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Chief Seattle's Speech*

(Authentic Text of Chief Seattle's Treaty Oration, 1854)

Yonder sky that has wept tears of compassion upon my people for centuries untold, and which to us appears changeless and eternal, may change. Today is fair. Tomorrow it may be overcast with clouds. My words are like the stars that never change. Whatever Seattle says, the Great Chief at Washington can rely upon with as much certainty as he can upon the return of the sun or the seasons. The White Chief says that Big Chief at Washington sends us greetings of friendship and goodwill. This is kind of him for we know he has little need of our friendship in return. His people are many. They are like the grass that covers vast prairies. My people are few. They resemble the scattering trees of a storm-swept plain. The great - and, I presume - good, White Chief sends us word that he wishes to buy our land but is willing to allow us enough to live comfortably. This indeed appears just, even generous, for the Red Man no longer has rights that he need respect, and the offer may be wise, also, as we are no longer in need of an extensive country.

There was a time when our people covered the land as the waves of a wind-ruffled sea cover its shell-paved floor, but that time long since passed away with the greatness of tribes that are now but a mournful memory. I will not dwell on, nor mourn over, our untimely decay, nor reproach my paleface brothers with hastening it, as we too may have been somewhat to blame.

Youth is impulsive. When our young men grow angry at some real or imaginary wrong, and disfigure their faces with black paint, it denotes that their hearts are black, and that

they are often cruel and relentless, and our old men and old women are unable to restrain them. Thus it has ever been. Thus it was when the white man began to push our forefathers ever westward. But let us hope that the hostilities between us may never return. We would have everything to lose and nothing to gain. Revenge by young men is considered gain, even at the cost of their own lives, but old men who stay at home in times of war, and mothers who have sons to lose, know better.

Our good father in Washington—for I presume he is now our father as well as yours, since King George has moved his boundaries further north—our great and good father, I say, sends us word that if we do as he desires he will protect us. His brave warriors will be to us a bristling wall of strength, and his wonderful ships of war will fill our harbors, so that our ancient enemies far to the northward — the Haidas and Tsimshians — will cease to frighten our women, children, and old men. Then in reality he will be our father and we his children. But can that ever be? Your God is not our God! Your God loves your people and hates mine! He folds his strong protecting arms lovingly about the paleface and leads him by the hand as a father leads an infant son. But, He has forsaken His Red children, if they really are His. Our God, the Great Spirit, seems also to have forsaken us. Your God makes your people wax stronger every day. Soon they will fill all the land. Our people are ebbing away like a rapidly receding tide that will never return. The white man's God cannot love our people or He would protect them. They seem to be orphans who can look nowhere for help. How then can we be brothers? How can your God become our God and renew our prosperity and awaken in us dreams of returning greatness? If we have a common Heavenly Father He must be partial, for He came to His paleface children. We never saw Him. He gave you laws

but had no word for His red children whose teeming multitudes once filled this vast continent as stars fill the firmament. No; we are two distinct races with separate origins and separate destinies. There is little in common between us.

C. HIEF SEATTLE'S SPEECH - A BRIEF OVERVIEW.

Chief Seattle's speech is a heartfelt response to the Isaac Stevens, the Governon of the State of Washington. The speech was publicised in a large scale. Chief Seattle, the leader of Sq Suquamish and Twamish Tribe, responds to the proposal of acquiring the land of Red Indians in an ironic way, so as to make the white men realize how they have been oppressing the Red Indians and the Red Indians cannot afford to fight back the white men in terms of their material strength against bringing in more and more destruction to the land. Therefore he puts forward certain conditions to the proposal of acquiring the land. For the sake of simplicity, let us summarize the speech in points form:

- Chief Seattle begins his speech by saying that Nature has been a great sympathizer and it will not remain so if we keep on spoiling it.
- Great Chief of Washington is referred to as "good father" and as he sends his words of good will and friendship. Chief Seattle says that the Great Chief does not need their friendship and it is his greatness that he extended the hands of friendship though they are more powerful and strong than the Red Indians.

* NOTE: 'White Chief' is a reference to Isaac Stevens, Governon of Washington. The President of America is referred to as 'The Great Chief'. 'Big Chief' and 'Great Chief' refers to the same person, the President of America though the President during that time was Franklin Pierce. Seattle actually referred to the First President George Washington.

• Chief Seattle states how at one point of time, Red Indians were a large tribe but are reduced to a very few in numbers then. But instead of mourning over the fact, he wants to look forward.

• He points out how the youth is impulsive and therefore indulges in warfare which destroys the family and nature and makes the world and nature to suffer.

• So Chief Seattle suggests that the white men and the native people should never think of hostility.

• The Chief Seattle mentions that the God of the white men is not the same as theirs as the white men's God only protects the whites and forsakes the Red Indians. He moreover says that the God of the white is partial to Red Indians.

• He emphasizes the two races have distinct origins therefore there are many differences between them.