

Everything is Waiting

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Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice.

—from David Whyte's "Everything is Waiting for You"

Even as a child, I felt the "grand array; the swelling presence, and the chorus," crowding out my "solo voice." I had a feeling that someone or something was always with me. For a time, I called it God, then later there were other names, Goddess, the Creator, or the ancestors. Once an adult I had much to heal and, given the loss of connection to my Indigenous culture and the teachings they would have provided, I had to find others who were open to different worldviews and believed in other ways of knowing. I became a regular at Vancouver's spiritual watering hole, Banyen Books and Sound, where I would always head for the new release section. It was there, in 1994, that I first stumbled upon David Whyte and his book *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*. I was not yet a poet, but the book excited me.

My reading list at that time included *In the Absence of the Sacred* by Jerry Mander, *Mediating Dangerously: The Frontiers of Conflict Resolution* by Buddhist mediator, Kenneth Cloke, and lots of Rumi and Hafiz. I was — and still am — convinced that we need spirituality or the sacred to be a part of all things. When I say spirituality, I do not mean dogma, religious or otherwise. I am referring to a sense of the sacred, whatever it is for you. I was attracted to poets who were also mystics and felt poetry was a valuable tool for connecting to the sacred. So when David Whyte's poem, "Everything is Waiting for You," spoke

to being in concert with everything around you I found both comfort and validation in his words. It felt like sacred text.

A few years later I came upon *God is Red* by Vine Deloria Jr. and began my journey back to my Indigenous roots. In that book, Deloria Jr. says, “All inanimate objects have spirit and personality so that mountains, rivers, waterfalls, even continents and earth itself have intelligence, knowledge, and the ability to communicate ideas.” Reading *God is Red*, I saw that so many of my beliefs and my way of being in the world had a grounding in the Indigenous worldview.

I consider myself to be in collaboration with the universe. I feel most comfortable in the natural world. Crows follow me down the street. One of them squawks loudly if I have my head down. He seems to be annoyed if I am too insular and not noticing my surroundings. When I look up and thank him, he has an undeniable look of satisfaction at having reminded me he is there and to pay attention to my surroundings.

As we rush and push agendas, we lose that connection. If we belittle those who believe these things or other ways of knowing, we are left with dry, hard, cold “facts” or theories, when what the world desperately needs right now is to be responsive, to allow things to be more organic.

Truth is that I long for collaborations that use circles. I long for a world where we go as slow as the slowest person in the room, where those who are fast and efficient sit down and listen. Listen to the one who is most likely sitting on wisdom that never gets to come out because everything moves too fast for them, or because they are not willing to push their way into discussions.

As I write this, I think of Richard Wagamese and the circles I attended at the home he shared with his wife, Debra Powell. In his circles we were all equal and time became irrelevant. He would lead by sharing a story with us, a teaching tied to his own life and what was currently happening for him. He would be vulnerable, “just another foolish two-legged” as my dear friend and Elder Aline LaFlamme always says. He was not trying to be some guru who had reached enlightenment. This made it easier for us to share openly and honestly when the feather came around. But what struck me most was that unlike other gatherings I had attended, there was no need to get everything out in one go. He would pass the feather around until everyone had said everything they needed to say.

Having been in AA and many board meetings where if you're lucky you get one chance to speak, it was a marvel to me that we were allowed to empty ourselves in this way. There was no need to rush. You had a chance to correct what you said earlier if someone said something after you that caused a shift in your thinking, or if you realized you had not expressed yourself well. There were no "gotcha" moments. We were in a fluid, responsive state and aware that each of us was learning. No one had all the answers but together we could sort things out with the assistance of our ancestors and the Creator. It is true we were not collaborating on any projects, but we were building community and assisting one another in bringing positive change into our lives. The circle became a touchstone that I still carry with me to this day.

Talking circles help us lean into listening in a deep way. They assist us in not only listening to each other but also to other ways of knowing—and we may limit collaborations and co-creations if we don't honour other ways of knowing. Indigenous or not, if we go far enough back in our lineage, we will find ancestors who knew the importance of collaborating with Spirit and being responsive to the natural world. My Icelandic ancestors spoke with trees before determining which one would make the best long boat. My Indigenous ancestors went on vision quests where they received knowledge about their gifts and their path. And then there is the world of dreams where messages can be received. What if we valued time spent in prayer, opened ourselves to contemplation and the revelations that can come if we ask for them?

These days there is so much to attend to. The call for safe spaces is challenging those in leadership roles to bring meaningful change to the way we approach collaboration and co-creations. However we choose to proceed, it's important to acknowledge that at times we are stepping into fast-moving water and that these rivers of change inevitably bring some chaos. We've never been here before. It takes courage to explore new terrain. Collaboration of this nature does require innovation. It requires a certain audacity. It may require sacrifices. Unless we have respect for the sacred and some connection to spirituality, we may miss what everything around us is trying to tell us. Unless we find opportunities to slow down, we may miss the answers that are waiting to reveal themselves. We may miss the fact that it is all just waiting for us.

together we walk the labyrinth

in this sharing of our silence there are rounded corners
where bodies circle circles within circles our bodies fluid
opening to each other we become rounded corners
no sharp turns here

only prayers filling the walls
filling our hearts

once at the centre we wait
eyes closed we feel bodies passing
bodies turning in the softening
of rounded corners

one foot in front of the other
we walk towards peace

in the background the faint sounds of piano keys
the chords of our longing have become a song
our pain put on pause some left in the rounded corners
where the softening edges and the sound of the piano
show us another way through the maze of emotions each day brings

heads bowed we give thanks
for the healing that the circling brings

together we walk in this prayer filled room
a place where many are answered
all outside sounds muted by meditation
even if jarring they become music turning us inward
moving us away from resistance

minds emptied
we retrace our steps

with body filled lightness we walk
in the quiet of our yearning for stillness
our questions answered we are nourished
it will now be easier to lead with love and when we forget

eyes closed we will remember the sharing
of silence and the walk towards peace