



An Interspiritual View

By Leslie Mezei

Interspirituality is the sharing of ultimate experience across traditions.—Wayne Teasdale

I call the talks I give about the story¹ of my family: “From the Holocaust to Unity in Diversity.” As an immigrant to this land from the European Holocaust of the Second World War, I have a great empathy for the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and the genocide they have endured over many hundreds of years from European Settlers.

As I started on a spiritual journey in mid-life, I was much impressed by the strong spirituality of Indigenous Peoples. I saw so much that we can learn from them about spirit in every being, about the Creator, the Great Spirit, about our unity with all—not only people and animals and plants, but with the very land and our Earth as a whole.

I was also interested in their group decision making skills and restorative justice, by the skillful use of sacred circles. I had the good fortune of attending a sweat lodge in Winnipeg, where I was given an eagle’s feather.

As I became involved with the interfaith movement², I often quoted Indigenous speakers, such as Chief Black Elk:

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes from within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness, with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan-Tanka, (the Great Spirit) and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us. This is the real peace, and the others are but reflections of this.³

I conduct a Universal Worship Service, where we light a candle to various religious traditions, read from their sacred books, which are together on our altar, and sing their chants. For these gatherings, we always

try to have an Indigenous person begin, calling on the four directions and smudging us. In more recent years, most meetings—not only spiritual ones—begin with a land acknowledgement.

The contemporary interspirituality movement⁴ embraces not only members of faith groups interested in interacting with each other, but also those who consider themselves “spiritual but not religious,” better named “spiritually independent.” And we can share spiritual practices from others’ religions and spiritual paths. Deeper within ourselves, on the spiritual level, there is unity of all. Unity in diversity! Here is Brother Wayne Teasdale⁵, who first used the term:

Interspirituality is the sharing of ultimate experience across traditions.... The growth of interspiritual wisdom among the religions requires community. It is through community that the faith traditions pool their treasures of the spirit, culled through millennia of mystical inner realization.

Pluralism is a global movement to actively promote the acceptance of differences, the flowering of diversity. The Statement of the G8 Religious Leaders Summit, Bordeaux, 2011 states that “tolerance, openness and understanding of other peoples’ cultures, social structures, values and religions are essential to the very survival of an interdependent world. Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for material progress, it is a vital component of peace, security and human development.”

The European Settlers and succeeding Canadian governments made the grave error of trying to homogenize all the peoples of this country, and especially its Indigenous nations, into one “chopped salad” rather than a diverse, colourful cultural “mosaic.”



Instead of learning from this land and the advanced spiritual wisdom of its Indigenous Peoples, it tried to force a tired European yoke on us all.

Interspirituality is about celebrating the diversity of voices of this magnificent Earth of ours, East and West, and weaving them together, while respecting the uniqueness of the different threads. It is like different voices singing together in harmony. So, the unique voices of diverse Indigenous traditions need to be respected, heard, and heeded so that we may open ourselves to their wisdom.

This means overcoming both racism and romantic or stereotypical visions regarding Indigenous traditions. We need to go far beyond mere tolerance—and even respect—to truly celebrate the diversity of these traditions.

Robin Wall Kimmerer writes that those of us who are not Indigenous to this land need to seek ways of becoming naturalized to these territories. This applies as well to our spiritual traditions. By listening deeply and learning from the wisdom of the diverse spiritual traditions of Turtle Island, we can discover ways to live well—sustainably, justly, and wisely—with each other and with the land itself. In so doing, we can also broaden and deepen a rich interspiritual vision and practice for us all.

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Questions for Reflection

1. *What struck you most in this reflection?*
2. *Based on what you have learned in this guide, how might Indigenous spiritual traditions enrich or transform your own spirituality?*
3. *How can these learnings be incorporated respectfully without appropriation?*

References

¹ A Tapestry of Survival, Leslie Mezei, 2019, Azrieli Foundation.

² Forty Years of Interfaith Experience in the Greater Toronto Area, Helene Ijaz ([request here](#))

³ Native American Quotes [here](#)

⁴ Dawn of Interspirituality Conference Report ([request here](#))

⁵ The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions