



Pathways to Decolonization

Spiritual Reflections

Finding a Pathway to Decolonization As We Share Our Stories

By Alf Dumont

I as a human being am not better than, but I am equal with all in the circle of life.... Our relationship with the Earth and with all living things on Earth is reciprocal—loving and being loved by all of life, caring and being cared for in return by the Earth.

As I read Session Ten, the words of Arthur Manuel and Nikki Sanchez reminded me of the visions, the hopes, and the challenges that each of us carry within us. I have always been reminded by my teachers and elders that we are not alone on the journey and that we share the journey together with all life. When I humbly acknowledge that I as a human being am not better than, but I am equal with all in the circle of life. I believe that we share best, when we acknowledge that our relationship with the Earth and with all living things on Earth is reciprocal—loving and being loved by all of life, caring and being cared for in return by the Earth.

“To sit down for a grown-up talk” reminds me, from my traditional Indigenous teachings that seeking to understand how to live respectfully with the land, as Indigenous people do, means seeking to live in harmony or in a reciprocal relationship with the land and all other living beings who share the land with us. It means taking only what we need and giving back to the Earth as the Earth gives to us. It means sharing with all living beings who share the land with us.

I was taught that we are to live in harmony with all life, so that our children and our children’s children for seven generations after us will have an environment that those seven generations before us left to us in good faith and trust. Living is this way means for me trying to live out the teaching my elders shared with me, *nindaweyan waganinug*, “all my relations.”

In living this teaching, I recognize that we are related to all life, and that as we share our stories, as we sing or as we dance in the circle of life, we do this as equals, with all our relations, with all of life: two-legged, four-legged, the flyers, the swimmers, the trees, the flora and fauna. We need each other. All life needs to be kept healthy.

As Arthur and Nikki explained, the way forward will not be easy or simple, but we can begin by challenging the established colonial structures in society and the sometimes the “unnamed” colonial beliefs within us and others.

We begin by sharing our stories in the talking circles of life, telling others who we are. We remind ourselves and others who our ancestors are and how we got to where we are now. And for some of us, reminding ourselves that decolonization is recognizing that all of us carry inside us more than one nation, more than one spiritual understanding.

If we look back far enough into the journeys of our ancestors, we will recognize that we carry more than one nation, more than one culture, and more than one spirituality, or more than one spiritual teaching. That realization will help us as we move forward. As we move forward, we need to look for new ways of working together with others who come from different cultural backgrounds or carry different spiritual understandings.

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I have been taught to share with respect and to challenge with kindness as we seek to decolonize ourselves and encourage others in their decolonization. All of us need to challenge and to be challenged on this life-long journey. As the Onondaga Nation reminds us:

The Onondaga People wish to bring about a healing between themselves and all others who live in this region that has been the homeland of the Onondaga Nation since the dawn of time. The Nation and its people have a unique spiritual, cultural, and historic relationship with the land, which is embodied in Gayanashagowa, the Great Law of Peace. This relationship goes far beyond federal and state legal concepts of ownership, possession or legal rights. The people are one with the land, and consider themselves stewards of it.

It is important to listen to the teachings and stories of all Indigenous people and to all the stories and teachings shared by others of in the circle of life. Our stories shared will give us a direction forward. And as we listen to all the stories and teachings in the circle, hopefully, we will embrace the courage to walk forward together in kindness and in hope, as changed and changing people.¹

Rev. Dr. Alf Dumont, who honours the traditional teachings of his Indigenous spirituality, served in the United Church of Canada for 40 years as a minister, as the director of an Indigenous theological centre, and as the executive secretary of an Indigenous conference.

Questions for Reflection

1. *What struck you most?*
2. *How might righting our relationship with the land and all living beings move us towards decolonization?*
3. *What might that entail in practice?*

¹ <https://www.onondaganation.org/land-rights>