

2013. When my spouse and I traveled through South Dakota this past summer, I was most excited to see the Crazy Horse Memorial, which has been under construction for sixty-six years by a Polish-American family. The patriarch of this familial sculpting endeavor, Korczak Ziolkowski, was a Bostonian who was working on Mount Rushmore.

1939. Ziolkowski was asked by a Lakota leader if he would consider making another monument in the Black Hills to Crazy Horse.

1876. Crazy Horse is the famed Oglala Lakota war leader who fought the U.S. government to maintain indigenous ownership of the Black Hills. The Sioux peoples, of whom the Lakota are a part, have lived around and worshipped in the Black Hills for over 12,000 years. That's 10,000 B.C.E. Though there had been prior conflicts between white settlers and the native peoples, fighting in South Dakota truly began when white prospectors discovered gold in the Black Hills in the 1870's.

Two treaties, one signed by most of the Lakota leadership in 1851 and one signed by some of the Lakota leadership in 1868, both decreed that the sacred Black Hills would remain under Lakota jurisdiction.

But, due to the gold, in 1876, the U.S. government decreed that all Lakota living around the Black Hills would have to move to local reservations immediately, allowing white settlers and developers into the Black Hills, or war would begin. And, so it did. Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho banded together to fight the ever-oncoming United States military, and Crazy Horse was a leader from the Lakota. Though the indigenous peoples famously defeated General Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn, within a year, the native peoples had lost the war.

When Crazy Horse went to surrender, the military attempted to arrest and imprison him. Crazy Horse resisted, and was bayoneted by a guard. He died a few hours later.

1877. Congress enacted a new treaty giving the U.S. government control of the Black Hills.

This is not the way to make a treaty, to create a covenant. Both parties in a covenant have to agree, both parties have to be free to dissent.

Back to 2013. In light of this history, the Ziolkowski family who is building the Crazy Horse Memorial has refused to accept money from the federal government for the project. The family has really run with initial idea of a native monument near Mount Rushmore. Whenever the sculpture is finally completed, the Crazy Horse Memorial will be the largest sculpture in the world. Depicting Crazy Horse astride a horse and pointing outwards into the Black Hills, the carving will be 563 feet tall and 641 feet long. Comparatively, on nearby Mount Rushmore, each of the four presidents' heads are about 60 feet tall.

As for me, I didn't want to just look at this Memorial from the road or even just see it a little closer up from the visitors' center. I wanted to go to the laser light show, during which, I read, there would be music and a narration of Crazy Horse's life while his story was projected, with lasers, on the gigantic memorial itself.

My spouse was less enthused by the laser light show plan, but I was quite insistent.

So, one summer evening, we paid our admission fees—which we had read would support the construction and go into educational programs for local Lakota young people—and took as close to a front row seat as we could find.

The sun set, and the show began. The technical aspects of laser-lighting were excellent. The images were crisp with, one could say, laser-precision. There was music and a narrator.

But, we didn't learn anything important about Crazy Horse. Occasionally, there were images of Crazy Horse riding on a horse or sitting near a fire, but no clear narrative of his short and influential life; I had to look him up on Wikipedia. Occasionally, there was information about the Ziolkowski family; I felt like I learned more about them than I did Crazy Horse. At one point, I remember quite clearly, we, the audience, were reminded that Native Americans gave the world such things as corn and tomatoes, which, I'm fairly certain, has nothing to do with Crazy Horse.

About halfway through the show, my spouse and I whispered to each other, “Do you think the Lakota designed this show just to mess with tourists?”

But, at the end of the show, it became suddenly, terribly, quite clear that whatever influence the local Lakota peoples have on the Crazy Horse Memorial must be quite minimal. Do you remember what I said earlier about Crazy Horse's life? That the U.S. government had broken their part of a treaty and that Crazy Horse was fighting the military to keep the Black Hills under Lakota control? And, that when he went to surrender, he was bayoneted by a soldier? ...

The end of the Crazy Horse Memorial laser-light show was a tribute to the U.S. military, complete with the song “I'm Proud To Be An American” ... “where at least I know I'm free...” and the symbols of each branch of the military projected onto Crazy Horse's mountainside. To say that this seemed in poor taste would be stating it lightly.

On the drive back to our campsite, I asked my spouse, in moral anguish, “Did we just accidentally give our money to racists?”... “This was *your* idea,” he offered, helpfully.

In Unitarian Universalism, the sixth source of our personal and corporate faith is earth-centered religions that celebrate the sacredness of nature and its rhythms. In many Native American cultural traditions, there is a strong connection with the natural world, finding the immanent marks and presence of That Which Is Holy. In the Lakota Sioux tradition, the Black Hills is such a place of immanent divinity. As Mary Brave Bird wrote, “The land is sacred... It is no wonder that we love it so, because it is beautiful...”

Since my time in the Black Hills, I have been thinking that if we as people of faith want to be in solidarity with those whose sacred land has been stolen, we need an inward spiritual understanding that land is sacred, and that *certain* land is sacred. To respect others we have to learn to respect our own spiritual enrichment and attachment to *certain* places. Those developing the Crazy Horse Memorial have the good intentions of honoring a Lakota war hero, but it’s questionable if they are truly allies to the Lakota, if they truly understand Crazy Horse’s legacy and the Black Hills’s spiritual richness.

If we ourselves cannot identify the feeling of our own connection to our sacred places, how could we possibly be strong allies to those who are losing their land, their sacred places? How can we have compassion and advocate for the Lakota and other indigenous peoples regaining their holy land if we can’t recognize where ours is?

I’ve been thinking about a more personal way for us as Unitarian Universalists to relate to this issue. For those of us who are not of Native North American ancestry, part of our problem is that our ancient sacred sites, the ones that are thousands of years old in our ethnic and religious histories, are in other lands. I remember

walking inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which contains under its enormous roof the sites of Jesus's crucifixion and tomb. Something inside me stirred, something old, and Italian, and Catholic, something that told me, *This is an important place. These walls contain and protect land that is sacred.*

And, yes, we Unitarian Universalists have many sacred places in "the old world," in England where James Rely preached the revived universalist doctrine, in Romania where Unitarianism has thrived and survived despite persecution for five hundred years, in Israel-Palestine, where Jesus proclaimed that the greatest commandment is to love God and to love our neighbor. If we cannot reawaken the spiritual parts of ourselves that connect to place, we will not understand this plight of our indigenous neighbors. The truth is, we don't have to look outside our own faith's historic roots to find those who understood that the land is sacred and that *certain* land is sacred. Every faith has sacred places.

Did anyone here at church this morning go to Walden Pond a couple of Sundays ago? Raise your hand, if you don't mind... And who else here has visited Walden Pond of your own volition? I have, twice... Thank you.

Why do we do this? If this pulpit weren't so high up, I'd ask you personally, but as the case is, I'll wager a guess: Do we go because Walden Pond means something to us as Unitarian Universalists, that it is a sacred place where our Unitarian ancestor Henry David Thoreau remembered and recognized the divine in nature? Do we go because we hope to remember and recognize the same?

Could we imagine, then, what it would feel like if gold were found at the bottom of Walden Pond? And, our own federal government decides it's important to drain Walden Pond and tear down trees in a manner they deem responsible. We try to fight it, say it's a state park, say it's important to our faith tradition, but as a small

religious group, they think we’re being selfish, irresponsible when so many others could benefit from the land we consider sacred.

Imagine if, a hundred years after Walden Pond was stolen, the Supreme Court of the United States admits that the land was stolen and the pond should not have been drained and that the government did something illegal in its treatment of our sacred land. And, so, in restitution, they offer us... Money, the amount we would have received had we sold Walden Pond, an act we never would have done. And, we’ve only had Walden Pond for 150 years.

In 1980, when the Lakota were offered such a verdict, such a deal—money for the Black Hills—Chief Frank Fools Crow and Frank Kills Enemy wrote, “The Black Hills is our church, the place where we worship. The Black Hills is our burial grounds. The Bones of our grandfathers lie buried in those hills. How can you expect us to sell our church and our cemeteries for a few token whiteman dollars? We will never sell.”

Will you take a moment with me to consider this? Here is *our* church, the place where *we* worship. This is a beautiful and sacred place, but it is enclosed, a building. Where is *our* sacred land, where is *your* sacred land? Let’s take a deep breath together. Is it Walden Pond? Is it our well-tended garden on Boylston Street? Is it the Public Garden, the Emerald Necklace, the White Mountains, Green Mountains, Acadia, the Cape? Where would we never sell? Let’s take another deep breath together.

That land is sacred.

May we grow in compassion, understanding, and advocacy for those whose sacred places are at risk. May we be thankful that the land is sacred, and that we may always find holiness and peace in our sacred places. May it be so. Blessed be, and amen.