

Reconciliation Begins with You and Me “Returning to Spirit” Workshop

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World War I, the War to End all Wars officially ended on November 11, 1918, almost 100 years ago. Every year since, there has been an armed conflict somewhere in the world. Even when peace treaties are signed and combatants go home and hang up their weapons, the victim toll keeps rising.

In 2007, two professional de-miners from Metz (France) died when a World War I bomb they were transporting unexpectedly exploded. Around the world, farmers and children, house builders and excavators are continually discovering pieces of unexploded ordnance. As the soil erodes with the wind and the rain, as the frost heaves, munitions long buried find their way to the surface of the earth. These long-buried munitions are now corroded and far more unstable than they were years ago. It does not take much to set them off.

The Way Forward

In many ways, our lives are similar. Things happen to us when we are children – we are hurt, we are angry, we feel betrayed, and we are ashamed. However, we may not have the ability to handle our feelings. We may not be given the space to express them. Very quickly, we learn to bury our feelings, to hide them from others and from ourselves. We bury our hurts, we bury our anger, and we bury the guilt and the shame. We put on a happy face, or a successful face, or a calm face, or a stern face.

People think we have it all together. Yet, in reality, the things we buried long ago will not remain buried forever. As we age, events in our adult lives begin to heave the long-buried emotions to the surface. We can try to ignore the things that surface however; the better way is to handle them, to defuse them. The way forward is to reconcile with them.

Surviving at All Cost

When children were taken away from their families and sent to Indian Residential Schools, they experienced many painful thoughts, emotions and feelings. They felt hurt, angry, abandoned, confused, guilty, embarrassed. The list is a long one... and unique to each individual. Each handled the experience differently, but all were impacted.

Children learned to bury their emotions; they learned to cope with life; they learned how to survive. As students transitioned through residential school and into adulthood, long buried, unresolved emotions and experiences made their way to the surface over months, years or decades. Not surprisingly, experiences of residential school corroded by time mutated into alcoholism, running away, domestic violence, drug addiction, homelessness, hopelessness, despair, shame, guilt, rage, blame.

Looking Within Ourselves a First Step

Reconciliation between the Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians begins with each one of us. We each need to look within ourselves and see how we have long buried our pain, how we have learned to survive, cope and fix life.

We need to **reconcile** with ourselves first. We can never hope to **reconcile** with the other until we have first handled what is in our space – the log in our own eye that prevents us from seeing ourselves and the other with true sight. Only when we have looked within, can we begin to **reconcile** with others and with Life itself.

Letting Go

As we identify and let go of the stories that we have created about ourselves, others and about life, we are able to gain clarity about ourselves. We are able to step into an entirely new way of being – one built on a foundation of non-judgement and peaceful communication. We have been living our lives as if we are “stupid,” “invisible,” or that we always “need to be perfect” or that the other is “wrong.” When we can see the story that has taken over our lives, we can take responsibility and see the choices that empower us to create a new experience. We can choose to step from slavery to the story into the freedom of new possibilities.

When Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants come together into a Reconciliation workshop, miracles truly do happen as individuals sit down together and speak Spirit to Spirit. It requires each individual to do their own work - to let go of their story about the other, to let go of the claim for revenge, to let go of the guilt, to let go of the defensiveness. Into the space created by the letting go, there is room for something else to show up, a genuine readiness and willingness to listen to the other and to speak the truth.

Moving Forward in Mutuality

There is no blaming, no making wrong – there is simply an acknowledgement and a listening to the pain experienced on both sides. There is a willingness to examine the long-buried hurts that have festered beneath the surface and to reconcile them – to bring them out of the darkness into the light. There is a realization that only when we can meet Spirit to Spirit can we truly move forward together – in mutuality, in partnership and in fulfillment.

The work of *Returning to Spirit* does not end with our workshops. We are all required to reconcile with ourselves, with others and with life, on a daily, ongoing basis. It is the only way to bring peace to our world.