

Such a Cry for Lamentation

by Giovanni Pérez, Illuman SoCal Elder

On the Saturday morning after the US government began the bombing of Syria, our circle of men was gathered for our monthly Council at Griffith Park in Los Angeles. This natural preserve is in the hills in the middle of the city, where wildlife and natural beauty abound; it is home to the LA Observatory and the Greek Theatre. This natural space is well-used by hikers, joggers, and cyclists, and is also the home of the LA Zoo. On the weekends, families gather for their picnics and celebrations.

I personally wasn't aware of the president's order until one of the brothers brought it up in Council. My heart immediately sank, as I felt sadness upon hearing the news of yet another act of violence in our world, justified or not. This became part of our sharing, as we all were affected by the news.

It so happens that our circle has been reading *Backpacking with the Saints* by Wisdom Elder Belden Lane. We had prepared chapter 10, "Failure: Mount Whitney and Martin Luther": what failure and fallings have to teach us. Everything that morning seemed so synchronistic. We even witnessed manifestations of the "trickster" as one of our brothers kept "falling" off his chair when he would pick up the talking piece to speak.

I shared that, a few days prior, I was speaking to my daughter, who is finishing a year of volunteer teaching in Guatemala. She volunteers at a school that serves very poor and exploited children and families. These are families who have had to live on the peripheries of the city dump, one of the poorest and at-risk areas of Guatemala City. It so happened that one of the volunteers was returning home and they were bidding farewell to her. My daughter's thoughts drifted off to her own impending departure a few months away. Instinctively, the children began to ask her when she would be leaving. She had been told ahead of time not to discuss that with the children, because they would likely express their reactions with negative behavior toward beloved volunteers who were leaving them. They have already been abandoned by so much of society; losing the care from these volunteers is difficult for them.

Keeping, then, her own departure date from the children, she went home and began to think about how little progress had been made in the education of these children. She realized that the children were still at the same level as when she first began working with them at the beginning of

the academic year. This left her feeling unsuccessful in making a difference in the lives of these children and their families. Realizing that she was returning home to a "first world," as it were, to the most powerful nation in the world, she knew was leaving behind hundreds of children and families who have no choice but to live where they are. She would be able to continue her life in the US, always aware of the people she once lived with, in abject poverty, on the outskirts of the city, on the peripheries of the city dump.

This created for her a great sense of failure.

As I was sharing that, and how easy it is for me personally to get so bogged down by the seeming lack of progress in the world—bombing Syria again...a world that lacks empathy, lacks true strides for peace—a coyote made his way into "our space," behind some bushes, just yards away from our circle. Throughout my sharing, he bellowed a sustained and mournful howl. The moment met us like an ambush of sudden consciousness.

Then, one of the brothers proclaimed: "Such a cry for lamentation."

(Transcription of this story was provided by Bob Juarez, Illuman Wisdom Elder)