

(Seattle, Dwanish chief, spoke to Isaac Stevens, governor of Washington Territory, in 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. You say the great chief at Washington sends us greetings of friendship and goodwill. That 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 scattered trees of a storm-swept plain. I will not dwell on, nor mourn over, our untimely decay, nor reproach our white brothers with hastening it, as we too may have been somewhat to blame.

Your God is not our God. Your God loves your people and hates mine. He folds his strong and protecting arms lovingly about the white man, and leads him by the hand, as a father leads his infant son. But He has forsaken His Indian children, if we really are His. Our God, the Great Spirit, seems also to have forsaken us. Your God makes your people strong every day. Soon they will fill 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 us. We seem to be orphans who can look nowhere for help. How then can we be brothers? We are two distinct races, with separate origins and separate destinies. There is little in common between us.

Seattle - 2

To us, the ashes of our ancestors are sacred, and their resting place is hallowed ground. You wander far from the graves of your ancestors, and seemingly without regret. Your religion was written upon tables of stone by the iron finger of your God, so that you could not forget. The Indian could never understand it nor remember it. Our religion is the tradition of our ancestors - the dreams of our old men, given them in solemn hours of night by the Great Spirit, and the visions of our chiefs. It is written in the hearts of our people.

Your dead cease to love you and the land of their birth as soon as they pass through the mouth of the tomb, and wander far beyond the stars. They are soon forgotten and never return. Our dead never forget the beautiful world that gave them being.

Day and night cannot dwell together. The Indian has always fled the approach of the white man, as the morning mist flees before the morning sun. However, your proposition seems fair, and I think that my people will accept it and will retire to the reservation you offer them. Then we will dwell apart in peace. It matters little where we pass the remnant of our days. They will not be many. A few more moons, a few more winters, and not one of the descendants of the mighty tribes that once moved over this broad land will remain to mourn over the graves of a people once more powerful and hopeful than yours. But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless. Your time of decay may be distant, but it will surely come, for even the white man, whose God walked and talked with him as friend with friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We will see.

Seattle - 3

Every part of this land is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. The very dust upon which you now stand responds more lovingly to our footsteps than to yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch. Even the little children who lived and rejoiced here for a brief season love these quiet places, and in the evening they greet the shadowy returning spirits. And when the last Indian shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe has become a myth among the white men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe. When your children's children think themselves alone in the field, in the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. At night, when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled, and still love, this beautiful land. The white man will never be alone.

Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds.