



Seeing Wétiko: Recognizing Abundance and 'Mutual Becoming'

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A Moment for Gratitude

The Land and the Peoples

I would like to take a moment to honour the land and the peoples whose home we occupy. As my work for this project has spanned both traditional Treaty 6 and 7 territory:

I would like to express my gratitude to the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this Treaty 6 territory for centuries, the Nêhiyaw, Dene, Anishinaabe, Nakota Isga, and Niisitapi peoples. I also acknowledge this as the Métis' homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel.

I would also like to honour and acknowledge Moh'kinsstis, and the traditional Treaty 7 territory and oral practices of the Blackfoot confederacy: Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, as well as the Îyâxe Nakoda and Tsuut'ina nations. I acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 within the historical Northwest Métis homeland.

While land acknowledgements are important, so too is the acknowledgement that colonial "histories" do not end in history, but continue to be perpetuated and upheld in our systems today. Thank you and gratitude to the Elders, witnesses, and survivors who have kept the teachings alive. Part of our acknowledgement of the land and the peoples must include our explicit acknowledgement about our own responsibilities to the Treaties as settlers and newcomers with the prayer that we too, one day, may be looked upon as good ancestors.

Elders

Sometimes a single truth is not enough to explain the balance and order of the world around us. Thank you to the Elders and Knowledge Keepers that have shared so much wisdom with me over the years.

To

- Marion Lerat from Kahkewistahaw Cree Nation
- Hal Eagletail from Tsuut'ina Nation
- Earnie Poundmaker from Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation
- Ruby Eaglechild from Kainai Nation

Support Trio

Gratitude for my team of supports, Sebastien Rioux from Newo Global Energy and Professor Brian Nichols. Thank you for your guidance, heart led conversations, and individual commitment to dreaming of a more aligned now.

Institute for Community Prosperity and Catamount Fellows

Gratitude for Barb Davies, Cordelia Snowdon-Lawley, James Stauch, and all my fellow fellows in the program.

Family

Finally, gratitude to my partner, Wade, for your commitment to the Red Road and Medicine and your support in so many ways throughout this journey

And our kids Onawa and Emrys, for their love and support. I've spent many afternoons learning and writing instead of playing - I'm looking forward to blanket forts and some family adventures.



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Thus Far

Truthfully, I never expected to see myself participating in a formal academic experience or research, purely because I'm a pretty vocal critic of European and anthropocentric knowledge and power structures, linear thinking tendencies, and the overall acceptability of the status quo. In fact, I was once adamant I would never go to school for business, as I was disgusted with capitalism and the cycle of overconsumption, of which I had no intention of aligning myself. My heart longs for storytelling as knowledge, word as "contract," song as medicine, and reciprocity as currency. When I became aware of the social innovation program within the business degree program at Mount Royal University, my initial reaction was "oohh...*destruction from the inside, out,*" and immediately applied. While my stance has *slightly* softened, my frustration with the status quo has only deepened. Much of my university experience thus far has been going through the motions of detached learning in fear of becoming that which I despise, however, the Catamount Fellowship has been remarkably transformative. The Fellowship is offered through the Institute of Community Prosperity and partners with various community organizations and members of faculty to investigate and collaborate on a social issue through a systems thinking lens. I am incredibly honoured to be partnered with Newo Global Energy as I was asked to contemplate the wondering,

"How might we value "inner" work (mind, body, spirit, emotion) as much as "outer" work (completed projects, sales, deliverables, measurables, etc.) in our organizations and personal lives to help foster an economy of prosperity and abundance?"

Almost immediately, I found myself torn between the topic presented. In writing about how to value inner work as much as outer work I was terrified that the research would lead to quantifying and measuring the power of the human spirit. Brian, Seb, and I often had conversations about how seemingly simple this was.

"Ultimately, if we were all just better people this would work itself out naturally."

But what's keeping us from that? In this inquiry, we began to better understand the system entangling us in its process.

Most challenging was the understanding that we can't "measure" spirit, and in a system that delights in that which is tangible, this proved challenging. So we decided to challenge the system instead.

Journey Map

We began this process by exploring factors contributing to an environment that favours "outer" work (completed projects, sales, deliverables, measurables) over internal work (mind, body, spirit, emotion) in our organizations and, subsequently, our personal lives. This process was contextualized with a very basic understanding of *wétiko*, an understanding and story carried by Cree and other Indigenous peoples, to describe our current affiliation with scarcity mindsets. From here, we embarked on a journey through the colonial lens influencing current systems; the current state of "work," recognizing scarcity, and the impacts of grief. From there we explore the gift of hopelessness. That leads into recognizing abundance, mutual becoming, emergence, and finally - melting the heart.

Seeing Wétiko

*“A man goes to knowledge as he goes to war, wide awake, with fear, with respect, and with absolute assurance...For me there is only the traveling on paths that have heart, on any path that may have heart. There I travel, and the only worthwhile challenge is to travel its full length. And there I travel, looking, looking breathlessly...Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question... Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good, if it doesn't it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere; but one has heart.” - Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968)¹*

While my personal understanding of wétiko is in its infantile stages, in previous years I've had the honour of listening to oral stories of the wétiko spirit or similar Spirits from a number of Elders and Knowledge Keepers, such as Elder Marion Lerat from the Kahkewistahaw Cree Nation, Hal Eagletail from the Tsuut'ina Nation, Elder Earnie Poundmaker of the Ahtakakoop Nation. While these particular stories were oral teachings and such stories can't be shared in this space, honouring and listening to oral and written Indigenous histories and seeing this wétiko spirit as an influence feels imperative to this lens of understanding. Author of *Columbus and other Cannibals*, Professor Jack Forbes describes wétiko as “the consuming of another's life for one's own private purpose or profit.”³ Often referred to as a virus, spell, or disease, wétiko is said to consume the mind of those it afflicts, creating a collective psychosis rendering people oblivious to their actions and compelling them to act against their own best interests.⁴ Author Paul Levy has also written in great detail about the wétiko spirit, and his work identifies this spirit named differently in many worldviews, including Buddhism, Judeo-Christianity, Hinduism, and beyond. In an effort to understand this spirit better, I was also honoured to sit with Dion Simon, Medicine Trail Coordinator at the Iniskim Centre, who shared stories and some context relating to the wétiko Spirit. The stories shared reminded me of many of the stories I heard while I was working with Medicine Maestros in Peru who spoke of the need to sing the right songs, *icaros*, to “wake up the heart” which had been coaxed to sleep by the world. But what caused this heart to freeze or go to sleep?

1 Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), 43, 106-107, 194-195.

2 This note was included as provided context, written by Sebastien Rioux, regarding the research question I was presented with. I felt it necessary to include along with my own research on the topic.

3 Jack Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals* (New York, New York: Autonomedia, 1992), 24.

4 Paul Levy, *Dispelling Wetiko: Breaking the Curse of Evil* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2013).

Provided Context² -We live in potentially the most materially abundant time in human history, yet we live by an economic narrative that is dominated by notions of scarcity built on a foundation of broken relationships with our inner and outer world. This leads our consumer society to operate from a space of “we aren't enough” and “we don't have enough”. To describe this scarcity affliction, the Cree and many other Indigenous peoples carry stories of wétiko, a cannibalistic, gluttonous, and selfish spirit that stalks winter camps. It is said that a wétiko has a frozen heart and that a wétiko can only be changed if their heart is melted completely.

I also want to take a moment to reflect on wétiko as a Spirit and being. So often, in our Euro-christianized way of perceiving the world, we default to assigning “good” and “bad” to things.

This is not that.

Wétiko is a spirit that calls in awareness. We approach this spirit with reverence, with gratitude for their sharing with us. We don't try to escape it, we're not thinking about how to destroy it. Wétiko is a gift and a powerful representation of lack of awareness. Their purpose is to lie on the edges of our awareness, warning us to stay on the path of the heart.

The Colonial Lens and its Influence on the System

“The materiality of the hope that we are co-producing is specifically an assemblage of colonial impulses and concepts: I refer, for instance, to a temporality that believes time to be a linear track that flows from past to future – the same imperialistic understanding that imprisoned non-western, indigenous cultures to second-tier, third-tier societies behind the lodestar of western civilization; I write of the story of separation that treats humans as essentially exceptional, divorced from their environments, isolated in their selfhood, masters over the material realm; I write of the sociology of the social that crowns humans with agency, vitality, and movement, in contrast with the dead, mute and blind realm of the natural world.”⁵

Interrelationality has been significantly influenced by a Eurocentric, often patriarchal knowledge paradigm in which many of our current systems are influenced.⁶ Through this paradigm, an ideological framework for “othering” has occurred, placing intrinsic value on so-called virtues that captured many European minds, such as progressive productivity, rationality, civility, and liberal-democratic government and economic systems.⁷ This “othering” has often reduced all alternative perspectives to a threat to the current and thus maintained neocolonial systems. According to Dr. Onwuzuruigbo, a Nigerian scholar, fear of “other” became the legitimizing rationale for European colonialism to consume all that was not deemed worthy.⁸ Colonial capturing of the psyche has expanded the quest for further consumption, competition, and rivalry. Often relegated to the past, the colonial lens continues to perpetuate itself through and by the systems in which it has created.⁹ Examples of this can be seen in racial, sexist, anthropocentric and late-stage capitalistic tendencies of political and legal systems, societal norms and structural

understandings.¹⁰ The colonized psyche and identity has individuals and communities believing the colonizer’s narrative of separation, individualism, and the need for consumption, often in the name of so-called “progress.”¹¹ Non-linear ways of thinking are often abandoned. Cyclical thinking is often found in various Indigenous ways of being, which places an incredible amount of value in that which is not seen – interrelationality and reciprocity often being the core. Cyclical thinking also embodies the observation of natural cycles in the world. The rising and setting sun, the lunar cycles, seasonal cycles, death, rebirth, and beyond. Both types of thinking are not mutually exclusive, they rely on having a foot in both worlds – mindful of the need for structure while allowing for movement. Lisa Monchalin says, “linear thinking is hierarchical, often seeing the world as organized in a progressive ladder of worth and time as a movement toward ever better states of reality.”¹² Ideological perceptions of progress then, are generally measured with the temporal, linear illusion of time, perpetuating the need for existing systems and reinforcing the current state of “work.”

5 Bayo Akomolafe, “Coming Down to Earth,” Writings – Bayo Akomolafe, March 11, 2020, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/coming-down-to-earth>.

6 Lauren Tynan and Michelle Bishop, “Decolonizing the Literature Review: A Relational Approach,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, August 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221101594>.

7 Ifeanyi Onwuzuruigbo, “Indigenising Eurocentric Sociology: The ‘Captive Mind’ and Five Decades of Sociology in Nigeria,” *Current Sociology* 66, no. 6 (2017): 831–848, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392117704242>.

8 *Ibid*

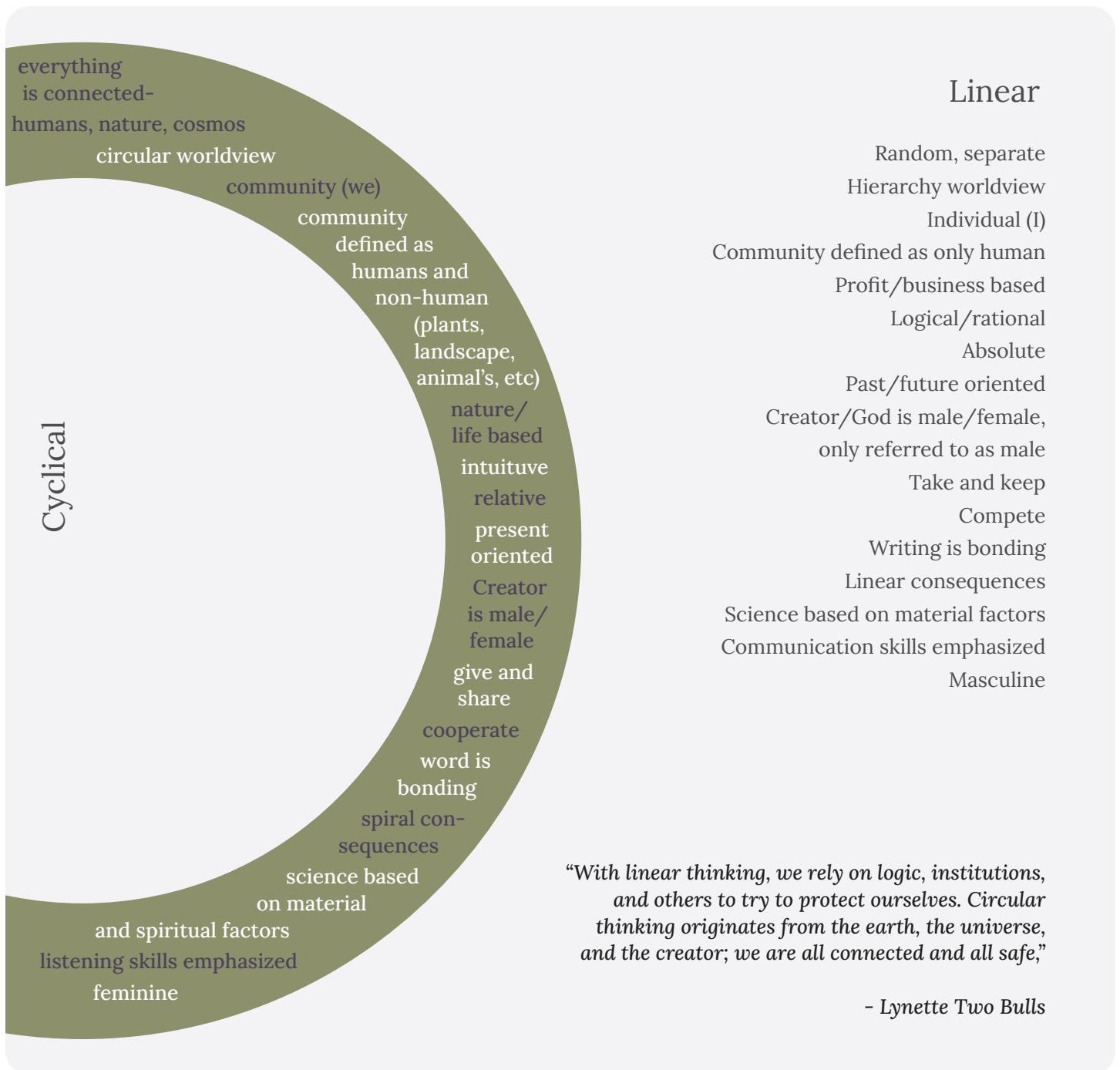
9 J. Kehaulani Kauanui, “‘A Structure, Not an Event’: Settler Colonialism and Enduring

10 Martin John Cannon and Lina Sunseri, *Racism, Colonialism, and Indigeneity in Canada: A Reader* (Brantford, Ontario: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2019). Indigeneity,” *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.25158/l5.1.7>.

11 Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “Settler Colonialism as Structure,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015): 52–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649214560440>.

12 Lisa Monchalin, *The Colonial Problem: An Indigenous Perspective on Crime and Injustice in Canada* (Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College, 2017), 27.

Ways of Thinking



The Current State of “Work”

We now find ourselves in a current state where “work” is often confined within the walls of neoliberal ideologies. According to Lazzarato, that is, a society driven by enterprise “based on the market, competition, inequality, and the privilege of the individual.”¹³ In this system, the reward is given to those who integrate themselves into the framework, themselves becoming “human capital” in a system of neoliberal capitalism.¹⁴ Widely subscribed to, anthropocentric capitalism has expanded the colonial psyche by providing for its workers a mind that continues the need to consume to be seen as valuable or effective within the systems in which they are held.¹⁵ Colonization and capitalism then go hand in hand, creating and enforcing systems that often prioritize linear illusions of progress and the strive for abundance through consumption that feed into one another until an individual realizes that they are still “starving” despite their consumption. According to Shibly Shahrier, Koji Kotani, and Makoto Kakinaka, this ongoing modernization of competitive societies (capitalism) has created a mass social learning that derives value in competition over cooperation. It begins to value external deliverables because of their tangible nature within a competitive environment.¹⁶ This system creates a value structure that individuals are expected to conform to. Often referred to as a result of capitalism, individualism with a possessive nature is described as “the view that individual rationality and the sanctity of the consumer are the most significant building blocks of the economy.”¹⁷ It may be essential to note here that it seems to be the possessive description of individualism that is called into question rather than the matter of individualism itself. This possessive nature of individualism reinforces Kimmerer’s “bundle of rights”¹⁸ by suggesting that the exclusion of relationality between us and the world is acceptable because we have a right to the world rather than cultivating a reciprocal, interconnected relationship with her. In this, individualism and self-possession, alien from the natural world, become the defining characteristic of successful personhood, where “human life is turned into human capital.”¹⁹ Thus, the idea of reporting on external deliverables is often equivalent to what we are able to produce as individuals because our value has been diminished to our ability to produce a level of linearity that contributes to and reinforces capitalistic tendencies.

13 Maurizio Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action – Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 109–133, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409350283>.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Iyko Day, “Racial Capitalism, Colonialism, and Death-Dealing Abstraction,” *American Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2020): 1033–1046, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2020.0059>.

16 Shibly Shahrier, Koji Kotani, and Makoto Kakinaka, “Social Value Orientation and Capitalism in Societies,” *PLOS ONE* 11, no. 10 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0165067>.

17 Iliia Murtazashvili, “Does Capitalism Have a Future? A Review Essay of Peter Boettke’s *The Struggle for a Better World* and Daniel Bromley’s *Possessive Individualism: A Crisis of Capitalism*,” *The Review of Austrian Economics*, January 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11138-021-00558-5>.

18 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Vancouver, B.C: Langara College, 2022), 32

19 Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession the Performative in the Political: Conversations with Athena Athanasiou* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 12.

Scarcity

The colonial psyche that has been widely adopted has significantly impacted our human tendency for reciprocity. In a world focused on linearity and progress, consumption becomes a means to an end and relationality and interconnectedness is forgotten.²⁰ In our forgetting, we attempt to manufacture a sense of sacredness, or meaning, through the act of consumption. Within this system is a mindset of individual personal property ownership, greatly influenced by neoliberalism and capitalism, that has laid the groundwork for a scarcity mindset to invade many of our minds and views about the world.²¹ From a Eurocentric perspective, scarcity is approached from fear and a belief that we must consume now and produce now before we “run out” of resources and that there is not enough.²² As neoliberal capitalism relies on scarcity to justify its existence, abundance can fundamentally not be realized. As the author of *Capitalism and Desire*, Todd McGowan, states, “Arguing on behalf of capitalism requires an investment in the inevitability of scarcity as an article of the faith.”²³ In contrast, many Indigenous ways of being and thinking approach scarcity with a reciprocal mindset, with the understanding that we must be mindful of what we consume because we know that there are limited resources - we only take what we need. Reciprocity, described by Indigenous author Robin Wall Kimmerer, is “Each person, human or no, is bound to every other in a reciprocal relationship. Just as all beings have a duty to me, I have a duty to them.”²⁴ When this reciprocal relationship is forgotten, “other” in all their forms are taken for granted, and individualism prevails. Individualism fosters competition and a desire for dominance rather than cooperation and obligations of reciprocity. Motivated by fear of not being enough, we try to trick ourselves into realizing abundance by following a heartless path, bound by the illusion of linearity and both the projection and assumption of our human dominance.

20 Hal Eagletail, Tsuut’ina Knowledge Keeper, personal communication

21 Carol Anne Hilton, *Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2021).

22 *Ibid.*

23 As cited in Todd McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets* (S.I.: Columbia University Press, 2016), 199

24 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College, 2022), 115



Grief

“Remember you are water.

Of course you leave salt trails.

Of course you are crying.

Flow

P.S. If there happens to be a multitude of griefs upon you, individual and collective, or fast and slow, or small and large, add equal parts of these considerations:

that the broken heart can cover more territory.

that perhaps love can only be as large as grief demands.

that grief is the growing up of the heart that bursts boundaries like an old skin or a finished life.

that grief is gratitude.

that water seeks scale, that even your tears seek the recognition of community.

that the heart is a front line and the fight is to feel in a world of distraction.

that death might be the only freedom. that your grief is a worthwhile use of your time.

that your body will feel only as much as it is able to.

that the ones you grieve may be grieving you.

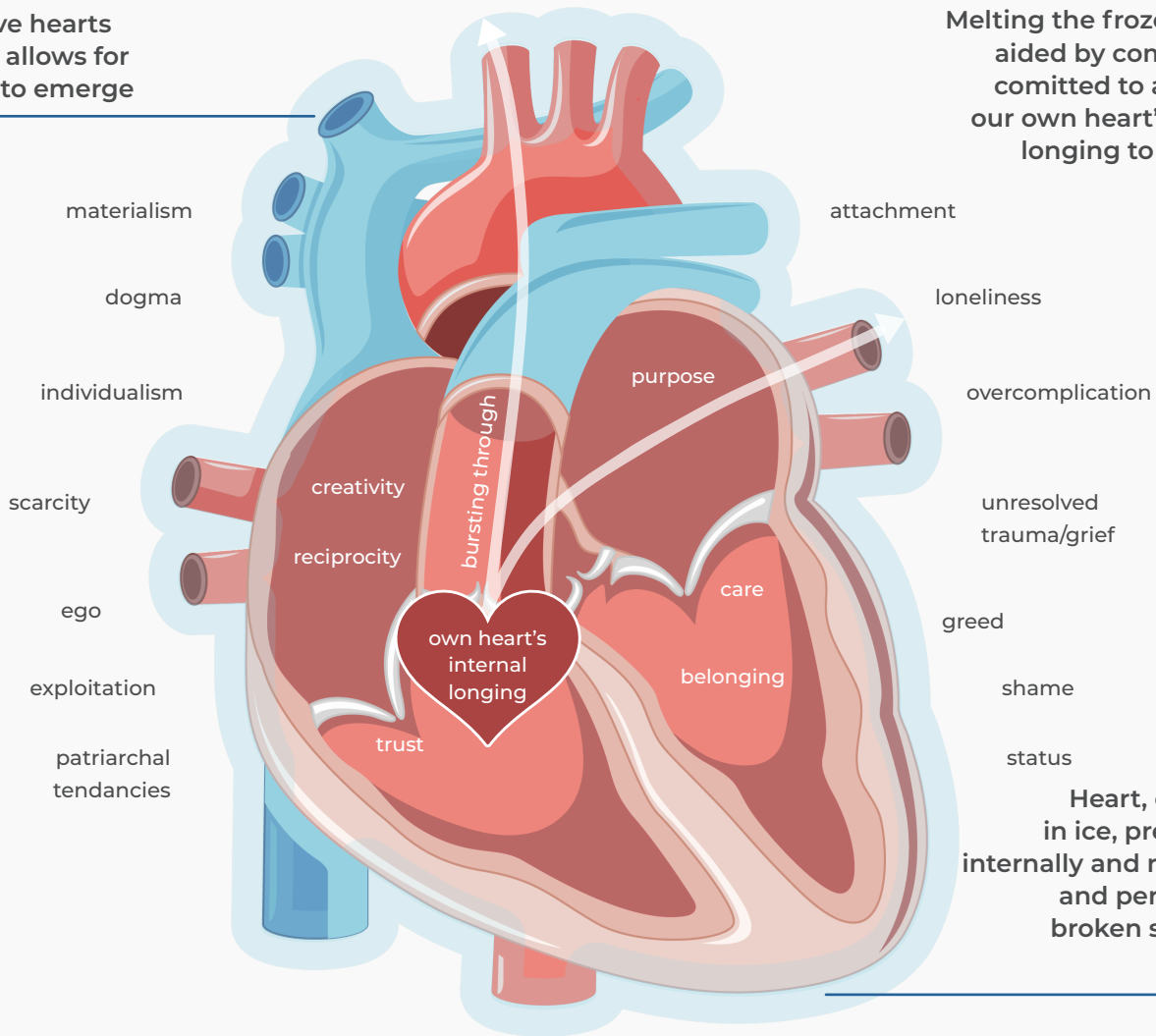
that the sacred comes from the limitations.

that you are excellent at loving.” – adrienne maree brown²⁵

²⁵ adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (United States: AK Press, 2021), 64

Collective hearts melting allows for change to emerge

Melting the frozen heart aided by community comitted to allowing our own heart's interal longing to emerge



Heart, encased in ice, pressuring internally and reflected and perpetuate broken systems.

In conversation with Blackfoot Elder Ruby Eaglechild, she quietly spoke the words, “we are *all* victims of colonization and colonial thought.”²⁶ Many systems that promote the above interaction with the world are at our human spirit’s expense. She described how a lack of awareness about the interconnectedness of all beings influences a society that lacks understanding of our harm.²⁷ adrienne maree brown describes many of the social justice movements that cry out for change in “political systems, natural environments, economic frameworks, civil society and culture” as “living and breathing memorials” to what has been lost and spaces where we as a collective, mourn the loss of the human spirit to the distractions.²⁸ In my mind, addressing our collective grief includes recognizing that the systems we participate in may be more harmful than we’ve allowed ourselves to acknowledge. In that, dismantling

these systems seems like more work than the continued burden of existing in them. In this, I feel that we become complexity-oriented to the detriment of taking action. We feel entangled in and by these systems, and overcomplicating their intricacies becomes the default because collective grieving over them is discouraged. Turning towards reflecting on and valuing internal spaces means mourning that we have gotten so caught up in external ones. This inner reflexivity should not motivate a narcissistic “self-help” journey, but may instead inform the vision we hold. Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, in their book *Active Hope*, explain that feeling our grief for the systems of the world is indicative of our interconnectedness and that through turning towards grief and a potential of subsequent healing, we become empowered to change some of these systems.²⁹ In viewing our current realities, we grieve, because our love for the world has no place to go.

26 Blackfoot Elder Ruby Eaglechild, personal communication

27 *Ibid*

28 adrienne maree brown, *Holding Change: The Way of Emergent Strategy Facilitation and Mediation* (Consortium Book Sales & Dist, 2021), 63.

29 Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in without Going Crazy* (United States: New World Library, 2012).



The Gift of Hopelessness

“The problem with hope, however, is that it often filters away voices we need to listen to, realities we need to contend with, and valleys we need to pass through. Hope, when fetishized, often dismisses the gift of hopelessness, the place of surrender and deep humility: the point of descent where we come down to earth. Like justice, this instrumentalist hope can get in the way of emergent transformation.”³⁰

I see a world obsessed with life and terrified of death despite the earth around us displaying the joy and sorrow of both death and rebirth. In our own lives and subsequent organizations, we cling to familiar constructs, rearranging things here and there in the pursuit of “better.” Contending with the interwoven intricacies of many of our colonial minds, we approach restructuring ourselves and our organizations with asterix’s and policies where we might feel there is space for without changing the fundamental structures in which we are entangled. Why do we do this? Could it be perhaps, that we are so attached to the story of progress that we forget that death and transformation is a requirement of life? Often, our action, fueled with hope, becomes a smokescreen that teases at change without the need for gentle yet radical dismantling. Hope is relegated to being the burden of the future because we refuse to sit in despair of our creation now.

³⁰ Bayo Akomolafe, “Coming Down to Earth,” Writings – Bayo Akomolafe, March 11, 2020, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/coming-down-to-earth>.

Recognizing Abundance

“There are seasons in your life in the same way as there are seasons in nature. There are times to cultivate and create, when you nurture your world and give birth to new ideas and ventures. There are times of flourishing and abundance, when life feels in full bloom, energized and expanding. And there are times of fruition, when things come to an end. They have reached their climax and must be harvested before they begin to fade. And finally, of course, there are times that are cold and cutting and empty, times when the spring of new beginnings seems like a distant dream. Those rhythms in life are natural events. They weave into one another as day follows night, bringing, not messages of hope and fear, but messages of how things are.”³¹

Indigenous cultures around the world are balanced in the knowledge that the world is animate, non permanent, and cyclically changing. We have been gifted daily reflections of abundance -

The sun, gifting life
The moon, reflecting, pulling, pushing
Water, being, flowing, raging, drowning, giving
Fire, raging, warming, sparking,
Seeds, sowing
Life, giving
Death, reminding, renewing, reviving

And yet the illusion of abundance for many individuals and organizations is fueled through the trickery of scarcity. In moving from a scarcity mindset to embodying both internal and external abundance, McGowan points out that abundance does not remedy the afflictions of scarcity but that a scarcity mindset is often used to counteract the pain of abundance.³² He says that in recognizing abundance, we must also

realize that internal “wholeness” or satisfaction with presence requires us to “abandon the refuge of dissatisfaction” that fuels our participation in capitalism or the basis of mass consumption.³³

From a Buddhist point of view, the lines of self-identity are blurred with consumerist values feeding dissatisfaction, creating a false sense of self and the world.³⁴ Kimmerer echoes this sentiment, stating that this type of economy needs emptiness to thrive by creating unmet desires.³⁵ By recognizing abundance, we undermine scarcity through contentment which is strengthened through community, relationality and reciprocity with all beings.

31 Chögyam Trungpa and Carolyn Rose Gimian, *Ocean of Dharma: The Everyday Wisdom of Chögyam Trungpa* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008).

32 Todd McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets* (S.I.: Columbia University Press, 2016), 213-214

33 Ibid

34 Stephanie Kaza, “How Much is Enough?: Buddhist Perspectives on Consumerism.” as cited in Richard Karl Payne ed., *How Much Is Enough: Buddhism, Consumerism, and the Human Environment* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2010: 39-62)

35 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Vancouver, B.C: Langara College, 2022).

Reciprocity and Interrelationality

“Action on behalf of life transforms. Because the relationship between self and the world is reciprocal, it is not a question of first getting enlightened or saved and then acting. As we work to heal the earth, the earth heals us.”³⁶

Robin Wall Kimmerer describes consumption as a “bundle of rights” or a “bundle of responsibilities” which is dependent on our relationship with the gifts of the world.³⁷ Approached with reciprocity, our consumption is a “bundle of responsibilities” to which we owe our presence and reciprocal action. Approached with a scarcity mindset, however, consumption is something we view as owed to us; as something we are entitled to. Indigenous worldviews emphasize the importance of maintaining reciprocity in relationships with others, both human and non-human. In other words, we are obligated to consume mindfully, so that there is enough for others, respecting limits, and giving back.

Systems that prioritize interrelationality, which naturally tend to rebel against individual capitalistic tendencies, place value on a different perception of progress. Examples of such systems can be found in clan-based governance systems, cooperatives, and integral sharing economy practices. Progress is measured by collective goals and sustainable community well-being. In such an understanding, individual contribution is not seen as valuable unless it contributes to the collective good. This interrelationality or holism is described by Q’um Q’um Xiiem (Jo-ann Archibald) as the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical realms to form a whole, healthy person, which exists within a reciprocal relationship with family, community, and nation.³⁸

³⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College, 2022), 308

³⁷ *Ibid.*, (28)

³⁸ Q’um Q’um Xiiem (Jo-ann Archibald), *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 2014), 11.

Mutual Becoming

*“My joy is like a spring so warm, it makes flowers bloom all over the earth.
My pain is like a river of tears, so vast that it fills the four oceans
Please call me by my true name, that I can feel my cries and laughter at once
So I can feel, that my joy and pain are one
Please call me, by my true name so that I can wake up,
and the doors of my heart, could be let open”³⁹*

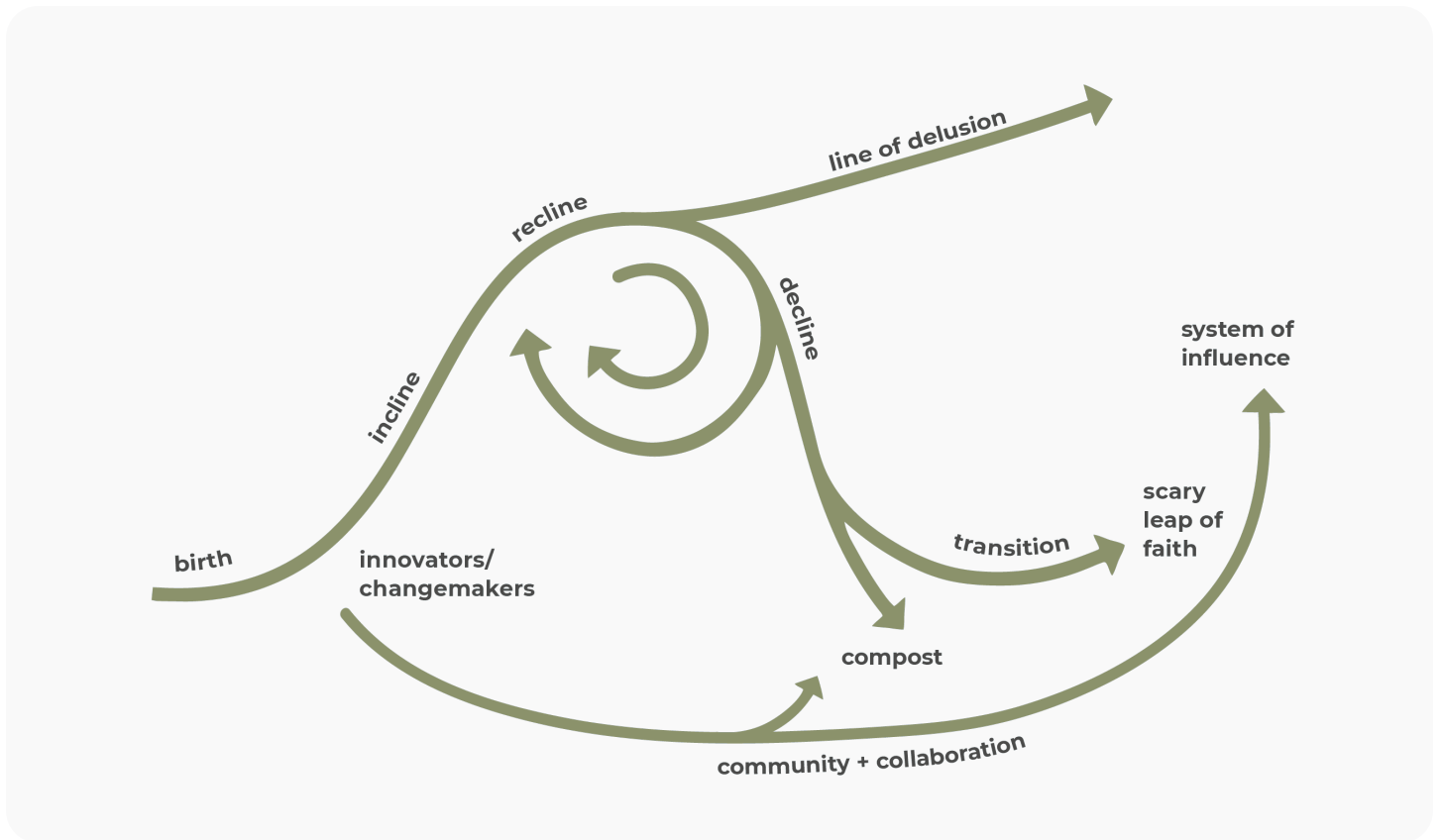
In her book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Karen Barad speaks of “agential realism” which, among other things, is an account of “how and why we must understand in an *integral* way the roles of human and nonhuman, material and discursive, factors and science and other practices.”⁴⁰ Part of this also includes understanding that we are of the universe - interwoven within. And that we are “intra-acting” from within and as part of the world in its becoming.⁴¹ Of course, this understanding of the universe has always been known by many Indigenous cultures that speak and are grounded in the intrinsic interconnectedness between all things, seemingly living and non. With this understanding, Frederic Laloux, in his book *Reinventing Organizations*, talks about living organizations, as in organizations are their own entity with their own evolutionary purpose.⁴² This sentiment is echoed in the two loops model which outlines the life cycle of living systems. As all living beings, we can see a life cycle that includes birth, growth and maturity, transition, and....as my five year old son puts it, a sacred death. When a system is “birthed,” it progresses to a point where it naturally starts a decline process. Instead of acknowledging this process, many organizations aim for continuous growth (the line of delusion), and spin - around and around- trying to project themselves into perpetual linearity.

39 I only knew this as a song until recently when I discovered Thich Nhat Hanh as its writer.

40 Karen Michelle Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 25

41 Ibid, 396

42 Laloux Frédéric, *Reinventing Organizations* (Bruxelles, France: Laoux (Frederic), 2016).



Meanwhile, another system is emerging alongside the one which seems dominant. Taking the things that no longer serve, ‘composting’ in the model serves as a space for sacred death to occur whilst informing emerging systems of what is no longer needed. Dominant systems have the opportunity to transition - some of their models are composted. All dominant systems go through a “trust fall” stage, into the emerging system.

This fundamentally challenges the worldview that seeks perpetual growth and fiercely avoids death, which is seen as a failure instead of an evolution. It also honours the gift of evolution that current systems have brought forth. Subsequently, in understanding our personal entanglement with the systems we interact with, our own personal work alongside the organization that nourishes body, mind, spirit, and emotion allows for “mutual becoming.”⁴³ In being witness with our current systems being afflicted with a *wétiko* type spirit, with hearts frozen and consumption becoming identity, we cannot separate ourselves and place ourselves above this phenomenon. In a quantum universe, our systems are a reflection of our own hearts and minds. In his book, *Undreaming Wétiko*, Paul Levy says “Quantum physics is pointing out that just like in a dream, we are participating— whether we know it or not—in creating our experience of the world and ourselves moment by moment.”⁴⁴ Awareness of quantum perspectives lends to us the ability to extend our understanding and subsequently deeper knowing of the interconnection of all creation as dependent upon itself while occupying an illusory position of separation. In being witness to our own beings being afflicted with *wétiko*, we can go about ever so gently melting the heart, not destroying it, but allowing it to be in its own awareness, and in ours on the edges, guiding us back to the heart.

43 Personal note - thank you Katherine Ziff for this quote in our conversations

44 Paul Levy, *Undreaming Wétiko: Breaking the Spell of the Nightmare Mind-Virus* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2023), 247



Emergence

“Nature moves in small fractals of interdependence, accumulating nonlinear changes and creating more possibilities with the constant adaptations of a resilient earth. If we attend to nature’s lessons, we can remember that we, too, are nature; we can unveil our own organic gifts, our way to the future together, our path to thriving in this abundant world”⁴⁵

Emergence is the allowing for *mutual becoming* to flow. Emergence allows for fractal change to accumulate and trust the change that people are going through to lead the emergent transformation of our systems. It is the act of listening and responding rather than predicting and controlling. There are no guidelines or guideposts... we allow people to emerge and listen to their own heart’s internal longings for *their* ways of being.

As this happens, mutual becoming, in its essence, entangled with our organizations begins to transform how systems emerge. As we tiptoe through new waters, our desire for solid footing will arise. We must resist the temptation to anchor ourselves into past trappings, by creating linearity to body, mind, spirit, emotion. They are meant to be free, chaotic, wild. We can’t

create policies for spaces where they are welcomed. We can’t tangibly measure spirit in linear practice. Instead, we can hold the space of nurturing that is required to allow them to be. This creation of space inspires *mutual becoming*. Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of cultivating a skill of “deep listening” accompanied by a “beginner’s mind” open to whatever emerges and unattached to results.⁴⁶ These emergence skills are cultivated by mindfulness which is paying attention without controlling, without judging. Indigenous cultures do this in observation of the natural world. It requires discipline, restraint, openness, and awareness. With this, we can reflect the needs of our own heart’s internal longing into being through the organizational structures we’re in and watch transformation emerge.

⁴⁵ adrienne maree brown, *Holding Change: The Way of Emergent Strategy Facilitation and Mediation* (Consortium Book Sales & Dist, 2021), 13

⁴⁶ Plum Village, “A Beginners Mind for a Beautiful Future | Dharma Talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, 2011-10-02 Magnolia Grove,” YouTube (YouTube, July 22, 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_F_cxM9d5Q.

Melting the Heart

*“You work that you may keep pace with
the earth and the soul of the earth.
For to be idle is to become a stranger unto the seasons,
and to step out of life’s procession, that marches in
majesty and proud submission towards the infinite.*

*When you work you are a flute through whose heart
the whispering of the hours turns to music.
Which of you would be a reed, dumb and silent,
when all else sings together in unison?*

*Always you have been told that work is
a curse and labour a misfortune.
But I say to you that when you work you fulfill
a part of earth’s furthest dream, assigned
to you when that dream was born,
And in keeping yourself with labour
you are in truth loving life,
And to love life through labour is to be
intimate with life’s inmost secret.*

*But if you in your pain call birth an affliction and
the support of the flesh a curse written upon your
brow, then I answer that naught but the sweat of
your brow shall wash away that which is written.*

*You have been told also that life is darkness, and in
your weariness you echo what was said by the weary.
And I say that life is indeed darkness
save when there is urge,
And all urge is blind save when there is knowledge,
And all knowledge is vain save when there is work,
And all work is empty save when there is love;
And when you work with love you bind yourself
to yourself, and to one another, and to God.*

*And what is it to work with love?
It is to weave the cloth with threads
drawn from your heart,*

*even
as if your
beloved were to
wear that cloth.
It is to build a
house with affection,
even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.
It is to sow seeds with tenderness and
reap the harvest with joy,
even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.
It is to charge all things you fashion
with a breath of your own spirit,
And to know that all the blessed dead
are standing about you and watching.*

*Often have I heard you say, as if speaking in sleep, “He
who works in marble, and finds the shape of his own
soul in the stone, is nobler than he who ploughs the soil.
And he who seizes the rainbow to lay it on a
cloth in the likeness of man, is more than he
who makes the sandals for our feet.”
But I say, not in sleep but in the overwakefulness of
noontide, that the wind speaks not more sweetly to the
giant oaks than to the least of all the blades of grass;
And he alone is great who turns the voice of the
wind into a song made sweeter by his own loving.*

*Work is love made visible.
And if you cannot work with love but only
with distaste, it is better that you should leave
your work and sit at the gate of the temple and
take alms of those who work with joy.
For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake
a bitter bread that feeds but half man’s hunger.
And if you grudge the crushing of the grapes,
your grudge distills a poison in the wine.
And if you sing though as angels, and love not
the singing, you muffle man’s ears to the voices
of the day and the voices of the night.”⁴⁷*

I'm hesitant to lend "change frameworks" or other processes that perpetuate linear ideologies and checkboxes. Your heart's internal longing is only known by you; the song that is sung to "wake up the heart;" co-composed by your own dreaming and dance with the world.

However,

In conversation with the community that is interwoven with Newo Global Energy, we asked the question in relation to the beautiful lesson of the *wétiko* spirit:

What is needed to help melt a frozen heart?

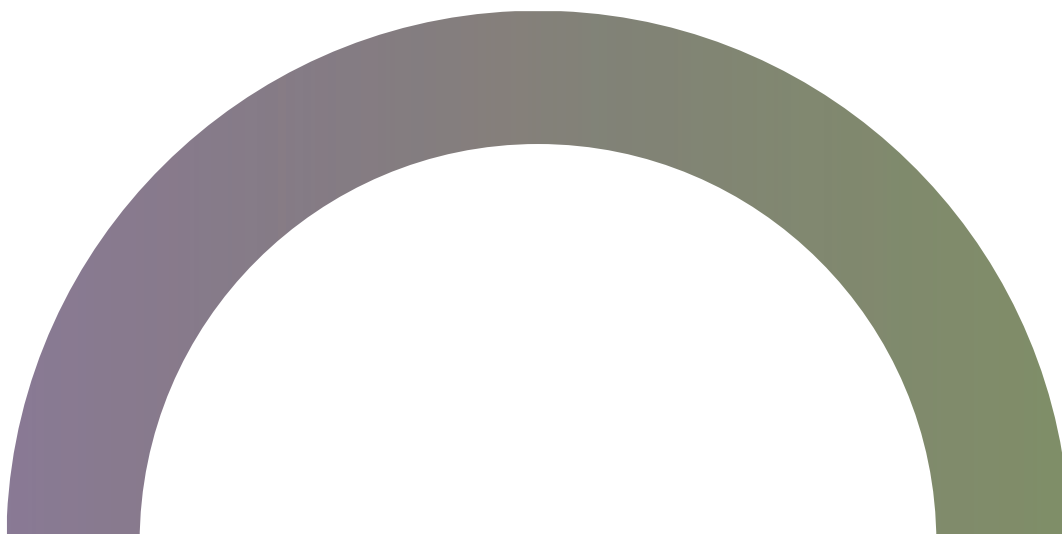
And surprisingly it wasn't better business management (although true, and another paper altogether). It wasn't more money, or better governance, more time off, or shifts in policy.

It was:

Community.
Uncentered, co-led leadership within community
Autonomy within community
Purpose within community
Feeling supported within community
Love within community
Guidance within community
Belonging within community
Boundaries within community
Healing within community
Song within community
Reciprocity within community.
Work within community.

We must engage in mutual becoming, alongside and through community to recognize abundance and honour the gift of awareness of *wétiko*. Through mutual becoming, emergence alongside community is possible.

The Elders have spoken, we may allow emergence by slow dancing with a spiral of lessons, with heart. And with heart and gathered hands, we all sing a new dream into being.



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Endnotes

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- 2 This note was included as provided context, written by Sebastien Rioux, regarding the research question I was presented with. I felt it necessary to include along with my own research on the topic.
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Note - Two loop model revision - Two Loop Life Cycle for Congregations ,” Squarespace, OAD, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f41edbe4b04c1007b7cdfe/t/6050d4a41b8c096b4ffadeef/1615910052711/Two+Loops+Life+Cycle.pdf>.

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