

Gather for Peace

The United States should take a cue from tribes that developed different and highly effective ways to settle disputes.

From an article in *The Los Angeles Times* and *Gainesville Sun* by Annie Pais, a Gainesville artist

This is in response to Michael Gannon's Feb. 23 column, in which he laid out five moral principles as a guide to use for waging war. His reasoning is good in that his moral lessons quote the Platonic philosopher and Christian Theologian St. Augustine of Hippo, but academic analysis only goes so far. Since all this warring behavior has been around for quite a while, I'm searching for models of how other cultures have come to handle it.

Here are two examples I find especially enlightening, incredibly mature and holistically satisfying. In the Hopi culture, in an attempt to balance the tribal structure, there was a council of grandmothers. These women were hugely respected and honored for obvious reasons. Collectively, they had literally created, carried, birthed, delivered, nourished, fed, protected, healed, taught and in every way imaginable, contributed to the well-being and welfare of the entire tribe. So, when things got out of whack and the chief and warriors got frustrated and even threatened, feeling like they wanted to strike out, etc., they first had to approach the council of grandmothers and receive counseling advice and

permission to take the tribe to war.

They listened to the wise advice of these honored women precisely because they had more invested in the tribe and had survived and sacrificed more.

This form of checks and balances was taken very seriously and engaged in as a respectful part of the process of leadership within the tribe and nation. It encouraged responsibility of actions.

If the grandmothers determined that war was necessary and unavoidable, permission was given, but only after every other avenue of problem solving and soul searching had been thoroughly exhausted.

In this very holistic way, balance was retained, respect was had by all, and the tribe itself was kept whole and strong. I love this example, not only because women were heard and respected, but because the decisions to go to war are not simply academic or passionate, they are all encompassing and involve the safety and quality of life of an entire nation.

This second example comes from the Inuits. Whenever life got seriously out of balance and fighting was imminent, the leaders got together and the tribes "challenged" each other to a poetry contest.

Each tribe gathered its best poets who summoned all their creative



strength to produce the most satisfying, the most beautiful and magical poems they could wage.

The marathon contest went on for days until it was determined by judges who was the winner, and peace prevailed.

Poetry is a highly evolved way of settling disputes and we can all admit we aren't there yet.

However, both of these examples show remarkable creativity in problem solving, great intelligence in leadership.

They illustrate a wise evolution in how civilizations learned from devastating experience that war is a short-term solution benefiting no one in the long run, and it can almost always be avoided by nations that first and foremost respect themselves and then others.

I think often we confuse pacifism with passiveness. This is both a discredit to intelligent, evolved, creative problem solving and a reflection of our own immature nation. Pacifism requires great courage and is the true opposite of passivism.