



## Spiritual Reflections Spiritual Knowing

By Terry Swan

*When God gave (the whites) Jesus, he gave the Indians the Pipe.*

–Isabel Ten Fingers<sup>i</sup>

The first time ever I took Grandmother Pipe to the mountains and conducted a ceremony by myself, the spirits came. I had not expected that. I heard them behind my back. I thought it was the wings of the dragonfly. Then I remembered—they were the spirits flapping, like I had heard in the ancient sweat lodge and other ceremonies I participated in over the years. It is a distinct sound. That day, they healed my back as I had asked them to do. And there was an overwhelming feeling all over my body, no more pain.

Afterwards, I floated down the mountain, perplexed in awe, and humbled. I felt suspended in another time with each step I took to descend the path, a literal out of body sensation. That was one of my first experiences working with spirit and I would have many more in the years to come.

When I got home, I put beautiful Grandmother Pipe away and I did not touch her for years. I was not ready for this power and it scared me; however, I do recall telling myself never to underestimate the power of spirit—especially when you summon them, expect miracles.



As Indigenous Peoples, we are in a time of resurgence and remembering. Spiritual tools and teachings contained within our genetic coding are kept safely in our heart lodges, languages, and the land. In consciousness and ceremony, we transform and transmute the violence of genocide towards peace and restoring the balance.

Traditional cultural and social structures have been altered by years of assimilation policies with lasting and ongoing effects. Practicing our ceremonies was outlawed by the Canadian government under the Indian Act<sup>2</sup> and you could be sent to jail for participating in them. This law was not repealed until the 1950s. The State made our culture illegal. We have moved farther and farther away from listening and

following the teachings of our Elders, and from the substance of the spiritual energy that once guided our lives (Deloria Jr., 2006).

Internalized racism and oppression due to genocidal policies and practices present themselves today as a deep soul wound<sup>3</sup>. When one is consistently reminded that their culture and identity are less than, the impact is significant on the mind, body, and spirit.

Spiritual disruptions require spiritual solutions. Processes like ceremonies, dreams, and synchronicities act as portals for gaining knowledge (Kovach, 2009).

Indigenous ways of knowing and being are embedded in cosmologies that include our languages, art, and ancient technologies. It is through the recovery of traditional knowledge buried deep within each and every one of us that we can be released from this legacy of disruption. Each time we engage in the resurgence of these sacred ways, our Ancestors are rejoicing.

We are in ceremony. When they buried thousands of our children with no reverence or honour of the sacred, we knew what we needed to do. Across our Nations, we began to sing our songs, light the sacred fires, raising our Pipes in prayer to Kihci-Manitou, Great Spirit, and dance for our Loved Ones.

We open the doorway to spirit through fire. This is what we know on how we grieve. Mother Earth holds their memories and has transformed them into love. They are our Ancestors and have become the seeds for change and justice across this land.

As long as we keep our ceremonies, songs, and rituals alive, we will continue to thrive. As a collective, it is time to restore right relationship with the laws of the natural world and reconcile relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. This is about nation building, and is, at its very core, necessary for our spiritual evolution.

# Re:Indigenization



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## Questions for Reflection

1. What struck you most?
2. How do you understand the relationship between spirituality (including ceremony, music, languages, stories, and ways of knowing and living) and the process of Indigenization?
3. What do we need to do, individually and collectively, to “restore right relationship with the laws of the natural world and reconcile relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples”?
4. Share a quote or insight that sticks with you.

## References

- Deloria Jr., V. (2006). *The world we used to live in: Remembering the powers of the medicine men*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.
- Duran, E. (2006). *Healing the soul wound : Counseling with American Indians and other native peoples*. Teachers College Press.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- St. Pierre, P., & Long Soldier, T. (1995). *Walking in a sacred manner: healers, dreamers, and pipe carriers – medicine women of the plains Indians*, p.182 New York, NY: Simon & Shuster Publishing.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Valentina Janis is quoted recalling these words of her mother, Isabel Ten Fingers, in *Walking in the Sacred Manner* (St. Pierre & Long Soldier, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> The Indian Act is a Canadian federal law that governs all matters pertaining to Indian status, bands, and Indian reserves, including the care of our children. Throughout history it has been highly invasive and paternalistic, as it authorizes the Canadian federal government to regulate and administer in the affairs and day-to-day lives of registered Indians and reserve communities. For more details, see Session 7 of the guide and the guide glossary.

<sup>3</sup> This concept is presented in *Healing the Soul Wound* (Duran, 2006).