

244 *Personal Empowerment Through Spiritual Healing*

As we seek to establish equality regarding health access, we must dismiss terms such as Aboriginal and First Nations. We are Indigenous people who are interested in Nation building to restore the languages, cultures, and ceremonial lives of our respective nations.

As Indigenous people we have experienced spiritual disempowerment that has hindered the growth and developmental needs of our societies. As a result of the oppression that occurred with colonization and assimilation, Indigenous people were forced to witness the destruction of societies that were rich in cultural practices and beliefs. This destruction caused many Indigenous people to experience a disconnection from self and the essence of who they are as spiritual beings.

The attempt at colonization, caused many people to lose their connection to the land. The subsequent disenfranchisement resulted when individuals were no longer able to continue practicing their traditional ways of interacting and living in harmony with the land. The roles and responsibilities of each individual were destroyed resulting in a disconnection from self and one's natural gifts and abilities. Community members no longer understood their purpose in life.

The onset of assimilation further destroyed the very foundation of Indigenous peoples. The displacement of children from the family unit caused a disruption in the traditional practices and beliefs of each society. The inherent right to own their voice was taken away from these children. They went from being cherished individuals to institutionalized products of their caretakers. They were denied the right to speak their languages and they were punished for engaging in any cultural practices, beliefs, and customs. The traumas experienced in these institutions further destroyed the essence of who they were as spiritual beings. The residential school experience promoted the dysfunctional rules of "don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel". The dysfunctional family systems were fostered through abuses that impacted the individual physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. The generational cycle of addictions, family violence, and abuse was fostered and nurtured as a result of the destruction of the family unit.

In helping Indigenous people heal, one must understand the importance of embracing the cultural practices, beliefs, and ceremonies. Individuals who have experienced a life of trauma are encouraged to embrace their personal power by breaking free from bondage of toxic shame that hinders personal growth and development. They are empowered through the universal teachings of love, respect, truth, honesty, humility, courage, and wisdom. They are enlightened through the teachings that come from attending ceremony, listening to the elders and returning to the teachings of the medicine wheel. They are provided with an opportunity to own their truth, by reconnecting with their discarded selves and embracing the essence of who they are as spiritual beings journeying toward enlightenment.