

Family Violence and Men of Color

*Healing the Wounded
Male Spirit*

SECOND EDITION

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El Hombre Noble Buscando Balance: The Noble Man Searching for Balance

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The ancient teachings, through storytelling, helped to guide, correct, and heal. Through them, the “rites of passage” lessons of “manhood” were conveyed and passed on from one generation to the next. This elder’s lesson, which has parallels in many cultures, begins the dialogue and journey toward honorable and balanced manhood.

THE YOUNG MAN AND LIFE’S LESSON

The *viejito* (the elder), lived way up on a hill and had been married for many years. His lifelong goal was to have a good relationship with his family, and he was able to do this. Then one day, his wife was called by the other world and left him. But before she left, she said to him, “Remember the promise.”

The elder said, “What promise?”

And she answered, “Remember the promise of how we got this house and this land.”

And he remembered that the way he got the enormous house and this land was that *dueño* (the owner) gave it all to them, based on one promise. The promise was that when they were ready to go to that “other place,” when they were going to die, they would give it to someone who would continue on with the same *valores* (values), someone who would

live in this house in a way that was harmonious, a way that would make the other happy. The *dueño* had said, "Remember, before you go, you have to give it—to someone who can carry these *valore* and make their partner happy."

The *viejito* remembered, and he realized that his time was getting short. So he called a meeting. He called everybody to the circle, and said, "I'm almost ready to leave and to go to the next world, but first I must keep a promise I made to my wife. I will give this mansion, this huge house and its ten thousand acres, away." (In those days you didn't get houses and you didn't get land unless someone gave them to you.) The *viejito* continued: "I'm going to give this house and this land to anyone who wants it, as long as he's able to tell me how you can make a harmonious life, how you can make a *mujer* (woman) happy. My life was devoted to my wife, so if you know, as an *hombre* (man), how to make a *mujer* happy, then you know how to live in harmony. Now, who among you wants to take the challenge of telling me the four things you have to do, the four values? Who wants to take the challenge of coming back and telling me these four *valores*? You must do it; however, by the time the sun sets on the seventh day. Do any of you want to take this challenge?"

Four men raised their hands and said that they would take the challenge.

And the *viejito* said, "There's one thing you should know: Anyone who takes the challenge but doesn't come back with the answers by the time the sun sets on the seventh day, that man will die, and all his generations to come will have disease and will suffer. Now, knowing that, how many of you would still like to take the challenge? Anyone? Remember, this is a huge house, ten thousand acres."

Well, something that happens to men sometimes is that we pretend we're not afraid and that we know everything.

And there was one man like that. "I'll do it!" he said. "Hey! Four values! No problem! I'll get that big house, and the land, and I'll be all set."

So this one man took the challenge. The *viejito* sent him out and said, "Now, go about the countryside and look for these values among the people, because the values are out there."

Off went the man, walking, and looking, and trying to think of the *valores*. And he was thinking, maybe one of the *valores* was to value money. But no, it couldn't be that. Could it be control? No, that couldn't be it. And the harder he thought about it, the harder it was for him to find the values.

As he was walking on this hot day, he became thirsty. He went by the river where there were some children playing in the water. He stopped to get a drink, and seeing the children, he remembered that, being children, these little ones know our spirits, they are honest, they say things we don't want them to say, they do things we don't want them to do, but they're so honest, so clear with us. And the children, seeing this man, knew that he was searching for something, and they asked, "*Señor, señor*, what's the matter? You look lost—are you looking for something?"

And the man replied, "Ah-h, what do you know? You're just little children, what do you know?"

"Well, what's the matter, sir—what's the matter? You need something?" Then one of the kids whispered, "Hey, he's the one—he's the one! He's the one looking for the *valores*."

And one of the children spoke up, saying, "You're the one looking for the *valores*!"

Another chided, "Oh, you're going to die if you don't find 'em, huh?"

Because the children know. The children know when we're lost, and they know when something's happening to us, when we're searching. And they're honest—and open—and ready to give us their knowledge, telling us, "We'll tell you! We'll tell you!"

And our usual answer is, "Ah-h, what do you kids know?"

"Well, we know what makes us happy!" the children said to the man. "What? What?" asked the man.

"We like *cariño* (love), we like our moms and dads to hug us and kiss us. We like *cariño*—we like *cariño*! We really like *cariño*! It's good! Yeah, that's what we like!"

And the man answered with a sigh, "Well, thank you—thank you."

"Okay! Bye, sir—bye, sir. Hope you find everything you need by the seventh day," the children said, adding "Cause if not, you're going to die!"

The man continued on his search, and a couple of days passed. He came to some orchards where *campesinos* (farmworkers) were harvesting fruit, working the land. Seeing the food, and being hungry, he asked one of the men, "Can I have some food?"

"You look a little bit lost and a little bit hungry; of course, you can," the worker said, and gave some fruit to the man. He asked, "*¿Que tiene, señor?*" (What's the matter, sir?)

The man replied, "Nothing, nothing. Ah-h-h, you men just work the land, what do you know?"

The worker replied, "No, no, we're close to the land, and we know what's going on. We can feel when something's not right, and you don't seem quite right."

And the man said, "But what do you know?"

Then the worker, talking to one of the others, said, "Ah-h, he's the one, he's the one," and they talked among themselves, saying, "He's the *loco* (the crazy one), the one who's looking for the *valores*."

"I'm not crazy," the man protested, "but I *am* looking for the values. But what do you know?"

The first worker replied, "Well, we work all day long, every day, and all we want is dignity, just for people to give us valor, to value what we do. We feed the people. We work hard just for one thing: dignity. That's all we ask—all we ask. So that's a value for you."

"Ah, *¡gracias!*" the man said. And on he went.

Soon it was the fourth day, then the fifth, and the man was getting a little nervous, starting to think that perhaps he shouldn't have taken on the challenge. He had thought it was going to be easy. As he came to the top of a hill, he saw a little house with a porch, where two *viejitos* (elders), an old couple, were sitting, drinking coffee, rocking and rocking, and talking to each other.

The man, who was getting tired, wanted a place to sleep, so he went up to the couple and asked, "Have you any place to sleep?"

The old man replied, "We always have room for people passing. Where are you going?" (And the *mujer* whispered, "He's the one, he's the one!") The *viejito*, laughing, said, "You're looking for the *valores*, eh?"

The man answered, "Yes, yes, but I don't know if I'm going to find the four *valores* soon enough."

The old man replied, "*Muy facil, es muy facil* (it's very easy)."

"So what do you mean?"

The old woman replied, "My husband and I, we've been married many years, 60 years, and the most difficult one is him!"

The old man turned to his wife, and said, "Agh, and she likes things in their place, just her way. We fought for years until we learned to respect each other, and we've been together all these years."

So the man stayed overnight with the old couple and realized he had learned a third value: respect. But it was the seventh day, and the sun was in the middle of the sky and now he was back, walking through the village and getting very nervous. As he walked on, he heard a noise somewhere off to the side: "Ps-s-st, p-s-s-t." He looked around, but he

saw nothing. Then, he heard the same noise again. "Ps-s-s-t, p-s-s-t." Suddenly he saw a *mujer*, saying again,

"Ps-s-s-t, p-s-s-t." He looked. "Ps-s-s-t, p-s-s-t, come here!" As he drew closer to her, he saw that she was very ugly, with big warts. As he came even closer, he noticed how bad she smelled. Stinking!

The man asked, "¿*Que tiene?* (What do you want?)"

The woman said, "So, you're the one looking for the four *valores*, eh?"

"Yes, but (phew! phew!) what do you know?"

The woman answered, "I've got it for you—I've got the last value!" "But look at you!" he said with disgust. "You're over here, and you're all stinky and smelly, and what could you know about anything!"

She replied, "Well, I sit here all day long. I see a lot. I know a lot. I see what shouldn't happen. I know. I know the fourth value." "You don't know anything!"

"Well, it's up to you, *señor*. What's your choice? If you don't get the value from me, then what? Death. You want to die?"

"No, but you're so ugly, and I . . ."

"Well, it's up to you, *señor*. Go ahead."

"All right, all right, give me the *valor!*" he said impatiently.

"No, no, no, no, no!" the woman said solemnly. "You know nothing in this world is free. Life is a circle. I'll give to you, but you give to me."

"But what do you want?"

"If I give you the *valor*, you have to marry me."

"Marry you!" the man said. "Let's be realistic!"

"Well, it's up to you," she said. "Either you marry me—or you die. Which would you like?"

"Aw, you don't know the value anyway," he muttered.

"Yes, I do."

"Well, what is it?"

"Well, it's very easy," the woman said slowly, "It's *palabra*. It's giving your word, meaning the value of trust. Trust is such an important thing, and the reason I'm sitting here is because people have broken trust with me. Your *palabra, señor*. *Si no tienes palabra, no tienes nada* (if your word isn't trusted, then you have nothing)."

"Agh, that's a stupid value," he replied.

"But you have no choice. It's the last one, eh?"

As the sun began to set, the man ran to the top of the village hill, where sat the *viejito*, the elder, smiling. "Did you find them?" the old man said. "Did you find them?"

The man answered, "Well, from the children, I learned about love."

"Yes, that's one."

"And from the farmworkers, I learned about dignity."

"Yes, that's the second one."

"From the elders, I learned the value of respect. But I don't know about this last one . . ." The man hesitated.

"Well, what's the last one?"

"Well, it's . . . it's trust, and it's about giving your word . . ." And the *viejito* says, "Yes, you got it! Where'd you learn about that value?"

"Well, there's this old, ugly woman, sitting on the—"

"No, no, I know about her! But how did you *get* it from her?" "Well, I promised I'd marry her."

"A-g-h-h-h, ho, ho!" the *viejito* laughed. "So then you will have to marry her, because you can't only *have* the values, you have to *live* them."

The man looked at the house, and thought, Well, it's a big house; maybe she could live on that side and I'll live on this side, eh?

So the *viejito* gave them the big house and the land.

And the *viejito* that night, because his job was done, passed to the next world.

The man and the ugly woman then had a wedding. They invited everyone, and everyone came and celebrated the marriage. After the wedding, the couple went into their house, into the bedroom. There were many bedrooms, but they were in the one room, and the man said, "Well, I'm going to go to another bedroom and sleep, and you can sleep in this bed."

"Yes, okay," replied the woman. "But before you go to sleep, give me a kiss goodnight."

"Do I have to?" he said with revulsion.

"Well, remember the *valores*," she replied, "love, dignity, respect, and . . . come on, kiss me."

"Do I really have to?"

"Yes," she said adamantly.

"Do I have to keep my eyes open?"

"No, you can close your eyes if you want," she said, "just as long as you kiss me."

So, with his eyes closed, the man, thinking that with his eyes closed he would not feel anything, kissed her.

And when he opened his eyes, the woman wasn't ugly anymore. She was beautiful!

And the man said, "Wait a minute! You're not ugly anymore! What happened?"

She replied, "It's because you're not afraid anymore. You were able to get close to what you were afraid of. And when you get close to, and hold, what you fear, it's not ugly anymore. It turns into a lesson about something of beauty. But that's not the end of it."

"What do you mean?" he said.

She replied, "You have a choice."

"What's the choice?"

"Well, I can either be beautiful in the house but ugly when we leave, or I can be ugly when we're in the house but beautiful when we're outside."

Which would you choose? Ugly when inside the house, beautiful when outside? Or beautiful inside the house, ugly when outside, where all your friends could talk about your ugly wife? If you choose beautiful inside, all your friends will talk about you and wonder how you could marry an ugly woman.

So what did this man do? What did he choose? He had learned something in his life.

Well, what he did is what wise men do, and he said to his wife, "Whatever you want." He gave up his control, he gave up the power, and he allowed the spirit of healing, and of the Creator, to guide him. He gave up trying to dictate.

And with that, she was beautiful inside the house and she was beautiful on the outside, because it didn't matter anymore.

BACKGROUND

Many people, and even many Chicano/Latinos, do not know that there was a time when there was little violence or fighting among Chicano/Latino people. In fact, many people believe that violence is a part of our core cultural identity.

Because neither do you understand us, nor do we understand you. And we do not know what it is that you want. You have deprived us of our good order and *way* of government, and the one with which you have replaced it we do not understand. Now all is confusion and without order and harmony. The Indians of Mexico have given themselves to fighting because you have brought it upon them. . . .

Those who are not in contact with you do not fight; they live in peace. And if during the time of our "paganism" there were fights and disputes, they were very few. And they were dealt with justly and settled quickly because there used to be no difficulties in finding out which of the parties was right, nor were there any delays and cheating as there are now. (Zurita, 1891)

In specific reference to domestic violence, this belief of inbred false perception is so ingrained that some think it is part of being a Chicano/Latino male to beat his wife, a part of his "*machismo*." It is within this falsehood that the root of the problem lies, the systematic, multigenerational process of internalized oppression.

E. S. Maruse writes that oppression is the "systematic, pervasive, routine mistreatment of individuals on the basis of their membership in a particular group." It is the denial or nonrecognition of the complete humanness of others. Oppression has an order, and the cycle begins with the circulation of lies, misinformation, or half-truths about a people. This misinformation then serves as a justification for their mistreatment. The cycle continues, whereby this misinformation is woven into the fabric of society. The final stage is when the target group believes the lies are attributed to a deficit in their own culture, and they begin internalizing the oppression in actions and behavior against themselves, thus breaking their own true spirit.

This "spirit breaking" came in a variety of direct and indirect measures as a means of the Europeans' attempting to "conquer" the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual identity of the indigenous Mexican people. This historical genocide resulted in over 50 million people being killed—men, women, and children; thousands of women and children raped; sacred writings, sacred sites, art, and precious belongings destroyed; and the distortion and disharmony of traditional values, customs, ceremonies, and spiritual teachings (Leon-Portilla, 1961). The result of this has been a deep imbalancing wound, referred to as intergenerational post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Duran & Duran, 1995).

At the same time, the wisdom of elders was so profound that the occurrence of these devastating events was actually prophesied by them, long before it came to pass, in the story of *La Llorona* (The Crying Woman) (Leon-Portilla, 1992).

The origin or root of the story is ancient and goes back to before the Europeans invaded Mexico. At this time, there were a number of prophecies, visions, or omens foretelling the arrival of the Spaniards, and one

of these omens was that of *La Llorona*. The people heard a weeping woman, night after night. She passed by in the middle of the night, wailing and crying out in a loud voice, "My children, my children, where will I take you? My children." At other times, she cried, "My children, my children, where are my children?" The indigenous reference for this "crying woman" is Cihuacoati, an ancient earth goddess, whose principal role was to care for the children. During the time of the European invasion, it has been documented that one of the main preoccupations of the mothers was their fear of "losing" their children. The fear was a literal fear of losing them to death or torture by the invaders, but more importantly, the fear that the children would lose their spirit, their *destino*, or purpose in life connected to their people. The essence of knowing one's *destino* was seen as the most significant element of keeping balanced and being well rooted.

In indigenous times, there was much focus and attention devoted to the proper "rooting" or raising of all children, both male and female. An ancient document describing the way the children were taught morals in the past stated that every morning after the children's usual meager breakfast they would be taught:

How they should live,
 How they should respect others,
 How they were to dedicate themselves to what was good and righteous,
 How they were to avoid evil,
 How to flee unrighteousness with strength, and
 How to refrain from perversion and greed. (Garibay Kintana, 1943, p. 97)

The teachings were the same for males and females, and as we see in the next passage, a purity of heart and a sense of spirituality were at the base of these teachings.

Even if he were poor and lowly,
 even if his mother and his father
 were the poorest of the poor . . .
 His lineage was not considered, only his way of life mattered—the
 purity of his heart,
 His good and humane heart . . .
 His stout heart. . . .
 It was said that he had God in his heart, that he was wise in the things
 of God. (Torquemada, 1943, I, p. 1988)

The above two accounts are directly opposite to the stereotypical view of the “*macho*” male’s self-centeredness. The following account is also contrary to the stereotypical “superior” controlling attitude that is typically considered to be a prerequisite of a traditional Chicano/Latino male:

Not with envy,
not with a twisted heart,
shall you feel superior,
shall you go about boasting.
Rather in goodness shall you make true
your song and your word.
And thus you shall be highly regarded,
and you shall be able to live with the others. (Olmos, n.d.)

In a slightly different way another test describes the good man’s just reward:

If you live uprightly,
you shall be held highly for it,
and people will say of you
what is appropriate, what is just. (Olmos, n.d.)

So we see that at the base of the culture were direct teachings to reinforce a sense of respect and interconnectedness founded on spirituality. In addition, contrary to the pervasive “Latin Lover” falsehood and the false stereotype that Latinos didn’t talk directly about sexuality, in the following, a father speaks to his son about the importance of sexual moderation and preparation.

Do not throw yourself upon women
Like the dog which throws itself upon food.
Be not like the dog
When he is given food or drink,
Giving yourself up to women before the time comes.
Even though you may long for women,
Hold back, hold back with your heart
Until you are a grown man, strong and robust.
Look at the maguey plant.
If it is opened before it has grown
And its liquid is taken out,
It has no substance.

It does not produce liquid, it is useless.
Before it is opened to withdraw its water,
It should be allowed to grow and attain full size
Then its sweet water is removed all in good time.
This is how you must act:
Before you know woman you must grow and be a complete man.
And then you will be ready for marriage;
You will beget children of good stature,
Healthy, agile, and comely. (*Códice Florentino*, Book VI, fol. 97, r.)

This passage states, “Before you know woman, you must grow and be a complete man.” This reference directs itself to a “rite of passage” that must take place in order that a young man can be ready to enter into a complete relationship with a woman. The passage further states, “And then you will be ready for marriage” or be prepared to make a commitment to another. This aspect of commitment or *palabra* (word), then, becomes the basis for manhood in the traditional sense; your word, credibility, and essence are based on who and what you represent.

The true essence of what was expected of a man is very clearly articulated in the following passage:

The mature man
Is a heart solid as a rock
Is a wise face
Possessor of a face
Possessor of a heart
He is able and understanding. (*Códice Matritense del Real Palacio*, VI, fol. 215)

And finally, in this ancient writing, a father who participates in the raising of children by placing before them a large mirror (his example) is described as compassionate:

The father, root and origin of the lineage of men.
His heart is good, he is careful of things; he is compassionate, he is concerned, he is the foresight, he is support, he protects with his hands.
He raises children, he educates, he instructs, he admonishes,
He teaches them to live.
He places before them a large mirror,
A mirror pierced on both sides; he is a large torch that does not smoke.
(*Códice Matritense de la Real Academia*, VIII, 118, v.)

The above reference to a “large torch that does not smoke” speaks again to *palabra*, or word, that is honest and consistent.

These last two accounts clearly articulate the basis of what the traditional elders described as a “*macho*” in the true sense of *palabra*, or word.

“Possessor of a face”—*cara*.

“Possessor of a heart”—*corazón*.

So complex are these instructions that 14 volumes are devoted to these teachings alone in the Florentine Codex, an ancient indigenous document. The development of one’s character, identity, or root essence was paramount to the ancients because they understood that if the root of the tree was not well grounded, then the tree would be weak and vulnerable to the winds. This identity root, based on the dual concepts of *cara y corazón*, is reflected in the four main values.

The *cara* reveals the significance of a man knowing his *destino* (purpose in life)—his role within the family and community—and a commitment to the interdependent functioning of the family. The two values that form the basis of *cara* are *dignidad* (dignity) and *respeto* (respect).

In balancing this duality, the *corazón* reveals the need for compassion and trust, a spiritual harmony and a sense of understanding and consideration for others. The two values that form the basis of *corazón* are *confianza* (interconnected bonding) and *cariño* (love, acceptance).

It is with this knowledge that the “true” definition of *macho*, based on the indigenous elders’ teachings, can be understood:

Dignified
A Protector
Nurturing
Spiritual
Faithful
Respectful
Friendly
Caring
Sensitive

Trustworthy. (*Códice Matritense de la Real Academia*, VIII, 118, v.)

So the teachings are still there, even though many do not know they exist. If you destroy the semblance of a people’s authentic self, you destroy their spirit. Thus, we truly begin to understand the tremendous trauma that was perpetrated and the disequilibrium that was manifested—so

profound in nature that we feel it still, even today. This tremendous historical, multigenerational distortion of our way of life impacted us to the degree that we, as a people, still are attempting to rebalance from the over 50 million deaths, rapes, and severe abuses that were perpetrated on our people. The total disequilibrating impact of destroying a harmonious, interdependent identity has now resulted in some of us hurting, killing, and violating our own as a way of life. This brings extreme sadness and pain to so many. And if that were not enough, these oppressive forces have been successful in having many believe that these negative, spirit-destroying acts of violence against women, the center of our people, are part of our cultural identity, a spirit-destroying lie that evokes deep hopelessness.

The end result of this belief is shame, resulting finally in a total psychospiritual amnesia of one’s true spirit. This long-term spirit-breaking process continues to have a devastating effect on Chicano/Latinos as a whole, and with reference to domestic violence, we see the harmful effects daily. Fortunately, the spirit of the ancients is very strong and thus we, as a people, have been able to maintain a semblance of our *destino* whereby the *mujer* (woman) and mother is still held with much respect and honor by many as an ideal, and in practice as well. This is not to say that the multigenerational oppression has not had its effect. Furthermore, I believe that unless we re-root the true essence of the ancient teachings quickly, we may lose our total rooted spirit.

We find in approaching this issue of *El Hombre Noble Buscando Balance* (The Noble Man Searching for Balance) that we have men at different points on the journey.

As part of this journey, there is a symbol of a “bridge crossing” rite of passage phase in every young person’s life that is seen as critical in defining that person’s development. The following is the way “The Bridge Story” came to me in a dream:

It was said that one of the greatest gifts of the dual forces coming together was that of creation—and so it was from woman and man in connection and commitment to each other and the community that the young ones were gifted to the world. It was man (father) who had as his role the raising and guiding of the children, and woman (mother) had as her role the nurturing and caring for the children, as did all the community. But after a time, when the crying woman’s (La Llorona) prophecy had come true and the people were struggling, there was a young girl whose time it was to approach the bridge. Since woman/mother gave life, she was given the privilege of guiding her children to the bridge. So it was that this mother took her daughter

to the woman's bridge (as there are two bridges), and she found a group of women standing in a circle at the foot of the bridge, talking and sharing. This was expected, as young girls are raised to share and care for each other, and to gather in circles.

The mother approached the women and asked them to help guide her daughter across the woman's bridge. The women readily accepted and encircled the young girl for the journey. A few days later, it was time for another to take her son to the man's bridge. As she approached the man's bridge, she looked but could find no one at the foot of the bridge. Needing someone to accompany her son, she continued to look and saw a group of men halfway across the bridge. They were arguing, drinking, and fighting with each other. She called out to them and asked them to accompany her son across the bridge. The men looked at each other in confusion, wondering to whom she was talking. Again, the mother called out to the men for assistance, and once again, they were dismayed. As boys, they had been raised to take care only of themselves and not to care for and nurture others. The mother called out again, asking if they would come and accompany her son across the bridge.

In the midst of this shouting, one man spoke up and said, "How do you expect us to take a young boy across the bridge when some of us grown men haven't even been across ourselves?"

"Then what should I do with my son?" asked the mother.

"Just leave him here with us," replied the man. So the mother left her son in the midst of the men who, themselves, were struggling.

As she went back to the village, very concerned, the other women noticed her worry and asked her, "Why?" She replied, "All the men I saw were arguing, fighting, drinking, lying, and cheating." She then turned to her young daughter and said, "Be careful with the men; they can't be trusted."

As she gave this advice to her daughter, her younger son also heard and learned to distrust men and, more importantly, to distrust himself.

Another mother approached the bridge with her son and was able to look through the men halfway across the bridge and see her husband, who had barely reached the other side. As she called out to him to come get his son, he said, "But I barely made it here myself! I just recently stopped drinking and going out. I'm afraid if I go past those men, I may get caught again because the pain that drew me to the middle is still present. I'm sorry, I can't."

There are many good men, but they hide themselves in their work, or in sports, or inside themselves. They spend very little time with their children, wives, or families, because to do this would open their hearts not only to love but also to their pain-ridden past. They may distance themselves emotionally from those they love most, only to explode unexpectedly someday.

There are many Chicano/Latino men, however, who have made it across the bridge, while maintaining their identity, values, traditions, and spirituality, but the oppressive society does not acknowledge or recognize them. These are not the men whom we generally see in domestic violence, alcohol, or drug treatment programs, because they are busy being good grandfathers, fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, and friends to their family and community.

"The Bridge Story" begins to explain the complexity of the issues as we attempt to understand the impact of multigenerational oppression in reference to working with Chicano/Latino men and domestic violence. What we find is that this sociohistorical trauma has affected them to different degrees whereby they fall at different places on what I have termed the Psychocultural Digressionary Scale. There are five stages to this process.

1. Psychocultural Confusion

This is a state in which the multigenerational effects of oppression confuse the people to the degree that their internal sense of spiritual identity still gives them signals that their aggressive, forceful ways are inappropriate to their true cultural base. Although they "know" that their aggression is culturally inappropriate, they are confused by society's message of male dominance, compounded by the lack of "true" knowledge in reference to their own culturally balanced sense of being *un noble hombre* (a noble male).

2. Internalized Anger

This often occurs as the traditional ceremonies and traditions of healing, cleansing, and rebalancing have been invalidated by society as being not necessary. This results in confusion about the changing values, the changing roles for men and women, along with continued invalidation by an oppressive society, which causes men to feel insecure and to begin questioning their *destino* (purpose in life). With the traditional extended support and healing systems (*compadres, temezcallis, hombres* circles) no longer in place, their inadequate feelings are internalized and manifested in several ways:

- Generalized apathy (unmotivated)
- Generalized fear (rigid)
- Hypersensitivity (reactive, moody)

3. Internalized Oppression (Hate)

At this point in the digressionary process, men begin to believe that the oppression and mistreatment by society is deserved and is due to an inadequacy in the Chicano/Latino culture. Many people at this stage falsely believe that male dominance, sexism, and domestic violence are a part of the Chicano/Latino identity, thus validating their abusive behavior. Unconsciously, they begin integrating many oppressive processes: violence, infidelity, and negative coping methods (drugs, alcohol, fleeing) as a maladaptive way of attempting to survive and maintain their "value." To justify their behavior, they blame the victims. People at this stage encircle themselves with others who reinforce their behavior.

Distrust in self and others (controlling, jealous)

Anger turned outward (hostility, acting out)

Self harm (drugs, alcohol, violence)

4. Dissociative Patterns of Behavior (Self-Hate)

At this stage, the oppression has been internalized so deeply that the expectations of male behaviors and treatment of women are based on the false, imbalanced sense of continuing the cycle. The cultural shame is so pervasive that there is a general mistrust, dislike, and avoidance of Chicano/Latino men. Gang violence, men fighting each other, and women stating, "I'll never marry a Chicano/Latino man" are symptoms. Individual day-to-day survival becomes the focus, and a systematic process of separating oneself from one's actions, and the harm caused by them, is common. People at this stage have trouble differentiating between self-sabotaging behavior and life-enhancing, culturally appropriate behavior.

Anger turned inward (self-hate)

Established alternative rules (survival)

Fatalism (lack of hope)

5. Psychospiritual Amnesia (Rage)

At this point, men have no recollection or memory of true Chicano/Latino cultural authenticity. They believe their negative adaptive behaviors are part of the cultural expectations. This occurs many times when

children are born into a family that is functioning at stage 3, 4, or 5. No one has taught the children the true cultural expectations of being *un hombre noble*, of being a *persona con palabra* (a person with credibility). Therefore, the children grow up with a false sense of who they are and what they should be. Rage-based, destructive behavior is a symptom of full-blown psychospiritual amnesia.

What makes the healing and rebalancing process more difficult and complex are the present-day oppressive processes that continue to torment the Chicano/Latino people. With the intensified immigrant bashing and English-only movements in full force, it makes it difficult to focus on the problem behavior without addressing the ongoing societal trauma. Any attempts to re-root the imbalanced, pain-ridden men in their true manhood identity are often seen by mainstream practitioners as not directly dealing with their behavior. In addition, the so-called leaders in the field of domestic violence, those who work with batterers, control the definition of what is acceptable theory, practice, and intervention, thus directly and indirectly continuing the oppression that has been perpetrated on the Chicano/Latino-community for generations.

With this in mind, we see how it becomes necessary not only to address the imbalanced, violent behavior that is a symptom of a deeper, self-denigrating, spiritual identity violation but to address it in the context of the total past and present-day social-historical oppression. More importantly, we must recognize that the effects of the oppressive trauma have been not only on the so-called abuser but on the family and community as well. This, therefore, necessitates encircling the entire healing process with a philosophy that is consistent with and indigenous to the identity ceremonies, traditions, and principles of the Chicano/Latino people themselves.

LA CULTURA CURA/THE HEALING TREE PHILOSOPHY

Families, communities, and societies since the beginning of time have had to confront issues that appeared to threaten the very essence of their purpose. Even in those times when there seemed to be no hope for revitalization, a way has shown itself.

Traditionally, in all communities, there was a sacred tree where individuals, families, and the community as a whole would gather. That tree, the symbolic focal point, rod of life, or spiritual altar, in more recent times is seen as a church, synagogue, community center, or the home of

the community healer/leader. Where this “place of the tree” truly served its community purpose, it became the reference point from which one gained clarity of purpose, healing, and strength. It then was the role of each person and family to take the spirit of this “tree” into their homes and instill its meaning into the members of their family. It is for this reason that many families have a spiritual altar in a special place in their homes.

At the same time, it was evident to all that the “weak wind,” the “coyote spirit,” or negative influences of the world were a constant threat to the harmony and balance of the individual, the family, and the community. It was for this reason that families and communities began to understand that in order to survive and grow, they, like the tree, must be re-rooted in positive principles.

People—men, women, elders—gathered in circles as a manner of honoring and keeping in harmony with those principles. In these circles, and through positive ceremonies, traditions, and customs, the principles were taught, reinforced, and strengthened. Therefore, the principles provided the way for the individual, the family, and the community to carry out their larger purpose in life, and the ceremonies and traditions ensured that they were taught and maintained.

Various tribes, subgroups of Chicano/Latino people, have developed interpretations of the principles and ceremonies based on the particular “way” of their rooted ethnic spirit. Although ceremonial expression of these rituals and principles is different, depending on the particular region, it is found that ethnic-centered people of all roots have gathered, and continue to gather, in circles (men, women, family/community) to strengthen, rebalance, and maintain harmony.

The healing tree philosophy (Codice Matritense del Real Palacio, n.d.) is used to symbolically emphasize the need for a positive, centering base of principles that assist Chicano/Latino males to maintain their balance, and grow. It is also used to illustrate the various elements that affect an individual and family/community, positively or negatively, in this process.

1. Purpose/*Destino*: Based on Individual, Family/Community Dignity (*Dignidad*)

A basic premise of individual, family/community dignity acknowledges that within the ancestral wisdom of a people are the teachings and medicine necessary for growth and healing. The teachings or healing elements inevitably come from the people themselves. Therefore, in

order for healing, or rebalance, to be successful, and although the initial incentive may come from an outside person, the ongoing motivation for individual, family/community growth and rebalancing must come from within the circle of those who desire or need growth and change.

2. Responsibility: Based on Respect (*Respeto*) for Family/Community Vision

Individuals must have a vision that reflects the potential of their true self in reference to their family/community. If a person has only a negative view of himself and his culture, then he has no avenue for growth or development.

A person's primary ethnicity is the root of the vision. It is necessary for the person to dream, reflect, and rediscover the life-enhancing values and gifts of his own indigenous culture. It is necessary to know and understand his history in order to understand the process that created his present situation. By this process, and with the proper guidance, a person will be able to separate pain and dysfunction from the strength of its culture. As part of their indigenous heritage, all peoples have ceremonies and rituals for clarifying and rediscovering their vision of growth. These ceremonies and rituals must be integrated and practiced in a balanced, consistent manner.

3. Interdependence: Based on Individual, Family/Community Trust (*Confianza*)

The strengthening of a community, and the families within it, directly enhances the development and healing of its individuals. As individuals heal and grow, they reintegrate with the positive vision of the community. Families/communities, and the individuals within them, must develop interdependently. If one is missing, then disharmonious growth occurs, which leads to false hope and development. It is essential to know the difference between codependence, individualism, and indigenous cultural interdependence.

4. Development: Circular Learning Based on Love (*Cariño*) for Life

A love for life is the basis of a circular learning process. As times change, people must learn “new” ways (based on ancient teachings) to live in the world as individuals, families, and communities. There must be pride in

one's root ethnicity and respect for those of another root. The new ways must be both life-preserving and life-enhancing. In addition, organizations, institutions, and dominant societal communities must learn to live in new ways.

5. Enthusiasm: Living Life with a Sense of Spirit (*Espíritu*)

Living life with a sense of spirit (spirituality) allows an individual, family/ community to approach life with an element of enthusiasm (*ganas*). Instilling or reinstilling that sense of spirituality in an individual, family/community allows one to deal with the difficult, and sometimes overwhelming, day-to-day pressures with a sense of hope and "greater spirit."

With the healing tree as the philosophy for reframing and addressing this issue of manhood and violence, the previous principles are used as a basis for re-rooting and recentering the behavior and spirit of the men. The true indigenous expectation of Chicano/Latino men as *hombres nobles* (noble men) begins to redefine the values and behaviors that are appropriate and acceptable. A traditional process of an extended kinship network, or *circulo de hombres*, a healing, rebalancing, and accountability process is reintroduced and initiated in these men's lives in order that, collectively, they can complete their journey across the bridge. In addition, establishing this circle of support (*compadres*) gives them a place to heal from the wounds of oppression and effectively confront the day-to-day stressors as *hombres nobles*.

One of the main elements of approaching an issue, such as domestic violence, is how you define it. In Western psychotherapeutic approaches to this issue, it continues to be standard to use a box-oriented framework to categorize, intervene, and evaluate progress. On the other hand, the traditional indigenous way is to look at things not in terms of good or bad, victim or perpetrator, but in terms of balance, of harmony, of the circular nature of life. That circular nature stresses an important point: If you share balance and harmony, they come back to you; if not, you must deal with what you have given. With the circular nature in mind, and based on the previous emphasis on healing from oppression and colonization, we acknowledge and recognize that most Chicano/Latino men in treatment are carrying not only their own unresolved baggage but that of their fathers, grandfathers, and so on back. This acknowledgment brings to light the choice for us, as men: to be a noble man and attempt to heal

and balance the pain, or irresponsibly give the baggage to the next generation, thus abdicating our manhood expectation. In addition, based on the healing tree philosophy, we acknowledge that we all come to the circle with *regalos* (gifts) and *cargas* (baggage) and lessons to teach each other. This aspect of *nosotros* (all of us) having gifts and baggage and lessons to teach puts men in the role of being accountable but without reoppressing them with categories and labels.

The Four Directions

The intervention process itself utilizes the traditional four dimensions of life: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual, incorporated within a four-phase framework.

- *Conocimiento*: In this phase, the focus is the acknowledgment of who the person is and what he brings to the circle. What is his *palabra*, meaning who and what does he represent? This is the core element in building *confianza* (trust).
- *Entendimiento*: The aspect of understanding, or reunderstanding, the journey of each person in the circle is the emphasis here. The aspects of history, oppression, and uncovering the authentic *hombre noble* are the focuses.
- *Integración*: The application of being able to live and maintain balance and harmony, in spite of the "coyote's" presence, is the focus.

The "coyote spirit" is used as the trickster elements in one's life that attempt to draw the person off-balance.

- *Movimiento*: This final phase focuses on the ongoing reestablishment of traditions and customs that help maintain the balance. The interconnected lifelong responsibility of being an example and a *compadre* to other men is emphasized.

As in a circle, there is no beginning, no end. This reinforces the idea that the lessons of life will always be present and that one has the choice of how he can approach these lessons and handle them in life.

What is occurring is the regrounding and the establishment of *destino* (positive purpose) in the lives of men, with the interconnected checks and balances of positive traditions and customs. The *circulo* becomes

the extended kinship network that supports but also makes all members accountable. The degree of healing and cleansing depends on a multitude of factors, but with the spirit reintroduced in their lives, men are given a viable option to continue to live their lives based on more than just day-to-day survival.

As one heals and grows, we all heal and grow, thus shedding a wounded layer of oppression that will make the lives of future generations much happier and more harmonious.

Un Hombre Noble/A Noble Man . . .

- *Es un hombre que cumple con su palabra* (Is a man of his word). *Tiene un sentido de responsabilidad para su propio bienestar y para otros en su círculo* (Has a sense of responsibility for his own well-being and that of others in his circle).
- *Rechaza cualquier forma de abuso: físico, emocional, mental, u espiritual a sí mismo o a otras personas* (Rejects any form of abuse: physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual, to himself or others).
- *Toma tiempo para reflexionar, rezar y incluir la ceremonia en su vida* (Takes time to reflect, pray, and include ceremony in his life).
- *Es sensible y comprensivo* (Is sensitive and understanding).
- *Es como un espejo, reflejando apoyo y claridad de uno a otro* (Is like a mirror, reflecting support and clarity to one another).
- *Vive estos valores honradamente y con amor* (Lives these values honestly, and with love).

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