

The 2021 Satyagraha Institute Paha Sapa (The Black Hills of South Dakota) – A Watershed Event Mary Clifford

The 2021 Satyagraha Institute Paha Sapa (Lakota for the *Black Hills*) 2021 was a return to Placerville Camp for many of us, and an invitation from The Satyagraha Institute administration to revisit and vision the Institute's future – locally in these beautiful Black Hills, and across the globe. One of the first things I did when I got to camp was greet Rapid Creek. Little did I know this water, a literal reflection of Placerville Camp, would feature prominently in the messages and learnings I would bring home.

This year's Satyagraha Institute invited us into a process of broad self-reflection, and community investment as a means for visioning The Satyagraha Institute's future as Carl looks toward his retirement. Lessons from the water surfaced as I thought about its most rigid form, and the metaphor Chris Moore-Backman uses to describe the Gandhian philosophy we have all been invited to read and study. The ice under the water represents self-purification. Above the water, the iceberg reflects the work of the constructive program--efforts to build up rather than tear down, and focus efforts on an intentional, constructive practice designed to hold firm against and eventually replace oppressive forces. The tip of that iceberg, represents *Satyagraha*: Truth, ahimsa, the unity of means and ends, service, heart unity, non-attachment to outcome, and the preservation of human dignity—with added emphasis on the maintenance of dignity. From the SI webpage:

Satyagraha is a way of directly engaging with others to work out the difficult aspects of life without resorting to coercion, harm, or ill intention. Satyagraha is the social power which arises when we act with kindness, respect, patience, generosity, and selfless service.

This year's Satyagraha Institute invited us into our own process/es for practicing the principles of nonviolent action.

The Water themes continued for me when Chas Jewett helped open the formal SI program with prayer and a recitation of **The Water Song**. The full story of that song, words and music can be found here:

<http://www.nibiwalk.org/nibi-songs/>

Ne-be Gee Zah- gay- e- gooGee Me-gwetch -wayn ne- me — goo Gee Zah

Wayn ne- me- goo

Water, we love you. We thank you. We respect you.

Without question, the week brought principle and practice challenges to our SI community. The questions about protocols, priorities, leadership structures, listening, sharing, all took turns being the central focus. After disrupted plans invited a revisioning of our work together, tense moments, late nights, and restructured efforts continued to invite participants to flow through it, like water. Without question, beauty emerged. SI participants were welcomed into a Daily Reflection from Suzanne Waters

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on the birth process: the panicked realization met with slow calming breaths; the water breaks as confirmation inviting more soothing breaths; the radiating pain, the endurance required, the love of each other represented; and radiant new life follows. The talk was perfectly aligned with the collective growing pains being experienced by the SI community, and invited a confidence in the inevitable, emerging outcome. Although potentially scary, awkward and clunky, messy and exhausting, the beauty of the process holds, inviting self-reflection, and work in constructive program. Perhaps the theme of water illustrated this time, the beginning of a process, the crowning of a new, and/or expanded leadership at The Satyagraha Institute.

I am a Wasicu (the Lakota and Dakota word for people of Western European Descent) woman, who came to the Satyagraha Institute from St. Cloud, Minnesota where I live on one side of the Mississippi River, and work on the campus of St. Cloud State University, located on the River's opposite edge. I walk by this River. I drive by this River. I gaze for hours at this mighty River. Without question, I love this River. Is that enough? As I learned The Water Song, I wondered, what is enough, really? Is what we do right now, for the Water or for any of the other experiences we bring nonviolent practice to, enough? And what might we offer to those who have done, and continue to do so much already? Within my Self, and with this community, what must be done?

With such focus on breath and growth, emergence and life, it should not surprise any of us that we returned to the water as we closed our time together. Rebecca Terk, a senior community organizer and state lobbyist for Dakota Rural Action, talked about the multiple potential watershed harms in the Rapid City area, and

the need for intentional action. In support of front line Water Protectors the SI 2021 community gifted over \$500 to Chas as she returns from Placerville Camp to another frontline Water protection action at Camp Migizi in Northern Minnesota to take direct action with the Line 3 protests and beyond.

Our Indigenous elders, brothers and sisters, leaders and teachers pray people like me, communities like us remember Water is life, Mni Wiconi, but our practice tells us that is not enough. For me, and perhaps for our community 2021 will prove to be a watershed moment for The Satyagraha Institute. As we commit again to our training, our commitment to self-purify and to stand together in love as we build forward for the betterment of our beloved community, may we all find radiant new life as we return home. May we greet the unprecedented harms all around us, the Water, the Earth, the battles we confront in our hearts and in our communities every day, by repeatedly centering nonviolent principles through a practice grounded in our growing love of and respect for each other.