

"Our mission is to re-establish our identity as Allegany Senecas by preserving our language, culture and customs as specified in our spiritual guide, the Gaiwi:yoh."

Ganöhsesge:kha: Hënödeyë:stha'

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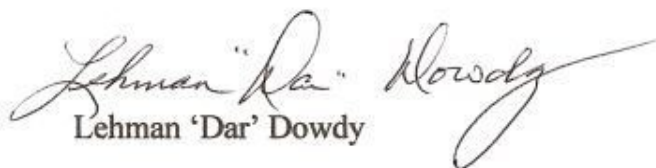
716-354-2219 · Longhouse Teachings

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Throughout the month of December 2009 there has been much sorrow and grief on our Territories due to the loss of family members and friends. It is also a time of wonder and reawakening as we question the reasons for these untimely deaths. Many people have asked me what my thoughts are on this situation. In turn, I asked, "What are the other religious leaders thinking or saying?" I too am curious as to what is the cause of our younger generation passing so early in life. If the cause is heart attacks, then one of the main reasons would be because of the way we are eating and living today. Another major cause is stress. We're living in a time and in another culture that our Native bodies still haven't fully adapted to. We're prone to diabetes because we can't break down all the sugar and starch in our fast-food diets, plus we've slowed down on our physical activity. Once, we ate foods high in starch – corn, beans and potatoes – but we worked hard and burned off those calories. Then there is the stress in our daily lives. We are wanting to accumulate and manage more monies to match our wants and desires. And the feeling of community and family has lessened; we're too busy now thinking only of ourselves. All of these factors are contributing to our early death. On a spiritual side; these same things are killing our spirit as well. The ancestors have warned us that these days would come; my Dad used to say: "You, maybe, you'll be the one to see these changes." He was talking about the time, as predicted by Handsome Lake, that we would grow tired of our Indian ways and the white man would take the minds of our children. Two hundred and nine years ago, our prophet was told that this day would come. Our language and culture are at a dangerous level of near extinction. Recently, a friend, Brother Kevin Krisco of St. Bonaventure University said: "The loss of your Seneca language and culture is like the cutting of a flower in full bloom; it is beautiful now but soon it will die." We're witnesses to the dying of our culture and language as well as the physical dying of our younger generations. We keep counting the number of fluent speakers left and we keep saying how important the Seneca language is but we're really doing nothing to retain it. And in this society that we're now living in; what does it matter anyway? The ones who would ask what the sense of learning our language is are

the ones who have emptied their bodies of being Indian and poured the white man into their souls. They've accepted assimilation fully and don't care if they're Indian or not. I, on the other hand believe that it matters because our children still want to be Seneca, they deserve our same birthrights and privileges of being Seneca. It isn't the right of this generation to kill our Seneca language, culture and traditions. It is our responsibility, each one of us, to learn, use and teach our language. The language makes us who we are and without it; we're no longer Indians. That's what I think. I think that we're doing exactly what the U.S. government wants us to do; terminate ourselves! But I do believe that it isn't too late, we can still turn this thing around. I promised my mother that I would keep our longhouses going to my last days and I continue to honor that promise. We all need to make similar promises; promises that will keep our kids safer, healthier and most of all; Indian. We can't just sit back and watch our children die young due to alcohol, violence or drugs; we need to decide today that we're going to return to living with a good mind and a caring heart. I don't advocate returning back to the 'good-ole-days' I say let's live today with good, strong Native thinking minds; minds that reject alcohol and drugs and see them clearly as destroyers of our people and culture. Handsome Lake turned it around in 1800 when he preached against alcohol; 75% of the people who heard his message stopped drinking on that day! That's how we made it here today, we're here because our ancestors believed in themselves; believed in our ability to live within but outside the dominate society. We're surrounded everyday by the outside world but we can still determine what we're going to let into our hearts and minds. Let in the good things; love yourself, your family and your community. I'm grieving too; I'm hurting because my family and community are hurting. Each day I offer my prayers searching for a solution to help our children and the elders; I want to make a difference in their lives. Maybe if we all decided to help we'd stop burying our people at such a young age. Maybe that's the answer; and, that's my response.


Lehman 'Dar' Dowdy