



LETTER TO THE HUICHOLS OF SAN ANDRÉS EXPRESSING THE VALUES OF THE TATEWARÍ GROUP

BY ELIOT COWAN AND DAVID WILEY

ELIOT COWAN AND DAVID WILEY are Americans by birth, but each has been called to follow their soul connections to the way of the Huichol Indians of Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains.

Eliot Cowan has completed the traditional Huichol shamanic apprenticeship and has been initiated as a Tsaurririkame, "A Singer of the Divine Song." David Wiley will soon complete his apprenticeship and, if all goes well, he will also receive full initiation in the Huichol tradition of healing. As such, their paths honor and serve the gods of the Huichol, particularly Tatewarí, the elemental god of fire, and Kauyumari, the Blue Deer, the dreamer of the world.

Over the past six years, Eliot and David have been the attending shamans for a group of about 50 other American men and women who are also called to the Huichol path. During this time, this group has traveled frequently to a remote village, San Andrés, to spend time in the Huichol homeland. They have supported the village by purchasing the work of their artists and by funding initiatives to build a water system and to make other village improvements. They have made many trusted friends and the community has become dear to their hearts.

As they have come to know the villagers

of San Andrés, they have also come to know their challenges. The village has gone through numerous changes. In a sense it has become more prosperous, largely due to money being sent by people who have left the village to work in cities and in the USA. The Mexican government has also invested in an "eco-tourism" center in San Andrés. And, to a certain extent, the groups patronage of the artists of San Andrés and the surrounding hamlets, and funding of certain construction projects has brought money into their hands.

This prosperity is a mixed blessing. While it has brought running water into the village and electricity that allows for refrigeration, illumination and easier cooking, it has also brought radios and television and, with them, the culture of materialism. At the same time, Protestant Evangelical Christianity has been making in-roads into the village, separating people from their traditional paths and disrupting the flow of an ancient way of being.

Having witnessed the rapid influx of Western influences and ideals that currently threaten the Huichols' traditional way of life, a tradition unbroken and unconquered for thousands and thousands of years, Eliot and David felt called by Tatewarí, Grandfather Fire, to send a public letter to the community:

ESTEEMED GOVERNOR, Council of Elders, Traditional Authorities and Other Members of the Community of San Andrés Cohamiata:

First, we wish to thank you for your welcome and support. It gives us great satisfaction to feel how friendship has grown between us over the years.

We send you this letter to express our support for your community. We want you to be aware of the purpose of our presence in San Andrés, and, also to know how much we value Huichol culture.

Years ago we were asked what was the name of our group, and we said, "We are 'The Invaded Ones.'"

"And why do you call yourselves that?" you asked. We replied, "A long time ago you were invaded by the Christians, Spaniards or mestizos. Now your gods have invaded us. Unexpectedly Tatewarí showed up and placed his spiritual demand upon us. So it is that we are the Invaded Ones." Later you gave us the name "Tatewarí Group," which is very appropriate.

We don't ask you to give us your knowledge, your traditions, your peyote; we don't ask to be admitted

to your rituals. We don't want anything that you wouldn't wish to share, because the gods grant us what they see is important for us. The only thing we could ask of you would be permission to continue coming from time to time to walk the earth, to feel the wind and rain, to see the stars at night, to hear the gods and the ancestors; and to offer our prayers. We are pleased to continue supporting your community as much as we can because we believe it to be of the highest importance that your culture flourishes.

We say that it is of the highest importance because we see that by maintaining your traditions, by making pilgrimage to the sacred places, by your offerings, by your rituals, and by the shamans' chants, healing and counsel you continue listening to the gods. In this way you give your children and grandchildren a dignified and joyous life, for they know who they are, where they are, what is to be done, and to what they owe their being in this world.

The people in our group are well acquainted with the gringo way of life. We are not like the young mestizos or young people from other countries who come looking for adventure. Those adventurers don't have responsibilities; they lack community; and they don't know what their own lives are about, so they want to get into other peoples business or look for peyote or drugs to escape from their own lives. But we are serious people. We are older and many of us have good families and communities. Most of us are highly educated; most were formerly Christians or from other religions. We have jobs and are considered trustworthy members of our communities. We know well the outside world, the world on the other side of the border.

As a support to your community, we want to share what we know of that world, because our culture can be difficult to understand. Long ago our ancestors had traditions just as your community does now. Our forebears left their traditions to become Christians or to stop believing in the gods, as academic people often do to chase after diplomas, money, and material things like cars, expensive clothes, and

bigger houses. We implore you not to make this mistake.

We know what we are talking about. Our culture is dying because it has lost its connection with the gods, and our people are afraid of realizing this.

The Christians don't know anything that the gods don't already know. Christians are only interested in stealing the souls of people of other traditions, or buying their souls, like the person who buys or steals someone else's corn to fill their own storehouse. Those people are not going to find salvation that way. They will only become enslaved to a foreign god who is not yours and can never be yours. Although they may have money and education, Christians don't have anything better than your direct relationship with the gods.

In addition to alcohol, another problem introduced by our culture is a new modern drug that is often even worse. It is television. When you watch TV it can seem interesting and exciting—something different from your daily life. But, you have to beware. Those who control the TV are invisibly changing you so you will abandon your ways and become like the people on TV and need the false things they need to fill their empty lives, since they have no connection with the importance of the gods and community. The people on TV are not real. They are invented to lead you astray and their stories made up to make you dissatisfied with your own life, so you will abandon your tradition and become like the lost people. That way you can be controlled by the government and the companies who invent these false stories in order to sell you new things with the false promise that you will attain a better life. Please be aware that TV is a terrible demon of foreign culture, sucking the life and will of your people as it has done to ours. In exchange, it offers only a false sense of well-being.

There are also problems with food. Mestizo culture brings in foods that may taste good, but the methods of cooking and the addition of chemicals can cause illness.

Another problem is debt. You observe many mestizos and gringos who appear to have many possessions, but you have

to understand that they owe a lot of money to the bank and they never get free of this problem.

In speaking of these problems we want to say that although our culture may appear attractive, it produces a lot of sickness. The people are not happy. Of what we have, nothing, not Christianity, education, money, material things... nothing is worth trading for the priceless gift you already have.

We repeat: our culture is dying. Even though it may seem strong and invincible, it is dying. The day will come when the only peoples left on this earth are those that have stayed faithful to the traditions granted them by the gods.

We wish to support this vision in hopes that you will not heed the voices of deception. To give you an example, in our country there are many indigenous peoples who lost their traditions. Some of them no longer exist. The ones who remain live in tremendous suffering. Family members beat and kill each other. Young people commit suicide. They endure much illness, hunger, and cold. Drugs, alcohol, desperation and insanity are everywhere.

On the other hand, your example shows us that to survive and live well one must follow in the footsteps of the Blue Deer. We are convinced that the future of humanity is to return to the past. Otherwise, there will be no future for humanity. For this reason we want to help your culture to stay alive.

Miraculously our Patron, Tatewari, has granted us a tiny bit of vision, a little protection against illness that surrounds us. We have experienced the supposed advantages of having been born in a country as wealthy as the United States. Our money, cars, airplanes, telephones, refrigerators, computers, television, atomic bombs, diplomas, record players—it is all worthless compared to what you have. Modernity will soon come to an end. But you will endure as long as the world exists. Or rather, you will endure as long as you stay faithful to your traditions.

With nothing further to add at this time, we take our leave, with gratitude to you for having listened to us.

*Sincerely,
Eliot Cowan and David Wiley
For the Tatewari Group*