state of the garden was blessed. In a post-Eden state, as people formed more complex governments, enacted inheritance laws, and delineated justice systems, the potential for abuse became much greater. God commands that every society have a safety net for those who “fall through the cracks.” Individual care and generosity do not always take care of the poor and needy, so there must be a place for the needy built into the system that does care for them.

God provides for the needy in laws concerning agricultural work, through the Sabbath and Jubilee system, and through festivals and celebrations. Embedded in the command for Israel to tithe is God’s concern for the poor: “Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake” (Deut. 14:28-29).

The disempowered triad was meant to be so much a part of Israel’s thinking that one need only mention one of the three to bring up the imag-

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ery of all three — and God's pressing concern for all the poor and marginalized. Widows, orphans, and strangers were hot-button words among the Jewish people as they worked out their own righteousness. The understanding of Israel's obligation to the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed widows, orphans, and strangers was meant to be so much a part of their thinking that God even commands them to leave any forgotten act of harvesting to benefit the poor.

When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do. When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don't go over the boughs twice. Leave the remaining olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. When you gather the grapes in your vineyard, don't glean the vines after they are picked. Leave the remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. (Deut. 24:19-21)

God commands both individuals and the society in which they live to be generous and always take care of the poor. In such a community, shalom has a chance to thrive. In such a community, God will actually be glad to assign his name and dwell. "Then celebrate the Festival of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you. And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name — you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows living among you" (Deut. 16:10-11 NIV). Why would God expect Israel to live out shalom in this way, and even maintain a grateful and appreciative attitude? The answer is revealed in the following verse: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and follow carefully these decrees." God's intention was that Israel use their unfortunate circumstances, the time of slavery in Egypt when they had nothing, to check their attitude toward the poor and marginalized.⁷ The Creator's concern for shalom communities to be built on justice and care for the poor went past Israel and stretched to all the boundaries of the earth.

7. For more on widows, orphans, and strangers see Deuteronomy 24:17; 26:12; 27:19; Job 22:9; Psalm 146:9; Jeremiah 22:3; Isaiah 1:16-18; Ezekiel 22:7; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5; and Acts 6:1.

God's Big Dream

The ancient Israelites are not the only people to have been given the Creator's construct of shalom as a formula for a good society. In Romans 1:20 Paul says that Gentiles, as well as Jews, can see the Creator through the creation. "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse." Other ancient societies, from all parts of the world, have been given shalom-type constructs. There is so much we have to learn from the Creator simply through learning what God has done and is doing in creation. In the Genesis 1 account of creation, which I will explore later, we will see that shalom is clearly written in what God has created.

Paul also mentions, in Romans 2:15, the Law (Torah) written on our hearts. "They [the Gentiles] show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them." Neither nature or our own hearts excuse us from living according to the way God has intended. All around us, we have the Torah of creation. We have within our own hearts the Torah of conscience. We all know how to live out shalom.

How did Jesus describe what was required to live for God? "[Jesus] said to [the lawyer], 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40). The Law as interpreted by Jesus here is completely consistent with living out shalom. Many Native Americans understand the wisdom of living out shalom because it is a parallel concept to the harmony way of living that was given to our own people. We see harmony reflected in creation. We notice our own hearts have power to align with God's intended ways of living. We know, as all people know, to honor the Creator and treat others in the way we want to be treated.

In my doctoral dissertation I demonstrated how the Native American Harmony Way, though called different names by different tribes, is a widespread concept all across North America. After making my initial investigation into the Harmony Way, I discovered that the construct is much more widespread than I had at first imagined. Indigenous peoples from other places share similar constructs parallel to our understanding of harmony and the ancient Semitic understanding of shalom.

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In my own relationships with other indigenes, I have heard similar testimonies of a type of harmony way of living and understanding life — from Zulu, Inca, Maasai, Sami, Maori, Inuit, Australian Aboriginal, and Hawaiian peoples. I don't think it is an understatement to say that the ancient Semitic shalom construct, or what we can broadly refer to as the Harmony Way, is the Creator's original instruction for the way in which all societies should be ordered, and for how all life on this planet should be lived.

The universality of shalom is what Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann describes when he says, "The central vision of world history in the Bible is that all of creation is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature."⁸ This description reveals the connectedness of all creation and the resultant harmony and joy that come by realizing that connectedness. In the Hebrew Scriptures shalom is ubiquitous. Shalom is a very broad theological construct, but once understood it is like that missing tooth your tongue continually searches out; one can read again the Scriptures and find numerous shalom inferences and references from Genesis to Revelation. Brueggemann's view of the intimacy and the connectedness of all creation found within shalom⁹ is consistent with many indigenous concepts of well-being. Indigenous people understand all parts of creation as related to one another.

Brueggemann goes on to say,

That persistent vision of joy, well-being, harmony and prosperity is not captured in any single word or idea in the Bible; a cluster of words is required to express its many dimensions and subtle nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessings, righteousness. But the term that in recent discussions has been used to summarize that controlling vision is *shalom*. Both in such discussion and in the Bible itself, it bears tremendous freight — the freight of a dream of God that resists all our tendencies to division, hostility, fear, drivenness, and misery. *Shalom* is the substance of the biblical vision of one community embracing all creation. It refers to all

8. Walter Brueggemann, *Peace: Living Toward a Vision* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 13.

9. Brueggemann has done a wonderful job of explaining the broad concept of shalom. His understanding of shalom and the Native American constructs of harmony, such as found in quotes like the one I just listed, have numerous points in common.

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those resources and factors that make communal harmony joyous and effective.¹⁰

In trying to simplify the ingenuity and theological grandeur of shalom we might ask ourselves a few elemental questions such as: How does God live? What holds the Trinity together? On what principles was the universe built? Put simply, shalom is the answer to such questions. Another question we might ask, reflecting Brueggemann's point, is this: *What is God's dream?* I believe our best attempt at understanding shalom says that God's dream is a world in which all creation lives in accordance with the way of shalom. The observation that all creation is connected not only suggests familiarity between all creation, but also expresses tangible and intentional relationships. In such relationships human beings should make room for the possibility that all creation, in some way, bears the image of the Creator. In other words, there is something of God in all of creation. Living out these relationships as sacred is living in shalom.

Native American Harmony as Shalom

As a result of the colonial enterprise, most indigenous communities are quite broken and fragmented. In one sense, we are like the "canary in the coal mine" for the Euro-western colonial experiment. Native Americans, like all of humanity, are in desperate need of living out a concept of healing and wholeness that includes a real partnership with creation. When I first studied shalom and the Native American Harmony Way, I wondered if these two concepts working in tandem could serve the purpose of restoration among our indigenous peoples. Later, I came to realize that the two constructs are essentially one and that all humanity has the same desperate need of healing, because God has designed us all to live in a world of shalom.

We are all in need of God's vision. Anything less than God's vision is broken shalom. Some broken systems exist that no longer serve the purpose of the common good but instead emanate injustice and unrighteousness. Says Brueggemann, "The consequences of justice and righteousness is *shalom*, an enduring Sabbath of joy and well-being. But the alternative is injustice and oppression, which lead inevitably to turmoil and anxiety,

10. Brueggemann, *Peace*, 14.

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with no chance of well-being.”¹¹ Turmoil and anxiety are hallmarks of our world. Brueggemann’s understanding is incredibly similar to Native American concepts of broken harmony. Sometimes Native Americans refer to this broken state as a “broken hoop” or “broken circle.”

A circle or a hoop is a tangible object that you can picture in your mind. Sometimes it can be difficult to get our heads around a concept, making it impractical to confront and address. Shalom is by no means intangible. Brueggemann points to the practicality of shalom:

The Bible is not romantic about its vision. It never assumes shalom will come naturally or automatically. Indeed, there are many ways of compromising God’s will for shalom. One way the community can say no to the vision and live without shalom is to deceive itself into thinking that its private arrangements of injustice and exploitation are suitable ways of living. . . . The prophetic vision of shalom stands against all private arrangements, all “separate peaces,” all ghettos that pretend the others are not there (compare Luke 16:19-31). Religious legitimacy in the service of self-deceiving well-being is a form of chaos. Shalom is never the private property of the few.¹²

Shalom is communal, holistic, and tangible. There is no private or partial shalom. The whole community must have shalom or no one has shalom. As long as there are hungry people in a community that is well fed, there can be no shalom. Where there are homeless and jobless people amidst the employed and wealthy, shalom cannot exist. Shalom is not for the many, while a few suffer; nor is it for the few while many suffer. It must be available for everyone. In this way, shalom is everyone’s concern. Shalom very much defines the common good. In this sense, shalom is also very close to Native American views, which are more communal than individualistic. The connection of the individual to the community and the individual to societal structure has been diminished in some modern Euro-western societies. This shift can be explained in many ways, but the correct exegesis of shalom still remains — shalom produces change for the good of all.

As a social construct, shalom is also dynamic. Shalom is not a utopian destination; it is a constant journey. One does not wait on shalom;

11. Brueggemann, *Peace*, 18.

12. Brueggemann, *Peace*, 19-20.

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one actually sets about the task of shalom. In other words, people need to be going about the business of making shalom and living out shalom. This active, persistent effort takes place at every level, from personal relationships to societal and structural transformation. “The doing of righteousness and justice results in the building of viable community, that is, shalom, in which the oppressed and disenfranchised have dignity and power.”¹³ For Native Americans, finding harmony is also practical, and it is accomplished through direct involvement in ways such as intervention and ceremonies.

The transformational aspects of shalom are apparent in the divine model. In Scripture, God is active through creation, in personal relationships, in covenant relationships, in the incarnation of Jesus, and in redemption; consequently, shalom is reflected in all God’s activity. Shalom, therefore, is not detached from the reality of everyday life in the world, nor is it in any sense superspiritual, utopian, or otherworldly; rather, it exemplifies how seriously God takes the world. Again, Brueggemann aids our understanding. It is well-being that exists in the very midst of threats — from sword and drought and wild animals. “It is well-being of a material, physical, historical kind, not idyllic ‘pie in the sky,’ but ‘salvation’ in the midst of trees and crops and enemies — in the very places where people always have to cope with anxiety, to struggle for survival, and to deal with temptation.”¹⁴ The emphasis here concerns the very practical aspects of the value of shalom in everyday life. Active and practical, shalom never avoids the realities of an imperfect world.

Facing Shalom

As mentioned earlier, shalom seen simply as “peace” is an anemic translation. In fact, sometimes shalom must come through the active creation of conflict. For example, where injustice exists, living out shalom dictates that the structure perpetuating the injustice be transformed. Where marginalization of the weak, the poor, the disempowered, the “ethnic other,” is present, living out shalom demands that someone challenge the oppressive system and lift up those who are being oppressed, because oppression is sin. Wherever shalom is broken, sin is present; and it demands Christ’s restora-

13. Brueggemann, *Peace*, 7.

14. Brueggemann, *Peace*, 15.

tion, particularly if it be found in those who bear Christ's name. As one writer puts it, "God is for shalom and, therefore, against sin. In fact, we may safely describe evil as any spoiling of shalom, whether physically (e.g., by disease), morally, spiritually, or otherwise."¹⁵ Sin, in a very real sense, can be defined as the absence of shalom.

As a result of the practicality of shalom, sin is neither ignored nor relegated to the private, more personal areas of life. Shalom makers clearly need to be active in the world, influencing society toward the vision of the Trinitarian community on earth reflecting God's desire for everyone to dwell in shalom. Sin is brokenness and an alienating force that works against God's vision, but shalom does not assert unattainable utopian dreams without prescribing the means to a "peaceable kingdom" (Isa. 9:7; Rom. 14:17).

At this point the Native American understanding of balance and harmony can be helpful. Traditionally, Native Americans understood our role on earth as those who restore harmony in very practical ways. Our indigenous ceremonies often require not only symbolic acts but also practical restitution and full restoration. A vivid example of practical shalom making is the ancient Cherokee cementation ceremony, which occurred annually each fall. At that time anyone with a grievance against a fellow Cherokee was required to participate in the ceremony.

The basic components of the ceremony included a fire and prayers that were spoken by the holy person. Then the families and friends on each side of the riff would face each other with the lead persons (those with whom the division originated) at the head of the line. Each would give an account of the offense. Then the persons would go to the fire to pray for the strength to forgive. The two would then strip naked and exchange clothes. Following this action they spoke words of forgiveness and vowed never to bring the issue up again. The pipe was passed back and forth down the line for everyone to smoke. Finally, gifts were exchanged and a feast was prepared by both parties for the whole community. The result was both ceremonial and practical.

Making peace, shalom peace, also may be costly. For example, according to the practicality of living out shalom, the benefactors of colonial expansion would surely need to make restitution to those they robbed. In order to enjoy a society operating in shalom in America, everyone, espe-

15. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 14.

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cially Christians, will need to be educated to understand how shalom is directly related to ideas of restitution. As Edward Powers notes, "In the tribal period the word *shillem* (a close linguistic cousin of shalom) was used to denote requital or payment or compensation. The ancient Semitic tribes stressed the necessity of compensatory acts to make up for property loss, murder, or death in battle. This making up [of the loss] is a type of peace-making in that it attempts to restore the whole. Shillem restores shalom."¹⁶

The ramifications of restitution are incredible if we consider how much wrong has actually been done in the world by the colonial enterprise. Still, such a huge task should reveal the simple reality that shalom has been ignored, causing the world to be in such a mess. Only by practicing shalom can humanity restore the Creator's intentions for this fragmented world. Wherever relationships are fragmented, it is by living out shalom that they can be made whole.

Individualistic societies cause people to feel lonely and alienated, but shalom will bring authentic relationships and restore a sense of community. Greed and injustice marginalize and destroy people and the earth, but shalom restores dignity to everyone and everything. Shalom is the very concept needed in order to understand God and to make sense of the Christ who died for the world. When humans begin to understand shalom, God's power will begin working through them. Jesus, the shalom Christ who brings a shalom kingdom, is God's final answer to a broken and fragmented world. As Brueggemann so aptly states:

Shalom is the end of coercion. Shalom is the end of fragmentation. Shalom is the freedom to rejoice. Shalom is the courage to live an integrated life in a community of coherence. These are not simply neat values to be added on. They are a massive protest against the central values by which our world operates. The world depends on coercion. The world depends on fragmented loyalties. The world as presently ordered depends on these very conditions against which the gospel protests and to which it provides alternatives.¹⁷

16. Edward A. Powers, *Signs of Shalom* (Philadelphia: Joint Educational Development United Church Press, 1973), 15.

17. Brueggemann, *Peace*, 51.