

## **Remembering the Indigenous Mind: A Journey of Healing and Transformation by: Illana Berger, Ph.D.**

The intention of this paper is to initiate a conversation that might stimulate the healing and transformation of the human soul. This particular conversation revolves around the nurturing and healing of our relationship with the Ancestors through the process of de-colonizing our minds, our bodies, and our spirits. Before we can understand the process of de-colonization as a vehicle for transformation, we must look at colonization itself and the ways in which it governs all of our lives. The concept of colonization is entirely of the a western mind, borne out of power and control. The antidote, as will be seen below, is found in a different mind, known as the indigenous mind. These different minds speak to us in different tones or modes. While the western mind is familiar to us in much the same way as the air we breathe, the indigenous mind appears to have been long forgotten. By recovering our indigenous mind, we allow the healing of spirit and souls, bring ourselves into greater alignment with the Ancestors, and are able to walk with renewed vigor and clarity for the greater purpose.

### **COLONIZATION AND IMPERIALISM**

Colonization is the insular articulation of an imperialist center. Webster defines imperialism as a policy or practice of extending rule or authority of one country over other countries or colonies. Imperialism has the power and ability to stretch out its arms to places, peoples, and economies all over the world.

Colonialism/imperialism appears in several forms. The first form is perceived as economic expansion. Throughout time, human populations have exchanged/interchanged goods with each other in the process of commerce. However,

in the system of imperialist commerce, techniques of control are dictated in order to secure economic markets and financial investments for the purpose of domination and power. The second form is perceived as domination over other. This is the method of exploitation and subjugation of those without power, mostly aboriginal or indigenous peoples whose lands and resources are considered valuable or empowering.

Colonialism/imperialism strips identities of the colonized that are perceived to hold authority and a sense of community. It attempts to divide those whose lives are intertwined and interdependent. The removal of cultures from their homelands, the elimination of aboriginal languages, and the prohibition of rituals and cultural practices are but a few of the tactics employed by the colonizer (imperialist government and societies) to gain authority and control over the indigenous populace.

The last form that imperialism expresses itself in is the reach of colonialism into our heads, using convoluted methods of mind control through reasoning as a form of knowledge. Ultimately though, it is not just the conquered that need to be subjugated. The subjects of the kingdom or the citizens of the dominant culture must also be kept under control and in service to the greater imperialist ideal and undertaking. Therefore, following many generations of colonialist practices and ideology, all participants in the society are ultimately colonized in subtle and/or unconscious ways.

An important component to knowing ourselves and our indigenous nature and to recovering or remembering the mind that embodies this way of living/being is found in an understanding of the impact of imperialism and colonialism. To gain this understanding, we must de-construct the thinking, the assumptions, and the conditioning that has been passed down generation after generation since the initial contact with colonial forces. We must begin to understand and perceive of a time before colonization in which our original cultures were intact and in balance with the land. At that ancient time, we had autocratic dominion over our lives and were born into a universe which was wholeheartedly of our own cultural making, influenced by the forces of nature. We lived along side other cultures, practiced our rites and ceremonies, and sensed the world through the landscape and the sentient world that surrounded us.

In order to fully de-construct our lives, we first must be fully conscious that we have been colonized. Most all of us have been colonized in some way or another at

some time or another. In fact, the impetus to colonize well may be a product of endemic colonization historically. We must understand the ways in which each one of us individually, as well as culturally, has embodied the assumptions and conditioning of colonialism.

Like a fish in water, it is difficult to comprehend the environment which surrounds us. However, without this awareness of a colonial conditioning, we cannot escape its clutches. We must come to understand how we were colonized and what that means in terms of our past, our present and our future. Though in the past we might have found ourselves absolutely marginalized, today we find ourselves part of the dominant culture, fully acculturated into colonialism and full participants in what is termed “the globalization movement.”

Globalization can be interchanged with imperialism. It is a movement that has enormous implications for us as cultural people, as well as for our role in the future of the planet. Globalization carries with it a conversation that is intoxicating. It inspires a new wave of exploration, discovery, exploitation, and appropriation by infusing emergent research with goodwill in the form of patents, new medicines, and genetic advances. The ends in this modality, it is suggested, are for the good of humankind, and therefore justify the means.

As researchers gather traditional herbal and medicinal remedies and remove them from their cultural context, as we gather belief systems and ideas about healing, about the universe, about relationships, and ways of organizing, and the practices and rituals that go along with such beliefs, such as sundances, sweat lodges, massage techniques, prayers, chants, use of stones and crystals, and specific dances and songs, the methods and practices of colonial intellect are imposed to secure new systems of rule and new forms of social proprieties.

Colonization is not only a cultural phenomena. It is extended into both the body and spirit as well. If we look at the character of cancer cells, we can see that cancer is a metaphorical physical expression of colonization. Cancer cells conquer healthy cells and convert them into the colonial practice of massive occupation of parts of our physical bodies. Eventually, the cancer cells become established, the next generation of cells become cancerous as though it always was their purpose, and the body's resources (blood supply, for example) are redirected to support the now dominant cancerous culture. Only by removing, inhibiting or integrating the cancerous cells with

the environment they now occupy can the indigenous cells return to their essential purpose, and support the body's systems for its own good. When we deeply understand colonization and how to de-construct this in our everyday lives, I believe, we will also eliminate cancer from our bodies.

Colonization shows up in the spiritual realm as well. People who go into sacred sites oblivious to the spiritual power or significance of the place and act irreverently or unconsciously while there, demonstrate the depth at which colonization has numbed us to the presence of the sacred and of Spirit. When individuals or groups feel entitled to experiment or dabble in sacred ceremonies or rituals of other cultures, without comprehending either the sanctity or genesis of such ceremonies and rituals or the dangers of working with the powers of Spirit in this realm, the arrogance of colonization is revealed.

Colonization also shows up in the way we grow and consume our food. The use of refined or processed foods keeps us disconnected from our food sources, our land, and the beings upon whose very lives we depend. A false sense of security is fostered through the consumption of these processed, manufactured, and/or genetically altered foods. We eventually believe, consciously or unconsciously, that we do not even need the land in order to keep our bodies alive. We remain numbed and stupefied while the land and resources are controlled by imperial and colonial forces and ultimately are depleted of their nurturing abilities to our detriment.

Imperialism, globalization, and colonialism all succeed by disconnecting people from their histories, their thinking, feeling, and the ways in which they interact with the world. Systematic fragmentation eventually is seen in the expression of ourselves as people, as cultures, and as races in the modern world.

This is how it was in the past and how it still is: Most of us are alienated from our own cultures of origin. If we re-experience the stories which tell our histories, our creation stories, our personal and cultural narratives in the original language embodying the world view and traditional tribal knowing of our Ancestors, perhaps we would, could, might understand ourselves in a genuine, authentic, more loving and honoring way. And, if we come to understand ourselves in this way, then we can extend the wisdom gained to all other beings with whom and which we share this lifetime.

## DE-COLONIZING

De-colonizing must begin by remembering the old ways of being/knowing held by our ancient Ancestors in each of our cultures of origin. By engaging in this process, we provoke our cultural and ancestral memory and bring consciousness to our innate connection to the sentient world.

Self identity is at the root of healing on the individual level, as well as culturally and socially. If we do not know who we are, we cannot awake to the wisdom held in our own bodies, as our own DNA, as a result of which we cannot come into our “Whole Mind.”

The whole mind or good mind, as the Hotinonshon:ni or Iroquois call it, is a mind or a consciousness that knows the humility of unity. Knowing that we are a part of the whole, we also know that our part, our presence, is as important, no more nor less, than the snail darter, trees, ants, cells, or atoms. The good mind also knows the importance of prayer and ceremony for holding energy and catalyzing Spirit in maintaining wholeness and harmony.

Each of us was brought into this lifetime with a biological make-up that is determined by lifetime after lifetime of our Ancestors. Their dreaming, their intention, willed us into existence. Encoded in our bodies not only is the wisdom of the past, the promises of the future, and the holiness of this moment, but also the map for our purpose in being alive.

Most of us will go through life oblivious to the duty required of our lifetime. Some of us will get glimpses of our duty and turn away out of fear, indifference, or laziness. Some will refuse to do the difficult work of transformation and insist on participating in the deep sleep imposed by the dominant culture. There will be some, though, who will answer the call of the Ancestors, answer the voice of the Sacred and the Divine, and come to know themselves and the task each of us has been given by incarnating at this time. It is my hope, my intention, that my work can and will awaken this in those whose lives are destined to catalyze the healing of the world, and with whom I am given the privilege to encounter.

## **REMEMBRANCE OF TRADITIONAL WISDOM**

Remembrance of traditional wisdom provides a way for indigenous cultures to come together in a supportive way, allowing and encouraging the emergence of new leaders and healers of these communities. The remembering of the indigenous life way of our culture of origin awakens in western people their own indigenous consciousness. A shared vision and understanding of one's identity brings cultures together and heals racism and cultural divisions. By promoting cultural diversity, we achieve unity which fosters community.

If we view transformative learning as a vehicle for achieving wholeness, then achieving what is called the whole mind or the good mind is the gauge by which we measure whether transformation actually has taken place. Albert Einstein said, "The world we have made as a result of a level of thinking we have done thus far creates problems we cannot solve at the same level at which we created them." If transformation implies change either in form, appearance, or dimensionality without changing the fundamental being or core identity, then transformation must come from tapping into the essence of who we are as human beings infused with soul.

Patriarchy and colonization have touched every culture, every tribal being, every distant blade of grass, and every innocent sentient being on this magnificent planet called Gaia. As a culture and civilization we have perpetrated the stories that continue to deny the sovereignty of indigenous people, deny the origins of different cultures and diminish the power of that diversity. Now is the time to put the stories and myths that no longer serve Creation to rest. Now is the season in which to interpret our stories, to take back ownership and responsibility for the narratives that were told by our Ancestors, and to let these chronicles be the healing stories they were intended to be. Now is the time to expose the appropriation of our cultural ways of knowing, name such colonization, and know and understand within our communities that, with the sacrifice of our traditional ways of knowing and (most profoundly) our sacred languages, we have almost all lost our souls.

## **ANCESTORS & MOVING INTO INDIGENOUS MIND**

A definition of Ancestors is imperative for there to be a comprehensive understanding of traditional tribal wisdom and knowledge . In the western paradigm, we mostly think of Ancestors as dead people. We think of them as those who lived before

us and who are in our immediate family. In a gathering that I recently facilitated with a group of college students, I asked them to bring pictures of their Ancestors for an altar that we were going to create together. Most of them brought pictures of their still living parents and grandparents. This, too, is not an uncommon perception.

What is meant by the concept of Ancestors from an indigenous paradigm has to do with the totality of cultural history, mythology, ritual, relationship with the landscape, and world view or philosophy of a people: all that has come and gone before.

Ancestors embody all that is related to an individual, to a culture, a race, and a community. Although Ancestors are our blood relatives, they also are every other element that has contributed and continues to contribute to our very existence. They comprise the soil from which we emerge and which holds and nourishes the food that we eat. They are the foods that grow in the soil and nourish our bodies. They are the animals that inform us how to live in relationship with the soil. These animal Ancestors teach us which foods are edible and which ones to avoid. They are the messengers who bring teachings and directives.

Ancestors are the waters that quench our thirst and teach us of the rhythms of the cycles of time through the ebb and flow of the tides or the swelling and shrinking of the river banks. Ancestors are the star nations, which gift our cultures with the teachings of their push and pull, their magnetic fields, and their attributes that they selflessly share with the planet and the culture. Ancestors live in the air that we breathe and which provides us with our first breath of life. They are in the fires that burn both literally and figuratively in and around us. They are the Spirits of those who came before and those who are yet to come. Ancestors are our future, our past, and our present, all together in the rising of the sun, the setting of the moon, and the movement of the planets.

Ancestors are our memory of the time we have lived and the lives yet to unfold. Ancestors are the songs that emerge from our cells and the dances that lift and carry us on the wings of time. Ancestors live in the soul of our language and the sounds, the vibrations that inform us through our sacred letters and their sacred form.

Ancestors teach us at every crossroad of our life. They share in every joy and each sorrow we encounter. Ancestors appear in unsuspecting places, assisting us with our journey through life.

In our modern culture, there has been profound emphasis on individuation and

being ourselves. We each strive to establish our own identity. Psychotherapy has flourished in its attempt to heal the individual and create a place for each one of us to feel alive and give us room for our individual spirit to express herself.

In tribal culture, each being plays a vital and important role. The community is a circle or stream of intelligence that is composed of the unique beings that are moving within the community as this one intelligence. Each one contributes and is important to the whole, but does not wish nor need to stand alone in the circle.

This dance, this interweaving within community, is almost lost today. In order to understand who each of us is, we tend to look at our lineage, our Ancestors, as part of the problem rather than that they are the parents, elders, or healers within a whole community.

To heal our relationships with all things, we must be in alignment. We must be aligned with food, culture, history, and the Ancestors. Each of our lives must also be aligned with Spirit.

By remembering our indigenous mind, our good mind, we come to know ourselves and our indigenous nature. This indigenous nature is not about culture *per se*. Our indigenous nature, or our knowing that is original to the individual, is not necessarily tied to culture or religion. In fact, culture and religion can influence the knowing and even at times, destroy it. In the end we can turn to culture, spiritual and/or religious practices for tools to express this knowing, but they are not the knowing itself. The knowing itself lives in the story that is our lives, the knowing is in the circle that is our community, our home. The knowing is in the relationship that is fostered and sustained with Spirit. The knowing is in the DNA of our earth body that vibrates in unison with the heartbeat of the world. We cannot fully recover our indigenous nature without looking at our culture, for sure, but we also must look at our families, Ancestors, migrations, stories and signs that have directed us toward our destiny.

The questions that arise, then, are: How do we come to know our indigenous nature? How do we de-construct the colonized mind? How do we transform and heal our souls?

The first step is to re-establish and mend our connection with the Ancestors.

Many rituals are associated with stories of origins that re-enact and commemorate a specific event in time with the intention to unite the present with the past and the future from generation to generation. The effectiveness of rituals for any

culture seems dependent on the people's conformity to the practices handed down by the Ancestors. The similarity of the present practice with the past is imperative to establish a connection with the Ancestors. Rupert Sheldrake says that;

“[W]e may be living in an amnesic world that is governed by eternal laws. It is possible that memory is inherent in nature; and if we find that we are indeed living in such a world, we shall have to give up many of our old habits of thought and adopt new ones [*or ancient ones*]: habits that are better adapted to life in a world that is living in the presence of the past and is also living in the presence of the future, and open to continuing creation.” (Sheldrake, 1988, p. 326)