

**Title: The Science of Humility**

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In the Mi'kmaw world, there is a teaching of the Medicine Wheel given by one of our Elders, which expresses the nature of our life journey. In this teaching, it is said that there are seven gifts. They are love, honesty, humility, respect, truth, patience and, lastly, wisdom. In this teaching, a significant change occurs in our life cycle every seven years. These are the stages of life through which we move facing challenges and successes to achieve these seven gifts. Difficulties may occur in life, but they are only instruments of change, expansion of our perspective and opportunities for wisdom.

The Medicine Wheel does not teach one lesson. Rather it contains an endless source of lessons. Each of these lessons reinforces the seven gifts and the need for balance in our lives. The Medicine Wheel shows us respect for all races of the earth and the gifts which they bring. Then again, it reminds us of the seasons, the warm breezes, the newness of each day, the spirit in all things and the clarity of spirit among Elders and children. In one teaching, it is said as the circle moves through the cycles of seven years duration, that we can go back to age seven in our Elder years, the only time the circle reverses itself. Children and Elders share the colour white in the wheel, which also represents the North. Balance of the body, intellect, spirit and environment are also represented in the Medicine Wheel. Most of all, it honours the wisdom of Mother Earth, building on her example of cycle and change.

In our world view, species possess rights. Humans possess responsibilities. We are bound to each other, therefore we must speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Care must be taken to ensure that our actions do not damage other living beings, whether plant, animal or insect, since we are completely dependant on them to provide for our needs. We do not see Mother Earth as an object that we can manipulate. Creation has value as it is, it does not assume value because we make a product out of it. In our traditional world view, preserving the integrity of Mother Earth is more important than using our "skill" to manipulate her. Our culture is built on a long term vision, not on what is immediately expedient. In making decisions, our culture asked that our leaders measure those choices against a very specific rule. The decisions had to be good for the next seven generations. This meant that we had to have foresight in planning and respect for the species we depend upon. The human species was not *privileged*, it was *responsible*.

Mother Earth provides for us, shelters us, feeds us, nourishes us. We then must look to her good example for guidance. Our actions toward her must be actions of gratitude. We too must be humble, and provide for other living things. We must provide shelter for the vulnerable, medicine for the sick and nourishment for the hungry. We must always look to Mother Nature to inform us how to live, we do not inform her. For example, as we watch the birds consume food and then regurgitate it into the mouths of young, we also chew our food so that babies can accept it and then place it in their mouths. As we watch

the animals of the forest construct their homes out of the materials nature provides, so do we honour them by imitating their examples. As we see the species of the fish swimming along the warmer shoreline in the early spring, so they may grow and develop, so we forbid our children to swim in the waters until after this time has passed, so that they will respect these fish which will later give their lives for them. Our seasons are adjusted to the cycles of the earth and species, so that our children may always be reminded of the integrity and beauty of creation, and of our dependence upon her.

Our social policies were also constructed around these concepts. If a man committed violence against another man, and killed him, he then had to assume responsibility for the family of the man he killed. If in youth two young people fell in love, the boy was expected to live with the family of the girl, so they could observe his character and determine his ability to provide for and care for their daughter. The culture was inherently modest, but the young were allowed to see whether they really were suited to one another in the ways that would matter in the long term. Children were watched over by the whole community. In this way, families were supported to overcome their problems without judgment and our interconnectedness was upheld. We accept sexuality as a gift from the Creator, but we are ever mindful of the responsibility inherent in that gift. Along with this wonderful capacity must come control, so that we do not behave irresponsibly toward the provisions of Mother Earth.

Celebrations were centered toward the Mother Earth's provision for our needs and the reinforcement of our beliefs. We would gather to sing, to pray, to celebrate, to feast. We would don the garb of animals in our celebrations to honour the sacrifice they have made to sustain our life, and to encourage them to continue to provide for us. We would honour our ancestors, who have passed their wisdom and understanding down to us. We know even now that they continue to guide us, to answer our questions. The spirit of our ancestors has helped us keep our beliefs and traditions alive, despite the many attempts to destroy our culture. Their words are passed down to us. We must always continue to work to keep our language alive, because in our language is embedded the wisdom and perspective of our ancestors. The manner in which we express ourselves in language always reminds us of inter-relatedness and inter-connection. So, for example, our word for the Bras d'Or Lakes is not "Arm of Gold" as is so often interpreted into English, but "that to which all things flow". The *relationship* of the lake in the broader creation complex is articulated, as well as the *relationship* of the waters that surround her. Not her exploitive value.

Our housing was simple not because the Mi'kmaw mind was not capable of conceiving a better engineered structure, or was primitive. Rather it was because the Mi'kmaw mind perceived complexities more important to the long term survival of Mother Earth. Our housing demonstrated our essential respect and honour for Mother Earth, our acknowledgement that we must walk softly upon her and leave no mark. Likewise when you killed an animal, you were expected to use all parts of that animal, so as to show respect. An example of our world view is contained in the following story: a film crew came to a First Nations community to make a documentary about their lives and their community. They stayed quite some time, and when they were done, they showed their

handiwork to the First Nations people. It was full of scenes showing the people going about their everyday lives, conversing with one another, interacting with their children. The community viewed it very politely, but at the end they asked if perhaps they might use the film equipment to make their own documentary about their own community. The film crew agreed. When the First Nations were done, they showed their view of their world. There was not a person in the film. Instead, they had filmed the trees, the rocks, the animals, the watercourses.

Throughout most of the 1900's, First Nation children in Canada were separated from their families and placed in residential schools. They were prevented from associating with their families or practicing their beliefs. During the residential school experience, the young were separated from all these understandings of their ancestors. They were forbidden their language which expressed their universe. They were denied their rituals, which connected them to every living species. They were taught shame, and a sense of inadequacy. There was no traditional healing for their souls. No quietly joyful sweat lodges in the crisp snow followed by the laughter of the feast, reminding us that death is always followed by re-birth. There was no grandfather or grandmother to guide them in the conflicts they felt inside. There were no parents or siblings to bring them joy. They were punished, abused and isolated. "Educated", but not "educated" for anything in particular.

Today, our young people are poised on the edge of two worlds. One which says you must compete to get ahead. You must abandon the "non-scientific" rituals and root yourself in Western scientific "fact". Some falter, parented by adults splintered in the residential schools and unable to know which way to turn. Some wholeheartedly join the new world, and buy into four wheelers, Nintendo, MSN and material success. Some try to maintain a foothold in both, and somehow find a place among the relics of wisdom and modernity. We seek, as Elders in our time, to be a conduit for the wisdom of our ancestors, to let their voice soar among our people. We seek to "see with two eyes". Not to put down the accomplishments of Western science, but to take it further along the path. We seek to challenge it with the thinking of our ancestors and blend its "facts" with their "wisdom". This is part of our teaching, to think deeply, and for a long time, about the ideas put to us by others. Then to gently sift it through the responsibilities we take upon ourselves, and develop an approach that ensures a good outcome – for the next seven generations. Science alone will not save one single species. This is because you cannot save one species while you degrade the ecosystem upon which it ultimately depends. Only a change in consciousness will ensure the long term survival of our planet, and of our species. Only the remembrance of the culture of humility will ensure we do not destroy creation with the uncontrolled application of our human ingenuity. Until we heed the science of the Aboriginal people, until we heed the spirit of the east, we will march unsteadily toward destruction. Only when we see with two eyes, will Western science be something more than blind, and Aboriginal thought something more than lost.

