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## TOWARD RECONCILIATION: CANADA AND FIRST NATIONS

My interest in Indigenous cultures is lifelong; I studied anthropology in college, and later taught school on the Colville Reservation. In grad school I did counseling with the Puyallup Tribe, and have worked in Prince Rupert, British Columbia (BC), Canada, where about 45% of my clients were Indigenous. I am now part of the Columbia River Treaty Round Table, a BC/USA group led by Indigenous members, working to influence a new Treaty based on sustainability, ecosystem function, and rights of Indigenous peoples. I support a First Nations group RAVEN, which works on struggles with corporations and the government, to stop logging and oil and gas projects on traditional lands; I also support a legal group helping with this.

Canada has left a tragic trail of acculturation and injustice toward the first peoples. At public gatherings acknowledgment is always given that we are on unceded territory (or treaty territory) of whatever bands occupied the area. Recently there have been apologies from the government. Words are spoken, yet the actions that need to go with them are held back or taken very slowly.

In 1876 the Indian Act consolidated ordinances designed to *eradicate* First Nations cultures and assimilate Indigenous people into Euro-Canadian society. This pathological goal means it was assumed that crushing peoples' traditions and values of thousands of years would lead them happily to taking on the social norms of the oppressor. Leaders who designed such policies considered the first peoples "savages." The actual outcome was generations of trauma, abuse, separation of families, needless deaths, and loss of language, culture, and human rights. The Act required that First Nations children be removed to residential schools. Dancing and spiritual ceremonies were prohibited.

Lately there has been a great momentum in the country toward meaningful reconciliation with First Nations. Canadians who may never have known much about the history and residential schools, have been learning. There has been publicity about the forced removal of children from their families to the schools where some died, and many were physically, sexually and psychologically abused. Speaking their languages was forbidden. The late Gord Downie, singer with The Tragically Hip, and Jeff Lemire produced a moving video "The Secret Path" <https://secretpath.ca/> based on a true story of a boy in residential school. This was in conjunction with the boy's family and it touched the hearts of many Canadians. In 2008 Prime Minister Harper apologized for the schools and the abuse and suffering. Canadians take reconciliation seriously, though governments seem uncertain about taking

action. Canada's policies toward First Nations have been labeled “genocide,” a word that officials can barely get out of their mouths. The head of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) when confronted with “systemic racism” didn't know what it meant, and at first did not concede the point: I was aghast! I myself do not use the words “racism, racist,” as I think this only adds to a false idea of our human family: [khabiracandaceblog.com/2017/11/12/there-is-one-race](http://khabiracandaceblog.com/2017/11/12/there-is-one-race)

As the RCMP was in charge of forcing children into residential schools and relocation of First Nations to Reserves, there is great mistrust of them. This year the RCMP removed and arrested women protesting a gas line—on their own territory. The Wet'suwet'en set up this protest site, and the Supreme Court of BC has recognized this *is their land*.

A major on-going issue is that of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. Between 1997 and 2000, murder of Indigenous women was nearly seven times that of non-Indigenous. Bands had been pleading for action on this tragic situation for years. Tormented families want answers; communities want justice. This has not seemed a priority for Police or government. Indigenous women's groups documented the number of murdered and missing to be around 4,000.



*Butterfly memorial to murdered and missing Indigenous women*

Recently there have been killings and assaults of first peoples by police. Over third of people killed by the RCMP are Indigenous, yet they make up five percent of the population. Reconciliation in Canada means all the concerns need to be understood and faced with people coming together, learning from each other, sharing with each other, and finding healing ways to move forward. Some heartening things are happening—people from all backgrounds and cultures are working together to protect Nature, ecosystems and Indigenous rights, traditions and culture. First Nations youth and others are being recognized in the media for their writing, music, art, and for learning and helping to preserve traditional languages. Many are very politically active.

It saddens me that when Europeans first came here it was not as guests willing to learn humbly from people here for thousands of years. Many groups on this continent had matrilineal inheritance, some had great respect for LGBT people. They respected and honored Nature and lived in a way that provided for all. Their spiritual life is rich, centered in Nature, and this is the very heart of Inayat Khan's message. Instead of being given the opportunity to be *hosts* to settlers, to share sustainable ways of living and the sacredness of Nature, First peoples were pushed off their territory, and denied their way of life. They had so much to give and Canada missed out. This is a loss that is just too cruel and disastrous; I hold great admiration for these peoples.



*Kenojuak Ashevak, Inuit woman, 2009*

The same attitudes that guided colonialism to destroy Indigenous peoples and rape the land included those of disregard for the sanctity of our relationship with Earth, Nature, with all Life. Now we are at a point where those deadly outmoded ideas must be replaced if Life is to continue on this planet. The problems and the work to be done seem too enormous, the destruction all around us overwhelming. So, BREATHE! Our lives can be gifts of service no matter what the eventuality may be. This can take great courage, yet we don't have to have faith in anything—just Love, compassion.

Inayat Khan, Bowl of Saki: *They who can be detached enough to keep their eyes open to all those whom circumstances have placed about them, and see in what way they can be of help to them, it is they who become rich; they inherit the kingdom of God.*

If we hold feelings of sadness, of regret for the past and current actions of societies and governments, it can be important to stay with those feelings and allow them to *be*, allow ourselves to cry the tears, or anger, dismay. We can find ways to reach out and learn about pain the others have suffered. There are books, group meetings, films, organizations bringing people together. There is a great teacher: Nature, which kindly offers wisdom. In the SRI we have people of diversity, so this community can be an avenue of reconciliation. We can

exchange with those who have lived different experiences and tragedies. There is a way of showing even a stranger that we are open to their experiences—by showing the heart through the eyes. The other person may open to this and a powerful exchange can occur.

We can take courage to examine whether we carry taught ways of categorizing others which are demeaning; we can ask whether we may have a sense of superiority just from growing up with certain societal attitudes. Do we hold stereotypes or have a habitual reaction to people we perceive as different? We can do an inventory—look at our attitudes on ethnicity, religion, dress, homelessness, addiction, gender identity, height, physical or mental challenges, mental health, wealth, occupation, education, attractiveness, politics, etc. Do we recognize what privileges we have compared to others? Then it is a matter of becoming humble, something greatly valued by Hazrat Inayat Khan and the sufi tradition. We do not *deserve* privilege, and do not *want* it if we truly want equality for all. We can use the advantages we have in order to give more to others, to society, rather than for ourselves. If we know on a deep level that every human being is just as important a gift to Life as all others, we act out of that.

Sufism offers many avenues to help us work through any barriers we may have, any growth we must do to bring constructive contribution to reconciliation in ways we may choose. Just having a *murshid* is a huge asset. Working with *wazaif* to purify the *nafs*, and open the heart can be quite transforming—and using breath practices, singing. The pairing of *Ya Jabbar*, (healing what is broken) *Ya Khaliq* (forming a new life) comes to mind as an example. Others could be *Ya Ghafur Ya Halim*; *Ya Qadir Ya Muqtadir*; *Ya Warith Ya Ba'ith*. One can find remedy *wazaif* oneself or with a guide. To expand awareness and compassion we have the walks of Mary, of Jesus, and Inayat Khan.

In my counseling I often used *alternate right/left brain stimulation* with clients (EMDR, EFT); in our dances and walks and walking meditation and with the Chinese Therapeutic Movements (from Murshid Saadi Douglas Klotz <https://abwoon.org/>) this is happening, making actual changes in the brain. Indigenous dancing also does this. Out on the street we can use focus on the *hara* or *dantien* to maintain our center, and can (at the same time or not) send out vibrations of friendliness and welcoming to others. Inayat Khan's vision of us as “one single family” can guide our thoughts and deeds.

It may be hard finding our individual involvement in this healing path. It can take patience—it took over three years for me, as I changed course in mid-stream. That was fine, for what I learned I integrated. Here is where the heart comes in—when our passion is stirred, we are shown the road to follow. This is strongly stressed by Inayat Khan who assures us that our path is *unique*: no one else is here to walk our specific path. There is a sacred contribution we each can make in this Life, and in taking that on we are blessed. Reconciliation is hard work yet it opens hearts which formerly may have needed protection. It has the potential to bring deep healing to us all.

All my Relations.