

Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Larry Mercurieff (Aleut)

Interviewee: Larry Mercurieff

Interviewer: David E. Hall

Date: 6/19/07 and 6/22/07

Transcriber: Linda Rand

DH (04:46): Please share a bit about yourself in terms of your heritage, where's home for you and focus of your life's work.

LM: (*Aleut*) What I said in my language, which is the Aleut language, Aleut people lived in the Bering Sea area for about 10,000 years. We still live there. In Aleut, my traditional name is Kuuyux, I come from the people of the sea lion. Sea lions are to us are like the bison are to the plains Indians or the whales are to the Eskimos of the far north. My traditional name Kuuyux means extension like an arm extending out from the body and was given to me when I was four years old. It is given to one person in each lifetime, so my Kuuyux which was the older man, looked for me, found me and designated me the next Kuuyux when I was four.

My generation was the last generation to have a fully intact traditional upbringing. I spent equal amounts of time with every segment of the community. So I spent equal amounts of time with the women, who took me out berry picking. I had to be there when they were preparing the foods, the wild foods that we ate. And with the men with hunting, fishing, and with the elders who would take me out camping, and would be there storytelling. To get to know my grandfather and for him to get to know me I had to spend 24 hours a day with him, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, for two years. I went to work with him. I went to bed with him. I went early in the morning out to the Bering Sea, where we'd take the Bering Sea water over our bodies, and praying towards the east as the sun rises. Then that very evening we might go to the Russian Orthodox church – he saw no real distinction between that, to terms of core spirituality that he was involved with. My Aachaa, I had a traditional relationship with an Aachaa, is a mentor type role of an older person with a younger person. My Aachaa picked me out when I was 5 years old and he taught me much of what I know about being Aleut about hunting about relationship to people, and about being a man, and relationship and understanding of nature. Yet literally from age 5 to age 13 he may have said no more than 200 words to me because words are considered in a traditional way not only to be superfluous but to diminish one's own understanding of things that are based on one's own inherent intelligence, of what we call the *real human being*.

DH: Can you speak to how your identity relates to the focus of your work?

LM: Well it's very much at the core of my work. Presently my work is in various circles dealing with what is happening on the planet, dealing with community wellness, dealing with traditional knowledge and wisdom, dealing with elder understanding about modern

day and how to apply traditional ways of knowing to modern times and to dealing with modern issues. So my grounded upbringing as a child really is serving me fully now in all the work that I'm doing. For example, I do a lot of public speaking with climate change issues. Currently, I'm chairing an international planning group for a gathering of indigenous people from all across North America to talk about bringing a message to the Native peoples of Turtle Island as well as perhaps a message to the world about these times and what it is we need to do to move forward to adapt to the changes that are coming.

DH: Later on I'm going to ask you some questions about your community. Can you speak to what composes your community in terms of people and places?

LM: You're asking now?

DH: Yes.

LM: When you say community you talking community at large or community from which I came?

DH: That is really open for you to interpret.

LM: I think it's a combination of both. I mean definitely the community I came from, Aleut people in the Pribiloff islands, is very central to my own rootedness. Being rooted to land, rooted to place. My great grandparents my great- great grandparents their great-great -grandparents are buried on that island. We have a direct tie to it, going back thousands of years, that directly ties us to the Bering Sea, which is our history book.

So growing up in that sense of community, I really began to understand what community really *means*. It doesn't necessarily need a physical place, but it definitely needs profound connectedness, heart to heart with people. So the other side of it, I have a community of people that I love, that are near and dear to my heart, that are literally all over the world and we stay connected at a very profound level.

DH: Great. So this term sustainability is being used a lot now by people addressing the environmental and social challenges of today and I'm wondering if that's a term that works for you or if there's any other terms that you prefer.

LM: Well, I think that's a very interesting topic. And of course depending on who you talk to and what quarter of western society you talk to or any part of the world, they're going to obviously have very different definitions of what sustainability means. In western society from my perspective, by and large, most people mean, how can we maintain our current *lifestyle*, without depleting that which sustains that lifestyle to the future. And of course environmental groups I feel are struggling with this whole idea and industries in western society have taken over the use of the term for their purposes.

It's very interesting...sustainability again, in western society, words tend to diminish its meaning and the English language in my opinion tends to segment out a part of a whole. Sustainability taken from that perspective is too small a term from what I would

consider to be a Native perspective or a perspective of people who have had sustained and intimate contact with immediate environment for countless generations. Because we don't have such a term, because we *live* it, and that has been key and central to people being able to live—like my people have—sustain themselves and *thrived*, for literally 10,000 years. That's 6,000 years before the height of the pyramid cultures. And how did we do it? We did it by basically embodying the whole idea of relationship, of reciprocity, of being able to think generations ahead from our decisions today.

Giving specific examples, when we go out and pick berries, we don't pick berries from a single location, and we don't take all the berries that are there. We don't use these scoopers that people use today. I've watched picking, scraping berries off bushes and destroying bushes in the process. When we pick flowers even, when we use the flowers for dyes, we pick every seventh flower so we're not picking them all from one place. And of course we do it with a presence of mind, being present at the moment, but being aware of having an underlying sense of *reverence* for what we're doing and understanding the implications of what we're doing with this single plant, turns the entire ecology which the plant comes from. In the native worldview, generally speaking, everything is connected, profoundly so, far beyond what most people understand. A single action of walking across the tundra, for example here in Alaska has major implications for insects, has implications for plants, it has implications for everything that interacts with that, has implications for that land and that particular area in which we walk. One has to be very deeply aware, not in a mental sense, but in an embodied sense of awareness, which is very difficult to explain in Western terms what that really means. But basically, it's a level of intimate and profound connection whereby the human body is in alignment and in harmony with the environment which we're in. There's an intelligence inherent in us, that if we allow it to go, and we don't function simply from the head, allow it to operate, will bring us more into alignment with creation.

DH: So does sustainability, as a word, capture that and if so, how would you define it?

LM: Well you know, I think it was Einstein that said, "You can't solve a problem with the same consciousness that created it." That consciousness that exists today is a disconnected consciousness, generally, from the perspective of those peoples who have maintained this profound connection with creation. This disconnected consciousness simply functions in the head. The elders say that traditionally we used to teach how to live. Now we teach how to make a living. We've reversed the paradigms for what is called a real human being, the conduct being a real human being, and behavior, and thoughts. Today instead of the heart telling the mind what to do, the mind is telling the heart what to do, and so that paradigm is reversed. When you reverse it, we profoundly disconnect. When we disconnect we create disconnected things.

This term sustainability from my perspective is one such term. It's a disconnected term, taken simply out of context, used for whatever purpose any person wants, without a fundamental underlying foundation for its meaning that is connected in context with everything else with which we have to live. When we do that, and we say, "O.k., we're going to create this energy based system that is sustainable," there's no consideration of the whole when we do that. I was thinking about how they stopped the taking of trees in the Pacific Northwest because of the spotted owl. It was claimed as a victory by the

environmental community, and what happened is, yeah, the industry pulled up stakes and they all moved to Canada. Now they're strip-mining all the trees up there. I mean we see these domino effects of human behavior as a result of what we're doing but there are also domino effects in the environment too.

It's a total misnomer, misunderstanding, misperception that the way the native people have survived is by leaving the environment alone and simply treading lightly on it. It's not true. We have been *active* stewards ever since we ever moved here. But, it was guided by this inner intelligence. We've been active stewards of the fish stock. We've been active stewards, like in the interior of Alaska, they would actually create fires in order to burn brush but it had to be done in a specific way, at specific seasons, specific times of year, with specific vegetation, and guided by people who understood the implication for all the connections. Now we do it for singular purposes, so again, its kind of a disconnected mentality that does that. So, we've been proactive in stewardship and that's been true for every indigenous group around the entire world. I just wanted to dispel the idea that we didn't get involved with the environment on a proactive basis in our stewardship—we do. But again, the difference between today's ways of doing things and the traditional way of the *human being*, is that it's done in context with information being transferred and life experience being transferred from generation to generation, in a system that involves use of language, songs, stories, dance, action, thought, words and combined with the essence of being a real human being.

Maybe I should talk about this because this is a really central concept. When I started going out hunting, the men would take me out when I was five years old—my Aachaa would take me out there with the men. We'd be hunting sea lion and the sea lion would be always in the water in the wintertime because it was too cold on land. We'd have to shoot from shore to land. We're not on boats because the water's too rough on the Bering Sea in wintertime. I would notice two very, very important things about these hunters. One is that they never zoned out. They could sit there quietly for hour after hour after hour, and nobody ever dulls out. They're *just there*, constantly aware. And then, the second thing is that they would always know when a sea lion's coming even before we saw it. And I wondered how in the heck would hunters do that? I found out at a very young age, because again using this whole principle of entire human being, intelligence of an entire human being—it's not just centered in the head but using all of one's senses eyes, ears, smell, intuition, gut feel, all of these things synthesizing without thought, which is a concept very hard for many westerners to understand. So I'm immersed in that kind of way of knowing. So, by age six I decided to go out underneath the bird cliffs of the Pribiloff Islands on St. Paul Island where I was born. We call it the Galapagos of the north—two and a half million sea birds all nestled around an island on cliffs. We'd have tens of thousands of seabirds in any cliff area. I would go underneath there before sunrise because I wanted to be there when the birds take off. I'd just watch them without thinking, just watch them, just taking it all in. Then one day I noticed that there were all these different species of birds of the cliffs. Literally tens of thousands in one cliff area, and they're flying in every direction: up, down, diagonal, in circles, in opposite circles and different species, different speeds, different heights. And, *never* did I ever see a single bird wing clip. Imagine that, tens of thousands of sea birds in what appears to be chaos, and never even a clipped wing involved with that. I wondered how did they do that? An insight arose, that I garnered from that that I connected to what the hunters were

doing, and that is that these birds were intensely alive. They were completely present. They were just nothing but a field of awareness. I thought *oh, that must be how they're doing it so I'm going to try*. So I go out there hunting and I try this “being present”. I didn't have the words for it at that time at six years old. I just intuitively went to this kind of state of being, where I would sit there without thought, as soon as thought would drift in I would zone out. After sitting there for hour after hour, feeling the rhythm of the ocean, and the wind pummeling against you, and you would just get into daydream state. But that state means that you're not a good hunter, or you won't be a good hunter, because you won't be aware of one seal lion that might come by and show up for 30 seconds, that you might have waited for an entire day and so you can't afford to be zoned out. I had to be fully aware, fully aware just like these hunters were, just like the birds were and as soon as I did that I began to feel the sea lion coming.

That was the beginning of my understanding of how one connects profoundly with the earth, to the point that by age 11, my dad gave me an outboard motor and skiff and said, you know, I can skipper it out now at 11 years old into the Bering Sea, fishing for halibut, going as much as 10 miles off the island. Because he knew I didn't have to take a competency test for he knew that I knew the winds, the tides, the currents, how to navigate in pea soup thick fog without the aid of any navigation instrument, about safety, about being able to get information that I needed in order to be safe at sea *and* to get halibut.

Well, applying the inherent intelligence of the human being by age 11, I could navigate in pea soup thick fog. I used to wonder how my people could do that, when it's overcast all the time so you can't see the stars and rarely do you see the sun—we get 20 days of sunshine a year. Where our people traditionally would navigate we're one of the best high seas navigators in the world, high seas kayaks. We'd go to South America, Southern California, we'd go to the South Pacific Islands—there's Aleut words in Hawaii. We'd go to Kamchatka, Siberia, and they would do it and come back.

What I found out is that when I come into this center, that I call it, this connected profound place of connectedness, I can feel the energy of the ocean. I can feel the tension of the ocean. I can see the difference in color in the ocean, the difference in rhythm, the difference in the intensity in which the ocean moves, the electrical energy if you will that comes from it. I can watch and birds come through the fog, of different species certain height off the ground going in a particular direction. Whether or not there's male or female seals that come up at what particular time of day roughly, and this is all synthesized, this information, and I would know exactly where I'm at. That is part of what Native peoples understand, as difficult as it is to put into words, is part of our spirituality.

From that kind of connection we get information, we get guidance from mother earth and all the different creatures and living things on the planet. It was no romantic notion that said, “I can talk to the trees, I can talk to the rocks.” It really exists. But it exists in a way that most people can't understand, because unless you experience it's really hard to relate to.

DH: Can you connect for us in how this concept of being completely present and centered relates to this idea of sustainability and the conversations that are happening in many different circles?

LM: Well, I think that the western debates on sustainability starting to evolve into a more holistic understanding, but it's still at a very infancy stage from my perspective. To see sustainability in terms of how do we sustain ourselves is way too limiting, or to simply say sustainability of environment is too limiting. It takes both.

The whole idea of sustainability engenders a goal. Again from a traditional viewpoint, how we get to where we're going is much more important than getting there. In western epistemology goal is more important than process. In Native worldview, generally speaking around the world, process is more important than goal. Again we reverse the laws for living. We must consider in any application of sustainability, how we get there. There are so many different dimensions or levels to understanding that, to put together a process that is in alignment, or in harmony, so that the outcome is harmonious with what we're trying to do, and what are intention is, and harmonious for the planet.

So I'm trying to think about examples. Well, the elders say that we can't make good decisions when our hearts are burdened. That is *so true*. We function, most of the world today, functions a multi-generational internalized oppression. That's where we come from. Our minds are focused on that and so internalized oppression creates certain kinds of products. Products that are based on fears, products that are based on control, products that are based on the idea of management, a lack of humility where we manage environment, or manage constituents of environment. That attitude lacks humility. That lack of humility, probably the genesis of it comes from fears. Primal fears that were played out in our life experiences, for generations on end that then makes us feel like we need to control. We got to have certainty, we have to have that security.

What is it like in the present moment trusting completely in one's own intelligence, one's own connection, in one's own guidance and the support from creation? One of the elders said, "the birds when they get up in the morning, first of all, even the birds don't get up before the light shows up. Secondly, they don't worry about where they go get their food. They're just *there*." My people, the Aleut people have lived literally in that way. They didn't plan. They just simply focused on a profound spiritual level being present in the moment. Trusting in the process, in life process. Trusting that guidance will be there to know what we need to do or to know where we need to go for food.

For fishing for halibut, I know the grounds so well, I know where the 3 ft. halibut are, where the 4 ft. halibut are, where the 5 ft. halibut are, where the nursery areas are so that we stay away from females. I know how to catch the halibut. As soon as the halibut is hooked, I can tell you if it's hooked by the lip or the jaw. I can tell you if it's down in the gullet. I can tell you if it's hooked on the side. I could tell you if it's male or female. I could tell you how it's going to fight on the way up as we jig with our hand line; all of these pieces of profound connection. I could tell you if the halibut is near the line and is about to come to the hook. This is critical pieces of information not only for survival but for maintaining harmony. Because in that intimate connection I had with the halibut I start to develop, just because of the process, a tremendous reverence for the power of that life force that existed in one fish. And I think about today's economic systems around the world. They are totally disconnected from any of that one on one relationship. Now these big factory trawler ships that are out there, or even a single long line, I was looking at that amongst some of our young men who were going into commercial fishing with using a long line with multiple hooks they put on the bottom and they just haul them up.

They've lost that one on one connection that used with a hand line. They no longer are connected to that halibut, and so what happens? They don't care.

When I bring the halibut up I know how to dispatch it quickly so it doesn't suffer. The whole empathy starts to come into play because of that intimate relationship with that single species, with that one fish. Now we take it in these loads. They just become things. I can't feel their pain anymore. I can't feel their strength, their power. I lose my reverence for the animal and say this is money. It's about money.

Then we import all of our goods in industrialized society. We're divorced from the foods, in getting our own foods, and for getting it in our own place where we're born. That is, in the minds of most Native peoples, an unsustainable way. For lots of reasons. There are mental, social, physical, economic, spiritual, psychological aspects to that that are really, really difficult to articulate in a 10 minute panel discussion. Which most of the time we're relegated to. "Tell us about your way and you got 10 or 15 minutes to talk about it". Right, impossible.

The wisdom keepers, our storehouse of knowledge and wisdom cannot function, even with a half hour talk at a conference, or doing an interview like this for example. Time is very limited and is costly, "Share with us your wisdom", well elders can't function, don't function from the idea of time constraint because they're moving from this inner intelligence source. They don't have control over it, if you will. They just simply let go, open up and whatever comes out, comes out, that seems to be appropriate at the time.

Frequently when I talk I never know what's going to come out of my mouth (laughs) *literally*. It takes an act of faith to do that. I used to wonder how elders can speak so eloquently, and that's one of the ways they do it, so its very difficult to go to *our* professors, par excellence, and garner from them the life wisdom that's needed in an interview. We have to be out there with them, we have to live with them everyday, we have to share with them and see what they do and how they conduct themselves and that's the way I grew up. Sadly, that's the way most people did not grow up.

Other things that are necessary for understanding sustainability: *silence*, the ability to go into silence. Because from that place we begin to not only settle within our own bodies, but our bodies never lie. Our bodies will guide us impeccably, to know what it is we need to do, and will guide our minds that way. But also that silence, it allows us to connect at a profound level with where we are. We live in societies where noise is everywhere. They got restaurants where people are not connected to their food they're talking loud and everybody's hollering over each other, walk the streets surrounded by noise. People are very uncomfortable in silence, and I believe one of the reasons for that, comes from the root cause of disconnection in the first place, that every human being has gone through in some form or another. And that happens from—I talk about this multi-generational kind of disconnectedness, given to each generation. One of the ways it happens, I'll just give a specific example that many Americans will be familiar with. That's Vietnam vets. Vietnam vets came back from Vietnam after their tour, sometimes multiple tours. They found that the soldiers, tens of thousands, were coming back feeling depressed. Feeling like they needed to isolate themselves, and taking to addictive behaviors, to cocaine, to television, to cigarettes, to coffee whatever, any kind of addiction. Of course the scientists that studied this realized there is a phenomenon going on here and it wasn't until they actually put a name to this phenomenon that it became visible and that's called post-traumatic stress disorder. These vets came back not wanting

to remember, think, feel, dream about or in any way be reminded of the horrors of the experience that were soul-trauma type horrors. What they did is, “I’ll shut down my feelings. I’m not going to feel a damn thing, and as soon as I separate from my feelings I’ll get away from it.”

Well the definition in my mind of addiction is nothing but a strategy to escape the present moment. *Don’t be here now, don’t be in your body* and I look at our young kids and they got these boom boxes and they got these earphones, and vehicles that are so much noise that is rattling the other cars, the restaurants where everybody’s in noise, all of this kind of stuff that’s happened it helps us to disconnect. Materialism, going into materialism, it simply is a way to try to feed what the elders call the big empty stomach that is created from disconnection of our own feelings, disconnection from our body. Simply going into the head again, is another manifestation of that disconnection, is that the mind cannot connect with anything except thoughts. Unless there’s a consciousness and awareness, where mind and heart are connected, then they can function together. Without that, the mind is simply a disconnected thing that creates disconnected things.

That’s where I believe sadly, much of the world is operating from. You think about it in the United States: World War I, World War II, Revolutionary War, Civil War, Mexican-American War. In Europe the Inquisition, the Crusades, you have literally thousands of years of major conflict, of major harm, soul trauma. Those parents have passed down these behaviors to their children. So we have it here today, your parents in someway internalized that oppression, and that woundedness, and passed those behaviors and attitudes towards you. So we developed basically a society that’s addicted, a society based on escaping the present moment. Silence is important, in order to re-connect back, in order to access our inherent intelligence, in order to understand how to *apply* a concept such as sustainability.

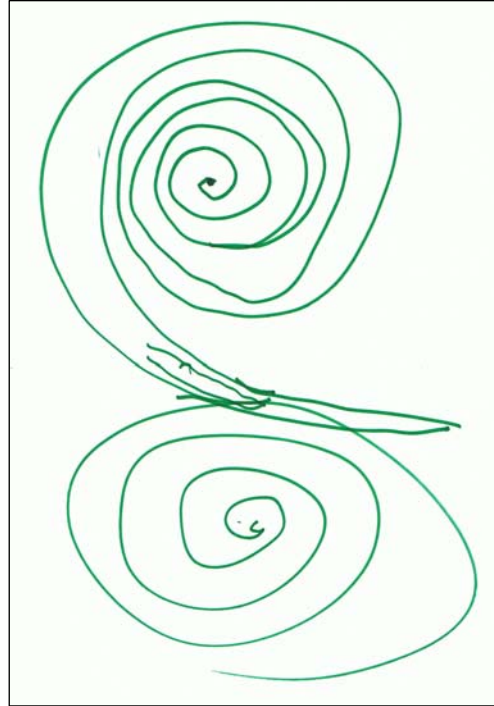
DH: Thinking of sustainability in these holistic terms, are there any images or symbols that come to mind for you that represent that more holistic concept in some way? And if so I ask if you’d be willing to draw it for us?

LM: (laughs) That is an interesting thing because, another way of the indigenous mind, I would call it, certainly the mind that I come from, is that I think in pictures not in words. So I have to struggle to bridge that in order to communicate in the western world. To see things in pictures, there is definitely one kind of ancient metaphorical symbol that would represent that.

DH: Would you be willing to draw that?

LM: Sure, it is used by Aleut people and many traditions actually. It’s very simple. On the side of the Aleut traditional hunting hats are things called volutes and the volutes are part of a universal symbol (*drawing*)... You will see these and they’re made out of ivory and they’re placed as wings on either side of the Aleut hat. It represents many, many different things but most of it is kind of engendering the concept you’re talking about. This actually is a profound spiritual teaching that is engendered in a simple work of art.

In here, is first of all, the circle, the spirals, is a feminine symbol. Inside is a phallic symbol, understanding the importance of balancing the characteristics and ways of understanding of the masculine and feminine in balance to each other. They function together. This is a symbol of infinity in motion. Infinity in motion represents *us*, who we are because that is who we are. The motion being of course is that anything that is truly dead doesn't move at all, it's done. Anything in motion in this universe, functions with energy moving. This kind of shows a moving thing. In addition to that, the center of the spiral metaphorically represents the 3rd eye, which is the spiritual eye from which one can see. It also represents our center, inside of ourselves which is the place that is infinitely present. It also represents the center of all things, the spirit that lives in all things. Some would say, as an external reference, "God." This symbol says it is us, it is inside, it is outside, it is everywhere, it is constant moving, it is infinite. And so that, and then of course you see that spiral in a lot of different cultures like the Celts for example. I mean every culture's got some kind of a spiral type design. This to me represents profound connectedness, profound spiritual understanding, and from that place can we only sustain who we are and sustain all of existence.



--break--

DH (02:00): Earlier you had identified with community in both local and global terms. Now I'd like you to allow your imagination to go into the future. Imagine a future in an ideal sense, where sustainability in terms that you've spoken about has really taken form. While you're there, be there as an observer, and report back to us here, what it is that you're seeing in that future in an idealized sense. Take a minute bring that into clarity whenever you're ready we'll begin

LM: I don't know if it's an idealized sense, we have stories about the way the world was that goes back, oh gosh, I think the longest one goes back a million years. The most detailed one, that's the longest goes back 200 thousand years. These are stories that came about or were developed by highly connected, spiritual people. The same goes for the vision for the future that actually this world occurred. That future is also one that I share in terms of knowing my own desires, about what I would like to see, even in my lifetime. That has to do with the whole aspect of the "real human being." The elders teach that, if you want to see how our cultures developed, how they evolved, look at the wisdom of a child. Go to a two-year old child and watch them.

I was thinking about one study done, I can't remember the exact reference to it, I think it was the University of Wisconsin, several years ago, where they challenged a world

class Olympic athlete to follow a two-year old child's movements for 15 minutes. The Olympic athlete could only do ten. The two-year old child kept going. By that time the Olympic athlete was totally exhausted.

It's part of what the elders from different traditions have always understood and that is that the child is a clear channel, if you will, for movement and flow of energy. There is an inherent intelligence in every human being that gradually gets covered up over time, as we're exposed to the wounded nature of life that is created by human beings. The way that they maintain their health as a real human being, as a two-year old, is actually incorporated into cultural systems around the world. This is something that very few people really understand, except these professors of the professors, these indigenous elders who carry these ways and understanding.

(5 min. 20 sec.)

For example, when a child wants to cry they cry in the moment. Right then and there; they discharge the energy of whatever emotion comes up at that time. They laugh when they want to laugh. They're totally not unselfconscious. They have no agenda. Play is play without agenda, whereas today, as we become adults, we have to have an agenda with our play. Using voice, using movement, is a way of moving energy. In fact in all the cultures were sophisticated ways of advanced understanding of the human body. In order to be able to move energies at all levels multi-dimensionally, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically through the body.

Even for those who follow the Christian tradition, there's a passage in the bible that says, "Unless you are as a child you cannot enter the kingdom of God." In an indigenous viewpoint, unless you're as a child, you're no longer functioning as a real human being. You're not going to be able to survive multi-generationally on the planet. You're not going to act in harmony with all of creation.

The real purpose of culture was to keep us healthy in that way, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. I think that the vision of the future is that we reincorporate that or restore those aspects, adapt it to modern times, and reflect it in the new thing that we're creating. There's some other things that are involved with this. That is in the ancient stories. In the beginning of time all of the four sacred colors red, white, black, and yellow were given specific gifts that were attached to the four sacred elements: earth, wind, fire, water, metaphorically represented.

For example in the direction east, the color yellow, which are the Asian peoples and people from India, the mastery and use of air, which is breath. To be able to use that in meditation, to develop and master it in such a way that is in harmony with all it is that aligns our body in harmony with ourselves, and with the earth and with all of creation. The sacred red color/brown would be the Native Americans. The gift is the mastery and understanding and use of the knowledge of how to nurture Mother Earth and to communicate with Mother Earth. That's the earth element. The sacred black color, the gift of motion, movement, and rhythm, in harmony with the universe. This has been twisted because of racism; saying that black people have rhythm. Well it's true, but on a far more profound level than people understand. This ability to have motion, movement, rhythm with drums and movement of the body in harmony with the universe is profound. The sacred white color, the gift of fire; the knowledge and understanding, and use and mastery of energy in different forms.

There's going to come a time when we restore ourselves as real human beings with the inherent intelligence of the real human being. These gifts from the four sacred colors will come together in a way that's never been seen since the beginning of time. That will create again, solutions that are outside the current consciousness of disconnection. Whatever those solutions are, they're going to be in harmony. So my vision of the future is incorporating all of these ways, adapting them to modern times, creating something totally new, but every piece of it in harmony with all of creation.

DH: Can you try to imagine what that might look like?

LM: (laughter)

DH: I know that that's a difficult, difficult thing to do but...

(9 min.50sec.)

LM: Well frequently when a question like that comes up we're looking at the external, because that is what most people are used to in the indoctrinated, wounded soul mind. We look at well, o.k. maybe we'll have subterranean homes. Alternative energy, we won't even need it. We don't need consumption of energy in order to be able to survive and thrive in harmony. Those are important, not to minimize the importance of it but the elders teach that nothing is created outside until it's created inside first.

So we're in conflict outside because we're in conflict inside. We're trashing the environment outside because we've trashed inside. We're a judge outside because we judge inside. We're critical of others and on and on. Nothing's created outside until it's created inside first. So the focus has to be, and all the wisdom keepers throughout the ages have always said that, "Point the finger back at yourself. We cannot offer the world that which we do not have." So *I* need to become as fully conscious, as fully aware, as fully present and in alignment with life, in order to create anything that would be of any value on a sustainable basis. So what it would look like?

All of us would walk around with the wisdom of the elders and a child like nature that would reflect in the glint in our eyes. That we're alive, we're alive and we're present in this moment. I'm nowhere else. I'm not in the past fretting over my guilt, my shame, my remorse, my rage or projecting the future out of my fears. I'm just here with you now and we are connected. When I say, "tunaax awaax," which is what I said at the beginning of this, means "the work of the land." And I said, "aang waan," which means, "Hello my other self." We are the mirror, the creation, that every aspect of us mirrors that of Mother Earth in our bodies. We are the Universe, inside of us. Our bodies are exactly that of Mother Earth. Mother Earth mirrors that for us and we mirror it for Mother Earth. What we do to our bodies we're doing to the earth.

An example is that one elder said, "There's no mystery behind why we're having more and more heart attacks today. They're fed by the arteries," and he took the analogy, "Look at what's happening to Mother Earth." The understanding of this way, the rivers and all the tributaries are the arteries and blood vessels of Mother Earth and they're being clogged. Mother Earth is mirroring back for us and we're mirroring back for the earth.

To be able to understand these original teachings, I think, when we restore ourselves as original human beings we will actually practice that. We will live it. We will embody it. We will know just from our inherent intelligence, not from some guru or master telling us what we ought to do. I mean we're the ones, and we'll do it. That's guaranteed. How many of us will end up doing it? That's another question. Ultimately it's not a question of whether or not Mother Earth is going to survive; it's a question of whether or not human beings will. That's what we're faced with now. We have the power unlike any other human beings ever in existence to destroy ourselves completely off the face of the planet.

DH: Well, in working towards avoiding that outcome, and with what you're saying in terms of the importance of the internal, and then the resulting external manifestation of that. Admittedly, my questions are more on that level of external, what's seen, what's embodied, and I'm wondering if you could speak to that in terms of relationships? So if people are very much acting from their place of inherent wisdom, what's going to be the nature of the patterns of relationships that we see among people and with Mother Earth?

(14 min. 34 sec.)

LM: Again, it's known by the stories and in the petroglyphs throughout the world that there was a time when the real human beings totally were in harmony with everything, and all other peoples and all other beings. We'd only hear the relatively recent stories in the last let's say five, six thousand, to ten thousand years about the violence that occurred and the internecine warfare between cultures and band and clan. That was a recent development. Before that time there was a time when we were all as real human beings totally open hearted, *completely*. It's very difficult for human beings today to understand that because we have no role models to say what does open heartedness look like? But in those days everyone was open-hearted and so there was communication and exchanges—I went down to Patagonia to be with Mapuche' people about four years ago. I met there the oldest woman in South America. Her name was Rosa and she was 123 plus years old. They were sharing with me their traditional ways. While I was down there, there was a delegation of Cechua/Amarr people that came from the Andes Mountains by horse back for two weeks just to see me. I knew that something was very important, something that didn't have to do necessarily with me. There was a delegation of spiritual leaders among the Cechua. When they got there they said, "We heard about your name, your traditional name. We'd like to know how you pronounce it, what does it mean, how you got it?"

So I told them Kuuyux means extension and it means extension of ancient knowledge into modern times. It was given to me by—there's one Aleut in each lifetime—and Kuuyux sought me out. They congregated and they smiled and nodded their heads, they came back and said, "This affirms our stories. We used to be the Cechua/Amarr. We used to be the go betweens of your people up north to the people down to the very south of Patagonia. We would help you and both sides to exchange herbs and medicines and healing stories and songs," this is like thousands of years ago. This is not like recent history. They said they have exactly the same name, given exactly the same way, pronounced exactly the way that I pronounced it. That was kind of like their affirmation that their stories, that they were go betweens, were true.

In those days people used to be profoundly connected. Not only physically but spiritually. When I went down to meet with the Mapuche' they had sent an emissary up here in person because they don't have telephones. They don't have internet. They wanted to deliver the message personally and they invited elders from Alaska to come down there. Well the elders asked me to go in their stead. So there's no way to communicate it back to them. I went down there and I was trying to explain to the Chief why it was me that came. They said—two interpreters—one turned Mapuche' into Spanish and Spanish to English, “No need to do it. We already knew you were coming, “and I said “How did you know?”

They said, “Well it was heard from the elders. They told us.”

“How did the elders know?”

“They talked to the Earth and the sky.”

So that's the kind of *innernet*, not internet that went on because of that profound connection that I talked about that allowed me to feel the sea lion before it even appeared. It's the same thing. That extrapolating into the future, that is the way we will communicate. That is the way we will connect. It will be openhearted. It will be sharing of our ways without agenda, without interference of ego, because ego projects into every human relationship because of the wounds and it's “I,” “me,” “this is my idea,” blah blah blah, none of that will exist. I offer this freely, I offer it unconditionally, I love you unconditionally and everybody's going to do the same thing.

DH: Can you say more about relationships?

LM: What deeper relationship can you have than a connection of heart to heart?

DH: I don't know if it gets any deeper, but is there more to say about it?

LM: I think people relate to each other in a totally different way than we do today. When I'm walking down the street somewhere, I look at every single person without judgment. I say to myself, “*Thank you*, for being here, for having the courage to be a human being. To go through the trials and tribulations that we're going through now, through the chaos, through the suffering, through the pain that all of us human beings are experiencing. Thank you, my other self, for being here. What is that like when everybody's doing that? So that you're never invisible anymore and you're always affirmed in the positive with every human being you ever meet? Fantastic.
(20 min. 24 sec.)

DH: Yes it would be. What about relationships with Mother Earth?

LM: Same way, connection would be very, very profound, very loving, very reciprocated. Mother Earth has a way of giving information—this is how native peoples, traditional peoples, with intimate, profound connection have always been able to develop and adapt technology, ways of doing things, attitudes, action. We're always guided by that place of unknown where the information comes—(*camera recording ends*)

DH: Back to the last question...so, you're speaking to relationships with Mother Earth?

LM: Right, and I was saying that by being a real human being we get our information and guidance directly from the earth, and different parts of her. Also from the great mystery, we call that, the profoundness of this deep void, our silent place that evolved from which all things are birthed.

As an example of that, in recent history, most people are familiar with the tsunami that hit Indonesia. There were some tribes that actually left before the tsunami hit. One of them that the news media was able to pick up, they interviewed the chief. How did the chief know? “Well, the birds told us that this was coming.”

There are ways in which information is communicated but it’s not done in a logical, western, linear thought form. It’s done in some mysterious way where the inherent intelligent human being synthesizes what is being received. There’s a particular direction that is given, not necessarily from us, not necessarily from our mind synthesizing information. It’s just an inner knowing for lack of a better way of putting it. That inner knowing is that information being conveyed that says, “I’ve gotta do this”, or “I’ve gotta move here”, or “we’ve gotta prepare for the coming times because great changes are coming. We’re going to need new technology because different species are going to move in and these are going to be species we’ve never fished for, we’ve never hunted for. This is the new technology that we’re going to need with that. This is the new stewardship principles we need to apply to that.”

Historians, anthropologists, and archeologists are totally missing the boat in some ways in understanding ancient civilization. The assumption is made based on these cultures, based on intellect and linear logic of the mind. None of them did. It’s not just simply information being passed from generation to generation. It’s what kind of information is being passed, how it’s being passed, and how prepared the recipients of that information are in order to apply that to the context of their time. In a conventional sense it’s not an accumulation of, “If you do this, this will happen. It’s not about that at all.” Or, “Don’t over pick your crops otherwise you’ll destroy the land,” and you learned it by mistake. By making mistake after mistake until finally we somehow evolved this new technology. That’s not the way it works

(24 min. 28 sec.)

I was thinking about how our people, for example, knew a technology. Our people used to hunt whales and we would have a spear that would be about 7 feet long. They would tip it with a particular kind of poison from a particular kind of plant. That poison, goes nowhere in the whale except directly to the heart. One anthropologist was musing with me, “How did your people get that? Was it by trial and error, or was it by watching animals and they ate something sometime and fell over dead?” I said, “No. They talked with the plants and the plants talked with them: “This is when you would pick me. This is how you will prepare me, and this is what I can be used for.” Again it doesn’t come in logic terms. It’s an inner knowing. That’s how all cultures *really* survived, that most people can’t understand, or don’t, and because the people who are studying that are people with disconnected minds—they couldn’t understand it. Also the language we’re using is so limiting. It’s a disconnected language. This is why we encourage people to use their own language. Again, a profound physics understanding about this, and that is,

in different parts of the world you will feel, and you know it as your own experience, going to a different land, you feel different. It has a different energy about it. That's because vibrationally, that particular area has a distinctly different vibration than another. When we say, "tunaax awaax," which means the work of the land, everything that I know, everything that I have, everything that I am, all the language that I use, is the work of the land. It's a way of crediting my ancestors and crediting Mother Earth.

Vibrationally, the language is given to us from that earth. We use that vibration in our language. When we live there for thousands of years that vibration inculcates into the language. So that language has power. That language is used for that communication for that particular area. This is again something that most people have thought important, the real importance of language. When I say, "tunaax awaax," it has a particular different kind of vibration than somebody would say a similar thing in their own language up in Pointe au Baril or in the South Pacific—way different. And there's a highly sophisticated advanced physics reason for that. I'm attuning my body to align with that vibration of the earth from which I come. That's how we get the information.

DH: You had mentioned new technologies and traditional practices and thinking about a sustainable future in the holistic sense. What's the dynamic there between new technologies and traditional practices? Do you see any tension?

LM: *Today* there's tension, massively so. Hopefully this evolves. When you have a new consciousness that's applied to the issues, then the technologies will take a completely different form than what any of us could possibly imagine today, and it will happen in our lifetime.

DH: What is the application, and maybe you've already spoken to this, but application of new technologies then, in this future that you're speaking of?

LM: Well, for example, I was listening to the Tlingit people in southeast Alaska who were telling me—they have a profound understanding of the relationship to salmon—they're called the Salmon Nation. Because of that profound relationship they were able to develop technologies that resulted in what Europeans found when they came to Alaska, and that is extreme abundance of everything. *Everything*.

The Tlingit storytellers were talking about how they would work with the intelligence of the salmon, in order to create a salmon catching regimen in one particular location, that worked with the land, worked with the flow of the water, in a way that didn't disrupt any of the ecology of that area and resulted in stronger salmon not weaker salmon. So there were more prolific and so they had much more abundance of salmon. That kind of technology is highly sophisticated. I mean they look at the western system, which is basically counting the number of salmon that come through a weir in order to determine the health stocks, without considering the implications of what you're doing on the shorelines of the rivers, what you're doing in the waters from which the salmon come from, by human beings walking along the shoreline. The subtlest of things create profound changes. That's understood by all tradition. Here they talk about how their salmon would double and quadruple, get more and more and more over time, until they had millions and millions and millions of salmon. It wasn't like today's salmon farms

where they raise salmon and kick them out to the ocean. No. This was raising salmon in a way that no more—this is highly sophisticated technology—no more salmon would be produced then could be sustained in every place that they migrate. Now how in the heck do you know that? That is like very sophisticated stuff. The thing is where we get into difficulties with western ways of thinking, is that the scientists need empirical data. If they were to live and document this over 500 years maybe they could do it. That they could document, “Yeah, this way could really work.” But to do it in a 10 year time series data gathering research project, no way. So we can’t prove it, except through our stories. Our stories do not lie. There’s too much at stake for that. All cultures that develop these stories understood that a lot was at stake that whole generations would live or die based on these stories so they had to be absolutely truthful.

(31 min. 33 sec.)

DH: Staying with this thinking of the future, I’d like to talk a little bit about worldviews as they’re held by the people. So, worldviews in terms of belief systems and values. What would be some characteristics of people’s belief systems and other values?

LM: Well, that question right there is a difference. First of all from my own experience in talking with different traditions, belief does not exist. Belief is simply a borrowed concept from somebody else. That *experience* is the most important aspect of the real human being. I experience the divine. I experience that which is called God. I experience the connection. For me to just simply say, “Oh yeah my people, that’s what they did and I believe it.” It means nothing to me as a real human being. It’s an intellectual concept. In that sense belief did not exist. In fact, belief would be lethal; it would be counter to the real human being, because I would not be left to my inherent intelligence to do that which is necessary for my own sacred path. Instead I would be imposing if I use belief. I would be imposing that on myself and I would ultimately end up imposing it on you. Because I believe this, I want you to believe it. Just because it works for me doesn’t mean it will work for you. There’s a profound understanding that each person has their own truth. You’re truth is as equally valid as mine because you have a very unique spiritual path, totally different from mine. I have no right to interfere with that whatsoever. So there was a great honor—and that’s going to be again another way of relationship with human beings as we evolve in our consciousness, is that understanding, and that acceptance, and that knowing and that non-judgment and that compassion. That was practiced by our peoples before the beginning of time.

DH: Is there room then to talk in terms of values?

LM: Well, again, the western understanding of values might be more limiting. What I learned at a very young age, is that the act of defining something by putting a word to it sometimes is necessary in order to make it visible. A lot of times it may interfere with my own understanding of what it is.

A simple example is one time I was picking up the telephone and my two year old son came to me at that time several years ago and said, “What’s that dad?” I said, “Telephone.” As soon as I did that I realized I was locking his perception of this thing

into a box and not honoring his own inherent intelligence to see it and draw their own conclusions about what this is. Then you could put a name to it but only after experiencing all these other different dimensions of it.

You ask an artist what is this that I'm sitting on? Most people would say it's a chair. That's a definition, right? A true artist would say this is a form which leaves it to its limitless possibilities and potential, that you would be able to determine from your own inherent intelligence it's possible use and function. When we limit ourselves by the words, so values could be one of those kinds of things...let me put it this way, the equivalent to me of what might be called "values" in the outside world, is being guided in alignment with all that is, in my thought, conduct, feelings, behavior and action and I trust that. Rather than, sometimes the word "value," especially I've seen this in most native peoples is their native values. As soon as we say that then we lock it in and it doesn't evolve because our mind is already locked into a perception of what it is. All of humanity needs to evolve and we need to get out of the categories the constructs and restrictions that we create in our minds.

(36 min. 28 sec.)

DH: My next question you might have a similar kind of response to it...thinking of yourself as a person, putting yourself in the shoes of somebody that's alive in the future where some of these things have taken form as you're speaking, what would your self concept be? In psychology we have an exercise where we ask people to do a series of "I am" statements to help explicate aspects of identity. I'm wondering if you could share some 'I am' statements. If it would help I have a sheet that provides 'I am' with blank spaces or you're welcome to speak them as you're sitting there. Does the idea make sense?

LM: I understand what you're asking. Again, I probably wouldn't give a conventional answer to that. Because every word, words have power and every word that we use starts to be embodied and goes deep into our subconscious, and part of what the sages throughout the ages have been saying is *letting go, letting go, letting go. Letting go of the "I am"*. I don't know who it was that said, "I think therefore I am," was that Descartes? I don't know."

DH: Yeah, you got it.

LM: Which again, it's not the thought that is the 'I am', that is our *very being* that is the 'I am' is. That 'I am' is undefinable and cannot be defined, actually. It's only functioning in human terms with our egos in play, that as soon as I say, "I am a blank," I am immediately implicit in my statement, utilizing an external reference point to help me understand my own essence. It can't be understood from that viewpoint. It's impossible. We can think that it does, but it absolutely does not.

Actually the "letting go, letting go," is also part of the real human being. In other words letting go of attachment—attachment to my own concept of who I am. Attachment to what I think I'm seeing based on words that were put into my head that are borrowed from another generation. Instead, trusting my own inherent intelligence to be

able to see. From that standpoint, that place of seeing is a place without defining things. So I look at you and I cannot define you by your physical form. I can't define you by the words you use. I can't even define you by looking into your eyes and seeing into your soul. All I can do is feel you, and feel the infinite aspect of who you are. As soon as I take into my mind the way you dress, how you talk, your demeanor, I'm diminishing you. Just as much as I won't do it to myself, I won't do it to anyone else.

(40 min. 7 sec.)

DH: So is this to say we won't be engaged in a process that is sustainable—the irony in this conversation is we're bounded by the language and employing the constructs and the terms—but is it to say then, to be engaged in that kind of a process that we're not using language. We don't have a sense of identity. We're not using language, as you said, it's powerful. It has an energy to it, and it embodies things. How does language fit into this world? How would people...I'm struggling with the thought of how to live, and be, in that kind of a place, living in that kind of a process without some identity.

LM: In Native cultures traditionally before the imbalances occurred between masculine and feminine, there was still always affirmation of the individual but the individual, and the affirmation, and the recipient of the affirmation always understood it in the context of the bigger whole. So there was always humility involved with that. So that countered today's proclivity to have the ego in the forefront. The ego has purpose and that purpose is our physical survival. But we're using it now for everything else. For our own identification, our own sense of self worth, all of that kind of thing, what we do in the world, rather than its real function. So we moved away from that. So there will still be individual affirmation but again with a greater understanding of what that affirmation really means. "I'm acknowledging you as my other self," which is different than saying, "You're my brother, You're my sister," or any of the other concepts in which we possibly come up with in our brain. We're not. It's an illusion. It's all one massive illusion. It's pretty interesting.

DH: So if people were to use an 'I am' statement from that place, that recognition and understanding what would that be? What would those 'I am' statements be?

LM: Well it's interesting, there's a place in the Bible, and again I don't follow the Christian path, I'm on my own particular traditional path, but I honor that path. In that there is an encounter of Moses and the burning bush. Where the Creator says, "I am that I am." Without most people understand today what that really means. In other words, we exist but we don't exist. The spiritual ways are filled with conundrums. It's like, "Light so bright as to blind those who cannot see," it just goes on and on and on like that. So when I say, "I am that I am," I'm defining myself in an undefinable way that has no limit. And that's the way of the real human being. It also gets away from attachment to the fact that I exist, because we're attached to it by virtue of our own fear of death. Letting go of *that* attachment is a pretty big thing. Letting go of your attachment that, "I am going to exist." Now this has really profound implications—and I want to say this as

a last point on this issue of the real human being—I intimated about the battles between the masculine and the feminine.

(44 min 34 sec.)

Between four and six thousand years ago, the world's spiritual leaders tuned in to their *innernet* and collectively realized that all the sacred teachings are going to be destroyed. All the things that are connected to the feminine were going to be violated and destroyed. Mother Earth based cultures, goddess cultures and Mother Earth herself. That all the things feminine would be violated, raped, and destroyed.

They deliberated amongst themselves what to do and they decided to hide the sacred and secret teachings. There will come a time, and that time was going to be in our lifetime, when these sacred teachings will start to come back together again and the hoop will be made whole. The destruction that's occurring on this planet is occurring ultimately because of the imbalanced male, or masculine self.

Metaphorically we understand and use the metaphors all the time without understanding its spiritual context. For example the male is yang. It's outward movement. It's physical manifestation. It's very mental, it's top down and these all have their function in balance with the feminine, which is the nurturing, the receptive, and the loving, and the relationship. But the male by itself cannot be in relationship. Bring both of them together. Even today, when you talk with women, when they're sitting together, they're talking about relationships. They're talking about their lovers, their husbands, their children, their friends. You talk with men it's literally fulfilling a stereotype. We're talking about the stock market, the football game, and that kind of stuff on the surface. So we need both, we need surface and depth. Women are able to go emotionally deep. Men, we stay on the surface. Women need the balance of the surface. The men need the balance of the depth. We need both in order to integrate ourselves as real human beings.

To the extent that we don't have that, we have what we have today. Top down, linear systems, devoid of connection, taking the science that transposes everything into numbers so we get further away from life and the living aspects of what we're dealing with. We create systems that are totally separate from everything else. I see you as a separate thing. We create wars because it's easy. When I'm separated from myself it's easy to separate from you. When I can separate from you I can create war and kill you because you are not my other self. You are something else. I dehumanize you and that justifies war or allows us to morally figure out how we can actually kill another human being.

Without that feminine balance, that's the kind of stuff that happens. It's what we're seeing in the world today. The destruction, the violations, the abhorrent violation to women around the world, the abhorrent destruction of the planet, Mother Earth, and the separation that creates wars. We need to heal that aspect. That is going to be a central consciousness movement, that is demanded of us at this time, to be able to bring these two back into balance again. From a human standpoint that means first healing myself with that, balancing those. And then working with others who are doing the same things but never imposing, this is not an epistemology. This is a way of living.

DH: Before moving on, are there any other aspects of your vision of the future to share?

LM: Humor.

DH: Humor?

LM: (Laughter) We take ourselves too seriously. Again, lightening up. That part of humor allows us to detach from whatever may be going on. Central to all indigenous cultures around the world, they've always had that humor and in different ways. Like in the Southwest they have the Heyoka, which is the person that does the reverse through humor ways to make you learn or to teach or see yourself differently. In western society they use jokes. Now we're having laughing kiosks, which are really great. Laughing kiosks eventually will change the kind of humor we will practice. Humor is an aspect of the real human being. When we take ourselves too seriously we get stuck. The whole point of all this is simply to loosen up.

DH: Nice. That's a good thought to take a break on.

LM: Good. Wow, we covered a lot of territory.

(49 min. 51 sec.)

Part 3 of interview with Larry Mercurieff

Date: 6/22/07

DH: Can you give us a brief summary of your thinking on a vision for a sustainable future?

LM: In terms of what that future would look like?

DH: Yeah.

LM: I think if it comes from a place of real consciousness, what we call the "real human being," it is interacting with each other as real humans beings, where we're totally centered and present in the moment, we're totally connected with ourselves and with others and with Mother Earth. Then I think we will begin to see the evolution of an entirely new technology or use of existing technologies in entirely different ways. Because as I've said before, Einstein said, "You can't solve a problem with the same consciousness that created it." If we apply the solutions that we think are good today, we're applying it from a place that created these problems in the first place. Consequently, it's not likely to be a real solution. It may touch the surface or it may have negative domino effect consequences that we can't see today because we're not. We're fragmented thinking, in separated terms, or separated consciousness.

So, whatever is created in the future is going to be created in a way that is going to be holistic, that looks into the interconnectedness of all things. That creativity comes from a place that is indescribable, at least in a Native viewpoint. It's not a creativity that comes directly from the mind. It comes from the inherent intelligence of the human body. Which is only accessible by being present in the moment, fully connected as the 'real human being' is. Unburdened, with energy flowing freely.

For example one time I was wondering how my ancestors could have created the incredible masks that they would make for ceremony. So, I asked an elder who said, “Go out to the beach clear your mind, clear your heart and get into a meditative state,” he didn’t say it in those exact words but that was the meaning of it and, “set your intent for what it is that you’re seeking. And just open up without interference of mind.” So I did that and it took about two hours before I could actually get to that point and in my mind’s eye this little black dot shows up and it expands and out of it poured at least a hundred masks each of them totally different in a matter of seconds. In western terms how would you explain that? You can’t and there’s no empirical way to prove it. One can always assume that if I created those masks, that was based on my own inner creativity, even if I as the artist would deny it, “That’s not where it came from.”

So the solutions we live for in the future are going to be derived in that fashion. They are always far greater than what we would expect them to be. Of course they will be focused more on process than on goal so that we will be looking at, what the elders always say, “How we put something together in using the process to achieve a goal is far more important than the goal itself,” because if you put together the process properly, the outcome always far exceeds the individual expectation.

Using principles of interconnectedness, and honor, reciprocity and reverence, so that, for example, I honor the fact that you are on your own sacred path. You have your own truth; you see the world totally different than I do. Can I create the space, or facilitates or support creation of the space that allows your truth to come forward and to be able to come forward in a way with everyone else, that may have totally different viewpoints, and to have the creativity and ingenuity and open-mindedness enough to be able to synthesize everyone’s input in that circle and come up with a solution.

(4 min. 58 sec.)

The Native peoples have been doing this for a long, long time and it really works. I’ve tried it myself and it really works. So, that process becomes very, very important. The process of course is the process of interaction of people because if we allow the right kind of space and we function from a place of our own inherent intelligence, the outcome is going to probably be pretty spectacular. It would probably be nothing that we individually could have conceived of. So what that future will actually look like is anyone’s guess but I do know that it’s going to be in balance, in harmony with creation. It’s going to be in alignment with, as we call it, spirit. Our intent is going to be aligned with the spirit. And we’ll be able to create some very wonderful things that are technologically, physiologically, and in any other sense, economically, is going to be far more harmonious than we’ve ever seen since the beginning of our time in this world

DH: Given where we are today, how do we work towards realizing that mode of human consciousness?

LM: I think there are probably several things we can do. One is that, I’m not advocating that whatever is being done now, to try to have something that is more supportable and in balance and in harmony with the earth and that those be stopped. We need to continue those but concurrent with those we need to actually sit down and figure out, “What are the strategies and processes and programs we can begin now, that would allow us to

restore our inherent human intelligence,” and we can actually model it after the two year old child that I spoke about earlier.

When you look at the two-year-old child, the way that they process their emotions they do it with their own inherent intelligence. They do it in the moment—when they’re angry they’re angry at the moment and so they’re cathartically letting it loose. When they’re happy they’re immediately playful. When they’re in conflict they may be frustrated or angry and then they process that and the next minute they’re perfectly fine. So the inherent intelligence of a two year old child being able to process all of the emotions that you energetically become a free flowing entity if you will, free flowing being. We’re going to have more energy, more creativity and more ability to work things in ways that are totally different than we’ve ever seen before.

So we need to establish some kind of processes and programs that takes a look at that and figure out how can we adapt those understandings with traditional ways of knowing to modern times and taking the best of what has been determined and developed in modern times and have the wisdom and intelligence to know what is useful, truly is useful. The elders talk about discernment. You need discernment. You need the ability to see what is truly useful, coming from a perspective that perhaps we don’t have today. A perspective of humility, particularly. That we don’t have the answers that there is a whole that is far greater than its parts, us being the parts, but we are a part of that whole. And bringing it...well, I was thinking about, if we would for example using these attitudes of reciprocity, respect, reverence for each other and everyone, put it together with other processes where there’s wisdom. That wisdom again, scientists talk about traditional knowledge and use and access of traditional knowledge. The elders say that knowledge without wisdom is useless. We only have to look at the use of atomic energy and how we applied it. There was no wisdom to it. There was no perspective of looking multiple generations down the line when I make a decision. Everything that I do in this world is effecting all the generations back to me. How can we re-establish some of those principles where we actually do look forward into the future for coming generations? And, also finding ways to bridge between traditional ways of knowing and the western epistemologies.

(10 min. 08 sec.)

I believe that in real partnerships, being an open process where we have this humility and not ethnocentric viewpoints or institutionally racist viewpoints that say, “My way is better than yours,” and to realize and recognize and acknowledging all our ways are equal in their different forms. If we could find a way to bring those together, bring the best of those worlds together we’re going to be far better able to deal with the daunting issues that we’re facing today.

A singular way of looking at things, a western epistemology, I think with the global monoculture that is evolving, is a very, very dangerous thing. To look at the world in one way is very, very dangerous, because we’ll be blinded to those things that we don’t think are important, but those things may be very important. We simply don’t have the eyes to be able to see them. For example, the most abundant green organism in all the world’s oceans are sea viruses. Someone somehow figured out that a single teaspoon of seawater is a billion sea viruses. Well how many scientists in the United States are studying sea viruses? I think it’s one out of the entire U.S. scientific establishment. Who are we to

make the determination that that sea virus, because they're such tiny organisms, are immaterial to the health and well being of the world's oceans. We have no clue.

The Native viewpoint, using humility, is that we don't have the wisdom to know which part is greater, which part is more important. We can't separate because it's all connected. Perhaps by ignoring the sea viruses we're ignoring some fundamental thing that is occurring in the world's oceans right now that we should have recognized. It may eventually spell the death of the health of the world's oceans. We have no clue.

Another example is about four years ago, I think it was, that they found out that solar flare activity actually materially affects the productive surface of the world's oceans. Now it is only because of modern technology that we've been able to find that out. Up to that point solar flares were ignored as a major forcing function on the world's oceans.

The concept of western society of managing ecosystems, of managing species, from the viewpoint of many native people is highly unsophisticated and very dangerous. It's like putting a gun in the hands of a child who never used a gun before. So that's where the wisdom comes in, and that wisdom doesn't come necessarily from just life experience. It comes from that spiritual source of guidance if you will, that comes from being centered, being present, being connected, being a real human being.

DH: What else do we need to continue doing or begin doing?

LM: I think we need serious deliberative processes that are taking stock of what we've wrought as humankind. *Why* we've come to where we are today. Do real soul searching into us as human beings. What have we created, why have we created this, and what's the root cause not the surface? It's important to deal with the surface, you know with all the programs that try to have the environmental protection of lands and restoration programs and all those kinds of things. But no one is saying, yeah, but "What caused that? What consciousness caused that kind of destruction? How did that consciousness get created?"

By asking those questions then maybe we can get some real solutions for ourselves. We shouldn't be out there studying environment. We should be studying ourselves. One time an elder said, you know they were putting radio tags on walrus to try to locate their migratory feeding patterns, the elder said, "They're not trying to understand the walrus. They're trying to find out who they are," meaning the scientists. Which in some ways is true. We're looking in the wrong direction so I think that we definitely need to have deliberative processes and dialogue between people of many different perspectives, many different worldviews. We also need to consider gender balance. In western society we're predominately working with male constructs: masculine constructs, top down organizations, command and control, managed, linear, numerically based. We need that feminine perspective, if you will, and we need to have balance, and to be able to understand how to listen.

(15 min. 48 sec.)

In western society what I've found, it is shocking actually sometimes, even for me having so much exposure to the western world, is to watch these T.V. talk shows. They're people talking over each other. They're not listening. What they're doing is hearing what the other person has said and thinking about what is going to be my response to that, rather than simply listening to what you're saying. The deliberative

process requires real listening. Sitting back without agenda to hear what the other person is saying. Again that is part of the process rather than focusing on the goal itself.

I sat in deliberative processes with native elders over a four- year period where they met four times a year, for three days each time, from seven different regions of Alaska. Never in that entire four years did I ever see conflict like this (gesture of fists coming together). Never. Because they're detached from ego and they're listening to each other and they're not speaking in response to the other. They're simply sharing what they know, their truth. Even before they speak, they would say, "I heard Helen say this, I know that she's a very wise woman and she has had many years as culture bearer." They would always, every speaker in that circle, would always affirm the prior speaker. Then they would speak their truth. They would never use words like 'I disagree with so and so," they would simply talk from their place of truth and everybody listened. From that we developed consensus. There is a process that is used for collective developing, collective agreement about what needs to be done. In western society we're based on a conflict model of education, conflict model of deliberation, conflict model of legal justice. It's the adversarial system.

Another example I'll give, which I think is a very beautiful one, the Yupik elders called me up and said they'd like for me to come. So I came, they didn't explain why. When I got there in southwestern Alaska, what the person who picked me up said, "The elders want you to watch what is happening here. There's been a great conflict in the region. There's a competition for the prime chief and there's two particular popular candidates. They're at each others' throats and it's splitting the region in half and villages, and inside the villages people are in conflict because of this competition." The elders did an unusual thing and actually stepped in to take control of the election process. That's very unusual. The only time they'll do it is if there's severe enough disruption to the harmony of the communities, families and individuals. Then they'll step in. Well they did, and when I got to the place of the gathering of all the candidates and hundreds of people in this huge auditorium. The elder spokesman said, "We took control of this because of the disharmonies created and now we're going to tell you how we're going to do this election. Every candidate, eight candidates, are going to have a chance to speak. But, you will not speak about yourself, you're going to speak about your other candidate, particularly the candidate you're directly concerned about. We will assign who talks about who. And then you're not going to say things negative. The winner of this election will be the one who finds the most positive things to say about the other candidates and they have to be true."

(20 min. 03 sec.)

Wow. So finally these two can get up that were at each other's throats and one said, "John you are a good hunter. You're a good father. I see that you take care of your children very well. You're a good provider. You're a great teacher," and this went on and on and on. The other candidate got up and the same thing. At the end of it, they're both in tears hugging each other. What if we could have elections in the United States like that? What are we teaching our young people? We're teaching them conflict. We're teaching them separation. Our national candidates, who are supposedly our leaders, our role models are bashing each other. Wow. And we're surprised that the younger generation is growing up separated? What kind of modeling are we doing, and what do we see on television? It goes on and on and on.

We need to take a look at these processes and see what happens when we flip the way that we're doing things now 180 degrees and change it because many of the elders call this the reverse society, or the inside out society because we've reversed all the paradigms. We used to teach how to live and now we teach how to make a living and the heart used to tell the mind what to do and now the mind tells the heart what to do. So, properly constructed processes could come up with totally different ways of doing things. That's definitely one of the things I think needs to be done.

DH: Would you emphasize anything else about what needs to be done?

LM: No, I think each and every single individual human being, if they truly are concerned, as I believe most of them are, about the future for their children, their grandchildren, their nieces and nephews, etc. The one biggest thing that they can do is, instead of looking outside start looking inside and seeing what *I* can do to become a reconnected human being once again. I think that's probably the most fundamentally important thing that we need to do.

DH: That's a wonderful thought to close our time together today. Thank you again.

LM: Thank you.

(22 min. 32 sec.)

To quote this interview, please use the following citation:

Mercurieff, L. (Interviewee) & Hall, D. E. (Interviewer). (2007). *Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Larry Mercurieff (Aleut)* [Interview transcript]. Retrieved from the Native Perspectives on Sustainability project website: www.nativeperspectives.net