

## Up With the Dawn:

Key to the Day's Riches  
(Unedited tape transcript)

We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake... by an infinite expectation of the dawn... Cultivate the habit of early rising. It is unwise to keep the head long on a level with the feet.

– Henry David Thoreau

Early to bed, early to rise, makes one healthy, wealthy and wise.

– traditional proverb

Al que madruga Dios lo ayuda.

God helps the one who wakes up at dawn.

– old Latin saying

The dawn is more clever than the night.

– traditional Russian saying

*Two Loons called from somewhere in the mist over Sailor Lake, deep in the Northern Pine forest. I was struggling to find my way down to the shoreline through the dense fog, with only dim diffused light to help me. It was an early summer dawn of 30 years ago and I was with a group of seekers on a month-long campout with Keewaydinoquay, an Ojibwa Medicine Woman and one of my Elders. We were to meet on the lakeshore for a Greeting the Sun Ceremony and in that moment I felt completely lost in time and space. Was there no people sound emanating from the fog because I was the first to arrive, or was it a silent point in the middle of the ceremony? If I was late would my appearance be considered a disrespectful interruption? I hated being late and dreaded any hint of my lifelong habit of chronic lateness being enacted.*

*A few steps further and a dozen or so forms appeared in the mist before me. At first I felt relieved, assuming I was early. And then doubt crept in as a minute went by, then another, and not a word was spoken. Was this a ceremonial interlude?*

*A couple more silent minutes passed. Another person appeared out of the vapors, and then another, and then Keewaydinoquay began the ceremony. I breathed a sigh of relief.*

*On another occasion I was newly arrived at Rolling Thunder's camp out on the desert scrub in Utah, and upon retiring that first night was told I would be expected to participate in the morning ceremony. Keewaydinoquay's patience was replaced by an emissary of Rolling Thunder's, visiting each wickiup at first light to assure that its residents were awake and momentarily on their way to the ceremonial circle.*

*Styles around greeting the dawn may vary, but one constant I have found with Native People is that "dawn" means first light. In my time living in the wild I have grown to understand why — first light feels like dawn. The night animals have already turned in and the creatures of day are awakening in a chorus of song and rhythm and movement that is so infectious that it can't help but be joined.*

*If that be the case, why are some of us seldom, if ever, conscious to hear the chorus? Is arising with the birds a natural inclination or a discipline?*

I am a morning person. And so are you. I realize that statement has just triggered a potential argument with roughly one out of three of you. If you are one of them, you are quite certain you are a creature of the night. That's when you come alive, that's when you are most productive. In an external sense that is likely true. Perhaps you have freedom in the evening hours which gives you an emotional boost. Perhaps you are socially stimulated. Perhaps caffeine or another drug plays a role. Maybe reduced stress encourages you. Yet organically – believe it or not – you are a morning person.

Scientific studies have shown that a comparison of avowed night people's morning an evening brain-wave activity and production results clearly pegs them as morning people. Some people's illusion of being creatures of the night are so strong that solid, quantifiable evidence barely shakes their self-perception.

Some claim that we are intellectual beings. Others give the nod to our emotional or spiritual component. I think we are primarily creatures of habit, and I hold people's unwavering belief that they are night people as further evidence of that. The overwhelming majority of our activities and involvements are habitual; even our responses to new situations are patterned on previous experience. We oftentimes become addicted to our habits because they provide comfort and familiarity. They are our status quo, our modus operandi, so naturally we would consider them our norm and defend them. As with the perception that some of us hold as being more naturally attuned to the night, we often have no objective perspective on whether or not our habits are intrinsically us.

Herein lies the dilemma for those of us who are night people. We are content with our sleep-wake pattern, and yet, we are not experiencing life to the fullest, we are not reaching our given potential. That potential—that unique gift that we are each given to nourish and gift its borne fruit to the people. For that reason we have a sacred responsibility to live our life to the fullest, it is our reason for being.

For me another motivation is that I just plain have more fun when I am more sharp and alert, I get more out of life because I can put more into it. My mind is quicker, my feelings are richer, I am more creative and energetic, and I spend less time at tasks, yet produce more and better.

Were we living in the Old Way we would naturally arise at first light, for that is the way we are genetically programmed. We gain the most beneficial sleep in the deep of the night; sleep in daylight hours is not as restful or healing. This is important because our bodies grow, heal and regenerate when we sleep in our sleep; kinetic activity is stilled and the body can thus devote its full energy to its own well-being. Our deep sleep time is also the best time for dreaming which is essential for our emotional cleansing and attuning to our inner wisdom (we literally go insane if we are not allowed to dream). Because deep night's sleep is more complete and nourishing than sleep at other times we need to sleep longer when our sleep is not in the night, and still we do not gain full benefit. Thus we feel more rested when we sleep in the night, and more energized when we awake with the dawn.

The sun's rising and all the awakening energy around us energizes us as well. We are connected; we can't help but be affected by the swirl of life around us. Conversely, if we try to keep functioning when everything else is slowing down to rest for the night we are bucking the tide. We are slowed as well and we place stress upon ourselves in trying to maintain alertness.

Here's what we can do to attune ourselves to the day's dawning:

- ▶ Break the sleep-in habit. That's all it is, just a habit. Which as with most habits is easiest to break not by struggling with it, but by replacing it with another. Rather than trying to get to bed

earlier and hoping you will thus naturally wake up earlier, wake yourself up at dawn regardless as to how tired you are. This approach virtually assures that you will be tired at night when your inclination might be to stay up. After a few days at most you will want to go to bed earlier, and thus be inclined to wake up earlier. It may take a week, it may take a month, but your old sleep habit will be gradually supplanted and you will no longer need to force yourself into awakening at dawn. And upon rising you will begin to feel an energy and a zest for life that you may not have felt for a long time.

Even with the virtually assured personal (and beyond) benefits, a few of us might still have trouble mustering the motivation. What works for me in such instances is to realize that I am what I vision myself to be. If I begin viewing myself as a day person, I will become one. Without any other change I will begin to see my bowl as half full rather than half empty. I will begin to surround myself with people who honor the dawn, for that is the Old Way. Because we are as an organ within the organism of our Circle we tend to become what we surround ourselves with. This is one of the easier ways to grow, to change, as it happens by attrition rather than being dependent upon any willful effort of our own (this is recognized by Native People as such a strong factor in the development of an individual that a Native will assess a person's character more by the people he surrounds himself with than by looking at the person himself).

- ▶ Rest and take naps. Our energy fluctuates in a circadian rhythm, it peaks and ebbs a number of times throughout the day. In our natural state we would be active during the peak and relax during the ebb to recharge. However, the schedule of lives that many of us lead are not conducive the that. We expect to be productive for the during of our scheduled work-time, so we push or stimulate ourselves to so that we can maintain our productivity. This causes us fatigue, in the same way that a rechargeable electrical appliance would become overdrawn if it were not periodically recharged.

We also function on a longer sequence rhythm which peaks on average from one to three times a day. Unlike the circadian rhythm, this rhythm is powered by a bigger battery so needs a longer and more powerful recharge than a short rest, ideally it takes a nap. My rhythm cycles about once a day with its low point being about mid-afternoon. If I take a nap I wake up refreshed and enthusiastic for the rest of the day. I have little compulsion to stimulate myself with energy food or drug to keep myself going. However, if I try to nap when my cycle is not at it's ebb, I'll often wake up groggy and unmotivated.

Most western cultures function on a workday schedule that does not allow for naps or for rest times at the low ebb of our circadian rhythm. We are expected to perform continuously until quitting time, which for most of us means pushing ourselves either through sheer will-power or stimulants (caffeine, sugar, loud music). This, along with stimulating ourselves to stay up past our normal bedtimes, over-stimulates our adrenals. Their function is to give us energy in time of stress and emergency; we create that situation when we push ourselves beyond our allotted day's energy, or through a period when our body requests rest. This may lead to burned out adrenals followed by an under-functioning thyroid gland. The result — we are always tired, we lose enthusiasm for life, we gain weight, we become depressed. When we drag ourselves to health-care professionals we usually treated symptomatically — we are treated for depression or diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Some of our symptoms may be alleviated but we never really do get better.

I faced a similar fate when 30 years ago I was working nearly all my waking hours, thinking I had to do so in order to be able to afford to return to Old Way living. I got so depleted that by mid-day I was hardly able to stand up. I didn't know what was happening to me; and bewilderment and

frustration I would sometimes just break into tears.

Fortunately for me, a friend guided me to a holistic practitioner who did not try to patch me up and send me back to the workplace. In short order he recognized my condition and before he prescribing anything he told me I either had to radically change my lifestyle and start following my heart or I was going to die a young age. I immediately dropped my involvements and moved to a secluded cabin in the forest. He guided me back to health—a laborious regenerating and reprogramming process that took six months before I felt like some semblance of my old self.

That is how I learned to take naps and wake up with the dawn. I have been healthy and energetic ever since, and in fact more productive than ever. People half my age can have trouble keeping up with me.

People in Native and more traditional civilized cultures are more fortunate; rest and nap periods are a normal part of their daily routine. Many Latin peoples, for example, take siesta-time, and Natives, who have so little structured work, are at great liberty to nap.

Some corporations and other institutions are currently experimenting with allowing naps and circadian rhythm rest periods. They are finding that even though their employees are losing some work-time they are actually more productive and produce better quality work. Or they are yet finding that their employees work improves in both quantity and quality.

### Bright Lights, Night Lights

We didn't evolve with bright lights supplanting the sun after sunset. We had subdued light, perhaps from an oil lamp or a candle or a fire, which we used to illumina a particular activity or to help us find our way. This small light within a mantle of darkness still allowed the night to signal our body and mind to quiet itself, to slow down and prepare for sleep. When we dwell in an artificial bright light environment after sunset our adrenal glands are stimulated to continue to function in order to give us daytime energy. Thus some of us get the mistaken sense we are night people, that we are not tired and perhaps don't need as much sleep as the next person.

The night is a time of recuperation for both body and mind. The dark triggers a change in energy flow from supporting physical activity in the daytime to supporting the healing of the body at night. Dark of the early evening is a time for introspection and reflection, of quieting the mind of its daytime activities in order to prepare for restful sleep. When we maintain a bright light environment after dark we rob ourselves of that transition time, and we cut into the time needed for physical healing and mental-emotional renewal. Thus we often wake up tired and stressed, without enthusiasm for the new day.

In our contemporary houses we can simulate the natural state with subdued overhead lighting and utilizing task-specific lighting to illumina only our particular area of activity. Shaded or cowled fixtures can be used to focus the light on the activity and keep it from lighting the entire area. In most rooms of my house I have eliminated overhead lighting altogether. After dark I will employ nightlights if necessary, so that guests might comfortably and safely find their way around.

Contrary to popular belief, reading or engaging in other activities in low light does not hurt the eyes. My eyes actually feel more relaxed in dim than bright light. They burn and fatigue less, and they feel more refreshed in the morning. Engaging in the evening activities in dim light not only honors our eyes but allows our adrenals to quiet down and prepares us for sleep. We need this transition time because it is the way we are designed to function. We evolved in an environment that provided this transition time. Like an athlete who takes time to cool down after intense physical activity, we need to do the same in order to maintain optimal health and reach our full potential.