

# Integrating Spirituality and Domestic Violence Treatment: Treatment of Aboriginal Men

Robert Kiyoshk

**SUMMARY.** This article provides a brief reflection on how the Change of Seasons treatment model developed and the reasons for its success with Aboriginal men. Parallels between Aboriginal perspectives, or worldviews, and Ken Wilber's transpersonal psychology, Rupert Sheldrake's fields theory, and Peter Senge's systems thinking are also discussed. Practical rituals and ceremonies that have been successfully integrated into psycho-educational group counselling as practiced in the Change of Seasons model are explained. These musings are included to initiate further dialogue on holistic approaches to counselling and other community initiatives. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Aboriginals, Aboriginal spirituality, group counselling, treatment, spousal abuse, systems thinking

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Address correspondence to: Robert Kiyoshk (E-mail: [mukwamanitou@telus.net](mailto:mukwamanitou@telus.net)).

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***A MODEL FOR WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL<sup>1</sup> CLIENTS***

The Change of Seasons model is a 28-session psycho-educational group counselling model that has been used over the past ten years by the Change of Seasons Society in North Vancouver, British Columbia. Spiritual practices are an integral part of the entire program, and every third session is completely focused on such activities. In 1990, when I first set foot in a meeting of the British Columbia Association of Counsellors of Abusive Men (ACAM), very few Aboriginal people were actively involved in the work of counselling assaultive men. At that time I met Bruce Wood, who had been working extensively with a psycho-educational approach. We collaborated on a model for working with Aboriginal men; the result was the Change of Seasons model, a combination of Bruce's model and Aboriginal cultural healing methods. Since then hundreds of Aboriginal men have participated in the counselling groups, and the model has been adapted for working with Aboriginal women and youth by the Warriors Against Violence Society in Vancouver.

We developed a model for working with Aboriginal men because we felt that models in common usage had much to offer but did not accommodate the particular cultural and spiritual needs of Aboriginal men. Our clients have many issues with mainstream approaches and service providers, all of these issues deriving from historical and contemporary relations with the dominant society's structures and values. Our model has been accepted by Aboriginal clients because it fits with their community's spiritual beliefs and worldviews.

As time passed, I began to realize the importance of being able to articulate for other counsellors the underlying processes of development taking place in the group therapy. This understanding is also essential for our own counsellors, in order to for them to become clearly cognizant of the processes in which they were engaging their clients. Although a client may not necessarily be aware of the treatment theories and processes, it is imperative that the counsellor be totally aware. The approaches of Ken Wilber (1996, 1998a, 1998b), Rupert Sheldrake (1988) and Peter Senge (1990, 1994) are used here to draw parallel between some mainstream approaches and Aboriginal perspectives.

***HISTORY OF OPPRESSION: COLONIZATION AND ANOMIE<sup>2</sup>***

Assaultive men's counselling in the Aboriginal community is a lot different than in mainstream programs. This is because the dynamics

and circumstances affecting the aboriginal population are quite different. Domestic violence statistics in Canadian general population figures show high degrees of domestic assault occurring nationally, while Aboriginal figures show astoundingly higher rates of domestic assault and other forms of family violence (Kiyoshk, 2001). Mainstream figures show perhaps one or three in ten women as victims of spousal abuse; Aboriginal figures run as high as eight and nine out of ten, depending upon the study and location.

The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples did much to emphasize the social and economic conditions that contribute to the serious violence within the Aboriginal population. However, the problem among the Aboriginal population is as serious today as it was when the British Columbia Task Force on Family Violence (1992) submitted its report *Is Anyone Listening?* and the accompanying *Family Violence in Aboriginal Communities* (Frank, 1992). Unfortunately, such studies objectify and quantify abuse without really getting down to the reality of the oppression and its long-term effects on aboriginal people. If one were to conduct substantial research into the effects of historical white-aboriginal relations, the findings might be quite alarming. For example, Dr. Anthony J. Hall, Associate Chair of the Department of Native American Studies at the University of Lethbridge, wrote the following:

Until well into the 1970s, the Canadian government paid the major Christian churches in Canada to conspire actively in the coercive silencing of these Aboriginal languages and preventing Indian children from honouring the Great Spirit in the way of their ancestors.

The history of these Indian residential schools, which existed in the United States but were forced on Indian Country with a singular intensity in Canada, illustrate the very clear existence of government laws, policies and institutions that generated outcomes which clearly lie within the United Nations Convention on Genocide, which was first ratified in 1948 but was not adopted by the USA until 40 years later. Article 2(e) of the Convention defines genocide to include “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” That is precisely what the Indian residential schools did, the receiving group being the Christian churches that ran these organizations.

Moreover, given the high rate of physical and sexual abuse which took place in these institutions, and the fact that the whole

purpose of these Christian institutions was to teach Indian children to despise and renounce their own Aboriginal heritages of language and religion, they easily meet definition 2(b). That provision refers to “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.” Section 2(c) is also applicable. It defines genocide as “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction in whole or in part.” (Hall, 1999, p. 5)

Needless to say, the survivors of this legacy have been traumatized, and it is little wonder that their presenting symptoms are often those of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder as listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-R; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Many Aboriginal men receiving counselling today are survivors of this Residential School Syndrome, or suffer the residual effects of having parents who were survivors or casualties.

### **CULTURAL AWARENESS AND THERAPY**

What makes a good spousal abuse counsellor in the Aboriginal community? Sharing the same cultural background and beliefs is a good starting point. What approaches work best? Circumspect, eclectic and egalitarian are desirable characteristics of an effective approach. Many approaches have been effective in working with Aboriginal men, leading one to conclude that it may well be the therapist who is responsible for the results more so than the particular approach used. In any case, understanding the etiology of an Aboriginal client plays the more significant role. The question of cultural relevance has been posed many times in Aboriginal and cross-cultural settings. Cultural background plays a large part in a client's etiology, and therefore must be considered in the approach to therapy. Aboriginal men can be placed at any number of spots along a continuum to determine where they are in terms of awareness of, or acceptance/non-acceptance of their culture of origin, and to what degree they have been acculturated or assimilated (see Table 1). In forming an etiology and understanding the role of anomie in counselling Aboriginal men, it is important to understand the personal situation of the client in respect to these possibilities, and to remember that perhaps the client does have a drastically different set of experiences that influence their perspectives and circumstances today. In addition, shifts in worldview<sup>3</sup> can occur for a client; change

TABLE 1. Continuum of Cultural Acceptance

<b>Aboriginal:</b>	Has had extensive exposure to aboriginal life and is grounded in aboriginal value systems and beliefs.
<b>Bicultural:</b>	Identity has been nurtured in family and through childhood; functions comfortably as bi-cultural individual (acculturated).
<b>Assimilated:</b>	Aboriginal heritage is peripheral to daily life, and lives primarily in mainstream society.
<b>Between Worlds:</b>	Caught between the expectations, values and demands of two worlds; unable to find a point of balance.

(e.g., from assimilated to Aboriginal) or movement (e.g., from Between-Worlds to Bicultural to Aboriginal) can occur back and forth between categories depending upon situations.

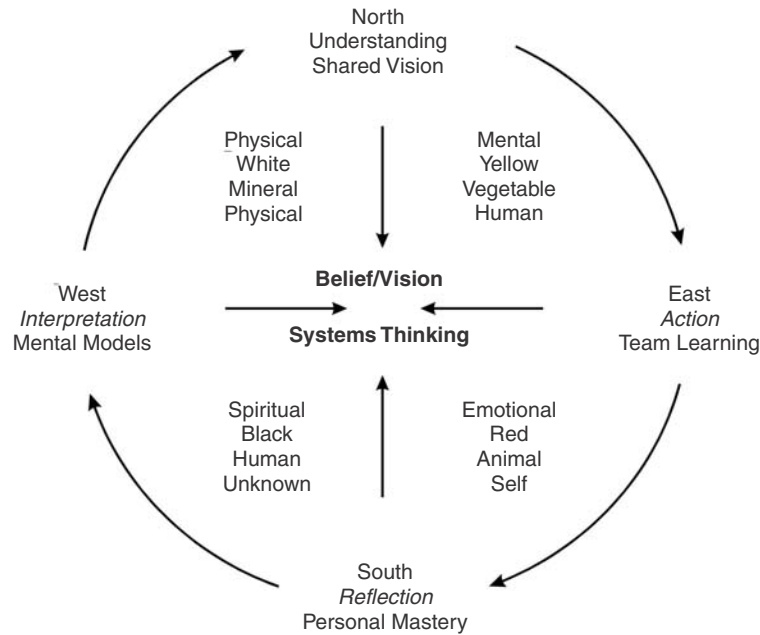
### ***MODELS OF TREATMENT: CIRCLES OF UNDERSTANDING***

#### ***Native American Worldview and Systems Thinking***

A system is a collection of parts that interact with each other to function as a whole. The worldview of Native North Americans is holistic. Systems thinking is also holistic. The two are identical in every respect except terminology. Systems thinking is actually an ancient way of thinking and perceiving the world. Systems thinking has been the underpinning of Native American consciousness and worldview since the earliest times. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1994) uses the term “nature’s templates” in reference to the universal applications and presence of systems principles. Systems thinking considers all factors, forces and players influencing any given circumstance.

A contemporary term and symbol used by Native Americans to describe their philosophies is the Medicine Wheel (see Figure 1). It is a recently developed symbolic tool for explaining the various dimensions of human processes and their relationships to each other. It is widely used in the education of Native Americans who have been deprived of, or lost touch with, their heritage. It is also widely used in the cross-cultural education of those wanting to grasp an understanding of Aboriginal clients. In the Medicine Wheel philosophy, the basis of all thinking and acting lies in the unceasing effort to bring the four worlds,

FIGURE 1. Medicine Wheel



(Integration of Senge, 1990, 1994, and Bopp & Bopp, 1982)

**Belief and vision** occur at the center with the four components of knowledge–action, reflection, interpretation and understanding. These components are transposed with Senge’s team learning, personal mastery, mental models and shared vision, with **systems thinking** as the central factor. This holistic framework is useful to those working in program and community development. Application to program development is discussed at the end of this article.

in whichever dimension they are being expressed, into perfect balance within the developing individual, his or her community, and all of Creation (Bopp & Bopp, 1982a).

Holistic thinking has been the underpinning of Native American consciousness and worldview since the earliest times. Well-known quotes attributed to Chief Seattle focus on the interconnectedness of all things. On the west coast of British Columbia, the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people have an expression “hishuk-ish-ts’awalk,” which translated into English means “everything is one.” The Dakota expression “mitakuye oyasin,” which begins and ends many prayers, translates to “all my relations” in reference to all of Creation, i.e., all beings, past, present and future. A similar notion expressed by Ken Wilber (1998a) is one of

“non-duality,” meaning not dichotomized or fragmented, but inclusive of body and spirit, and even more so, one with the universe. Basically, these terms are all in reference to a way of acknowledging, not perceiving, reality. Wilber (1996) believes: “If we string these orienting generalizations together, we will arrive at some astonishing and often profound conclusions, conclusions that, extraordinary as they might be, nonetheless embody nothing more than our already agreed upon knowledge. These beads of knowledge are already accepted: It is only necessary to string them together into a necklace” (p. 18).

### ***Wilber’s Integral Philosophy***

To understand the whole, it is necessary to understand the parts. To understand the parts it is necessary to understand the whole. Such is the circle of understanding. We move part to whole and back again, and in that dance of comprehension, in that amazing circle of understanding, we come alive to meaning, to value, and to vision: the very circle of understanding guides our way, weaving together the pieces, healing the fractures, mending the torn and tortured fragments, lighting the way ahead—this extraordinary movement from part to whole and back again, with healing the hallmark of each and every step, and grace the tender reward. (Wilber, 1998a, p. 1)

A genuinely holistic approach to viewing life is that espoused by Ken Wilber (1998a) in *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*. Integral means integrative, inclusive, comprehensive, and balanced. Wilber applies this approach to various fields of human knowledge and endeavours, including the integration of science and spirituality. Jack Crittendon summarizes the approach:

Truths from such fields as physics and biology; the ecosciences; chaos theory and systems sciences; medicine; neurophysiology; biochemistry; art, poetry, and aesthetics in general; developmental psychology and a spectrum of psychotherapeutic endeavors, from Freud to Jung to Piaget; the Great Chain theorists from Plato and Plotinus in the West to Shankara and Nagarjuna in the East; the modernists from Descartes and Locke to Kant; the Idealists from Schelling to Hegel; the postmodernists from Foucault and Derrida to Taylor and Habermas: the major hermeneutic tradition, Dilthey to Heidegger to Gadamer: the social, systems

theorists from Comte and Marx to Parsons and Luhmann; the contemplative and mystical schools of the great meditative traditions, East and West, in the world's major religious traditions (cited in Wilber, 1998a, viii-xi).

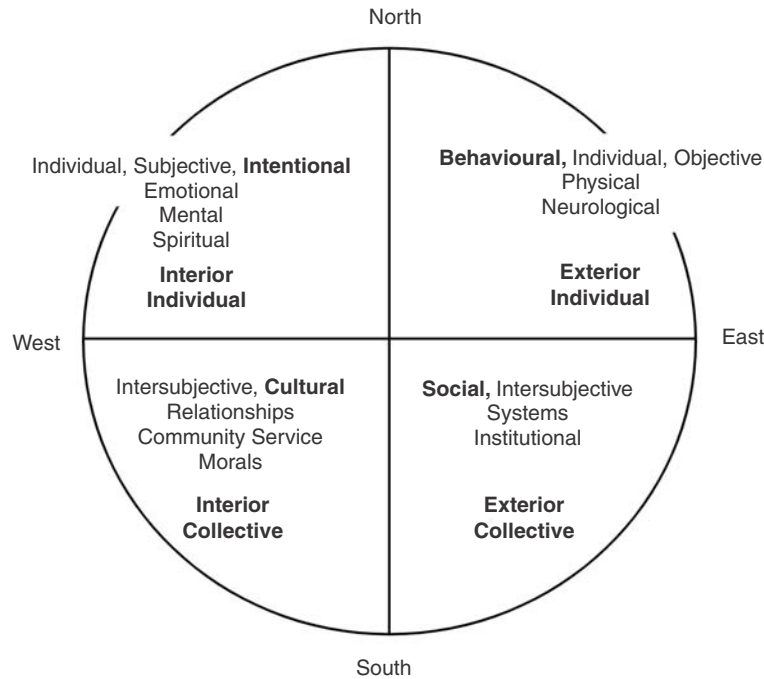
Figure 2 provides an illustration of the various dimensions of Wilber's approach. The approach initially examines the evolution of consciousness, applies and compares this to the discipline of transpersonal psychology, and eventually explores the application of these theories to a host of other beliefs and disciplines.

It is my assertion that Aboriginal worldviews are indeed within the category of what Wilber calls the "perennial philosophies."<sup>4</sup> Perennial philosophies pay particular attention to "spirit,"<sup>5</sup> which is often missing from mainstream counselling approaches. Basically in his "four-quadrants" he has created his own 'medicine wheel' to explain human consciousness. Spousal abuse counselling in aboriginal communities can benefit from an approach that demands a comprehensive holistic theoretical base that underpins the work. The pragmatic work, where theory becomes practice, can then be articulated from such a perspective.

Wilber's approach covers all the major capacities of the "human bodymind" (i.e., physical, emotional, mental, social, cultural, spiritual; see Figure 2). In his research on worldviews, he attempted to find a single and basic "holarchy"<sup>6</sup> that he felt was common across cultures. Of the perennial philosophies worldwide, he distilled four factors that were in common to all. These factors discovered are actually very simple, yet inclusive or holistic. They are the *inside* and *outside* of a holon,<sup>7</sup> in both its *individual* and *collective* forms, and are referred to as the "Four Corners of the Kosmos" (Wilber, 1996, 1998a, 1998b). Aboriginal worldview and symbolism are remarkably similar as evident in the various Medicine Wheel configurations and perspectives. The directions of the medicine wheel are in fact meant to position oneself in the universe, relative to everything else, hence the expression "all my relations," which includes all of Creation, and all creatures, beings and spirits of the past, present and future. Wilber's theory is shown here in the same quadrant-circle configuration as the Medicine Wheel.

Aboriginal perspectives and Wilber's transpersonal psychology emphasize holism, change, and process. Both contend that material reality and spiritual reality are functionally inseparable, and that human beings exist in connection to all other aspects of Creation. Humans are in a process of becoming, and that as humans we transcend the limitations of materiality by virtue of our ability to direct the process of our own be-

FIGURE 2. Wilber's Integral Theory Transposed to the Medicine Wheel



The system is that of a whole person in all his/her dimensions, and is the basis for the study of consciousness and transpersonal psychology (adapted from Wilber, 1996, 1997, 1998a).

coming. Aboriginal worldview is encapsulated in this statement: “The essence of human actualization is the process of coming to know and to love the ultimate unknowns underlying the ordering of the universe. This infinite process is expressed by individuals and by human collectives” (Bopp & Bopp, 1982a, pp. 8).

### *Role of Ritual and Ceremony in Therapy*

Ritual is a significant part of counselling in the aboriginal community. As a counsellor training coordinator I received interesting feedback from our trainees. Trainees were placed in group counselling situations in mainstream agencies and were asked to comment on their experiences. Invariably what they said was missing was a formal opening ritual, such as a “smudge,” a ritual cleansing used to begin most ab-

original counselling circles. Also absent was a symbolic object that embodied spiritual significance and a commitment to honesty, such as an eagle feather. Ritual can be trivialized by those not in touch with the spiritual aspect of existence; however, for cultures with a strong spiritual basis ritual is essential. It is not something that is mystical or impractical, but necessary to establish the tone and energy for the activity to follow.

When rituals and ceremonies are practiced, memory-energies are aroused, come alive, or awaken, as does the possibility for their repetition and replication in both physical and energetic form. In many indigenous cultures it is believed that spiritual energies can be influenced through ritual. The understanding is of oneness within spiritual-material construction, and that each cannot and does not occur without the other in human experience. Indeed the purpose of spiritual ritual is to access, to express, to recreate and experience spiritual energies or fields.

Rupert Sheldrake (1988) refers to the phenomenon that makes the revival of these memories possible as *morphic resonance*. In his theory, a field is a non-material region of influence; however, it can have a physical influence. He defines a morphic field as “A field within and around a morphic unit which organizes its characteristic structure and pattern of activity. Morphic fields underlie the form and behaviour of holons or morphic units at all levels of complexity. *The term morphic field includes morphogenetic, behavioural, social, cultural, and mental fields*” (p. 371). He further states “Fields interrelate and interconnect matter and energy within their realm of influence. Fields are not a form of matter, rather, matter is energy bound within fields” (p. 367). Some examples of fields in physics are gravitational and electro-magnetic fields, and the matter fields of quantum physics.

Central to the concept of morphic resonance is the transmission of forms and behaviours through repetition in time, in a pattern known as “formative causation,” which theorizes that organisms or morphic units at all levels of complexity are organized by these fields. Sheldrake (1988) states, “Morphic fields are shaped and stabilized by morphic resonance from previous similar morphic units, which were under the influence of fields of the same kind. They consequently contain a kind of cumulative memory and tend to become increasingly habitual” (p. 371). It is explanations such as these that make an integral connection possible between spirituality and physical realities.

It is manifestations of these energies and forms Sheldrake is referring to that are awakened when organizations achieve ‘synergy.’ Lloyd

Haraala, an Ojibway elder (personal communication, April 1999) explains that the Eagle Sundance pledge meeting is highly ritualized because “we are trying to get a rhythm going here.” It is these same energies that are awakened when a ceremonial participant has a spiritual experience. ‘Knowing’ in ritual is inherent in custom, tradition and in the continual invoking of energies, as well as in the doing. Certainly some of the great achievements experienced in human systems through true dialogue and principle-centered cooperation are no less spiritual experiences than those occurring in ceremonies. It is for these reasons that sweat lodge ceremonies, pipe ceremonies, and smudges are employed frequently and effectively in the format of the Change of Seasons and other First Nations men’s spousal abuse counselling programs.

### ***Group Facilitator as Therapist and Guide***

The changes a group participant is guided through are part of a quest to achieve a higher level of consciousness. Thus, at the outset it is essential that the counsellor is aware of this: that their role is more than that of didactic educator. Transpersonal psychology can help determine where the damage has been done to a person and to a soul, and it can therefore be helpful in identifying the work that needs to be done to achieve a higher consciousness. Basically, it can identify what work needs to be done to transcend the damage that has occurred. The work needs to be able to move the person through the stages of consciousness not accessible because of the trauma experienced. A crucial part of this journey is to provide access to the stage where spirit is not only acknowledged, but where it can be experienced. Higher forms of consciousness manifest in “issues in social action of mercy and compassion on behalf of all sentient beings” (Wilber, 1998b, p. 8). Likewise, it is the objective of counselling, and the rituals that augment it, to raise the consciousness of clients to a point where they are cognizant of the imbalance in their relationships. This awareness of *conscience* that evolves through heightened experiences of ceremony and ritual provide peak experiences in which participants get a glimpse and taste of what is possible.

Many men perhaps do not relate well to the concept of spirituality that is so often referred to in Aboriginal cultures and traditions. This extraordinary and elusive part of our beings is so closely intertwined with the emotional, psychological and physical aspects that at first it is viewed as something fundamentally different and separate, but it is not. It is a common thread that binds all the other aspects. It is the ever-present element that allows us to appreciate the beauty of a sun-

rise. It is the sentiment that brings sadness to us when the sun is setting, or when we lose a close friend, relative or child. It may be that part of us that hurts when we abuse those we love, telling us that something is wrong and out of balance. It is the mystery that makes our children grow and develop as persons, the energy that makes us perform physical feats beyond our expectations, and the creativity that connects us to others through the spoken word, song, or artistic achievement. Without it there is no real life. Certainly *indigenous* peoples do not have a monopoly on this thing. It is something that can enrich the lives of all people.

***MY PERSONAL CIRCLE OF UNDERSTANDING:  
THE CHANGE OF SEASONS***

When I set out on this journey I had no great aspirations that my work would eventually touch the lives of hundreds of Aboriginal men. I had seen what spiritual involvement could do for others, but at the time was driven by the pragmatic notion that Aboriginal family violence could be addressed in more effective ways than those most widely used at the time. Those approaches were incarceration and disease model alcohol and drug programs. For a long time I was suggesting to others that our Aboriginal cultural and spiritual heritage could change lives for the better. The more I espoused this, the stronger the reality became for myself. The journey I was suggesting for others became a journey of my own, and many of my closest colleagues set out on similar paths.

It is not assumed that clients will immediately experience the higher levels of consciousness attainable through consistent and focused spiritual practice. The role of the therapist therefore is merely to assist clients in taking the first steps on this journey. In retrospect, I feel it is also important as counsellors to map our own development towards spirit, towards peace. What teachers, techniques and rituals helped us on our path? This knowledge can be useful to others. Counsellors must also rise to the challenge of confronting violence in our communities by returning to the spiritual ways of our ancestors. As leaders and guides for others we must develop those qualities and virtues in ourselves that promote the creation of healthy Aboriginal families and communities.

***Rituals and Ceremonies in Change of Seasons Model***

Ceremonies and rituals that effectively augment group counselling are the focus of this section. I will briefly touch upon those that are most

common. These are the smudge, the talking circle, and the sweatlodge purification ceremony. Brief mention is made of the pipe ceremony.

In the manual *A Change of Seasons: A Training Manual for Counselors Working with Aboriginal Men Who Abuse their Partners/Spouses* (Wood & Kiyoshk, 1998), the cultural content is integral to the program. Every third session is a cultural activity that augments the psycho-educational group format. However every session includes cultural and spiritual ritual and symbolism.

All the rituals mentioned are performed within a circle, either standing or sitting. The men's groups, which are the focus of this chapter, incorporate elements of the smudge as well as the talking circle; therefore, those topics will be covered first.

### *The Smudge Ceremony*

A smudge ceremony is conducted at the beginning of each group session. A smudge is a means of cleansing oneself and one's surroundings of negative energies and thoughts. The primary element necessary for this ritual is an herb for burning as an offering. In most common use are sage, sweetgrass, cedar and juniper. The herb is lighted with a wooden match so as to smolder in a container such as a seashell, a flat or hollow rock, or similar vessel. Participants stand in a circle, and the person leading the ceremony will fan the smoldering herb with an eagle feather or fan. As he passes from person to person, each person wafts the smoke over themselves with their hands in a motion similar to washing themselves. As each person does this, the leader holds the feather or fan over their heads. Each person is involved in a silent prayer or meditation at this time; as prayer is a private, it is impolite for others in the circle to be staring at one another. Sometimes participants smudge their personal effects such as medicine pouches or jewelry. The herbs used are held to be sacred by those performing and/or participating in the ritual, and are considered to be gifts from the Creator. Each of these herbs has a special significance to the tribes in the territory to which they are indigenous. These gifts are from the plant world, and are given so curing and healing of the mind, body and spirit may occur when respectfully used. The smoke signifies that one's prayers are being sent to the Creator. This ritual is performed prior to any event of significance to ensure success and productivity. It can be performed in private, particularly to greet a new day, or whenever it is needed. In the case of a men's group, it is done to create a positive atmosphere and to ensure that one's words are forthcoming and truthful.

*Talking Circle*

This ritual is used in the personal sharing segment of each session. A talking circle is simply a gathering of people who have something of importance to talk about. Sometimes it is referred to as a sharing circle. When people come together in this way, respectful conduct is imperative and a given. The leader of the circle is generally a person held in high regard by those assembled. Hopefully this will be the case in an abusive men's group. In a talking circle, everything said is held to be strictly confidential. The leader usually describes the process and protocol of the circle. An object of some spiritual significance, sometimes called a "power object," is held by the speaker; for example, an object such as an eagle feather or a rock can be used. Customarily in a talking circle, people share whatever is on their mind and they are allowed to continue uninterrupted for whatever time they require. Others do not get up and leave or talk amongst themselves while sharing is occurring. When finished, the speaker utters words of closure and passes the power object to the person on their left. This person will then share, or pass the object with acknowledgment by offering words such as "all my relations" or "thank you" in their native tongue. Opting out however, is not always an option in a men's group.

The key difference in a men's group, however, is that after sharing a man will place the sacred object in the center of the circle and he then will be given feedback and/or confronted on what he has shared. Also, he will be required to stick to the topic at hand, usually concerning his abusive behaviour. In these instances, the sacred object of the culture is used to facilitate truthful sharing, and cannot be used to avoid feedback and confrontation. Generally, both types of sharing are preceded by a smudge.

*The Sweatlodge Ceremony*

The sweatlodge ceremony, a rite of purification, is probably the most common of all Native North American ceremonies. It is used for physical, mental and spiritual cleansing. It is usually done in preparation to any major undertaking, such as Sundancing or Fasting. The lodge itself is circular in layout, with a dome-like shape. The lodge is usually no more than four feet high and varies in width from one culture/society to another. The direction in which the door of the lodge faces also varies across cultures, usually predicated by the season or society. The number of saplings, and the type of wood used to construct

the frame is also determined by the society and purpose of the ceremony. There are many variations, but willow is most common. The frame was traditionally covered with hides, but today tarps and blankets are used. The lodge is completely dark within to allow the Spirits to visit when summoning prayers and offerings are made.

A fire is built at a specified distance from the lodge. This distance is stipulated by the society. In this *sacred fire*, rocks are heated until they are red hot. These rocks are referred to as *Grandfathers* in the native tongue. The number of rocks varies according to the purpose of the ceremony. Participants usually smudge and/or offer tobacco in the sacred fire before entering the lodge. The rocks, once heated, are brought into the lodge and placed in a pit in the center. All movement within the lodge is in a clockwise direction, as well as movement outside the lodge. Once all participants have taken their place, prayers are offered verbally and/or through songs, and herbs are sprinkled upon the red hot Grandfathers. Water then is splashed upon the rocks causing steam and intense heat within the lodge. The ceremony generally consists of four rounds, but I have been in ceremonies that have involved two and three rounds. A round is a time of praying, singing and chanting, and is dedicated to a specific purpose. At the end of the round, the door flap is opened for a breath of fresh air. On some occasions a sacred pipe is used in the ceremony.

What is shared during the sweatlodge ceremony is viewed as sacred and therefore is not for discussion outside of the lodge, except perhaps when consulting with an Elder or spiritual leader. Within the lodge, a participant can remove the masks that are worn in daily life, and is open to receive healing from the spiritual energies. The sweatlodge is viewed as a womb, and participants are renewed through ritual. This is an ideal place for releasing tension, shame and guilt, and an appropriate place to make or reaffirm commitments to positive change. This ritual is introduced with a didactic overview of the ceremony to prepare those who are not familiar with the practice. It is effectively used after particularly difficult sessions, such as sessions involving discussion of the most violent incident or the family of origin, or when the woman has shared her story.

### *The Pipe Ceremony*

The smoking of the sacred pipe is viewed as a prerequisite to all events of significance by all Nations that have the pipe as part of their traditions. Perhaps the strongest message that First Nations can offer the

mainstream society is embodied in this ritual. The pipe bowl and stem are viewed as being female and male respectively, and joining of the two is essential for the successful and natural completion of any task. It is symbolic of male and female forces working together for the betterment of humanity. Out of the joining of these two separate entities comes the potential for the creation of something that is more than the sum of the parts. In this ceremony lies the potential for the creation of humanity, for the creation of Life. Likewise, effective First Nations approaches to dealing with family violence are cooperative in nature rather than adversarial. This differs from the time-proven ineffectiveness of approaches that employ methods such as jail therapy and shame-basing. The pipe carrier offers prayers to the Creator, by offering the pipe to the six directions of the universe. The smoke from the tobacco takes one's prayers to the far-reaching corners of the universe, to the *Great Mystery*.

This brief description of some of the ceremonies included in the program for aboriginal men was written to provide information about cultural tools that may complement existing programs. Numerous other ceremonies exist, such as ceremonial dancing, fasting, and cold water purification baths in mountain streams and pools. However, a culturally appropriate program consists of more than merely beginning sessions with a smudge or a prayer. A minimum of paper work is given out on cultural teachings. Concepts can be explained in charts and diagrams in black and white, but the real learning and *transformation* comes from involvement. The real long-term goal of this type of treatment is for the men to practice these things daily throughout their lives.

### ***SYSTEMS THINKING IN COMMUNITY AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT***

A system is a collection of parts that interact with each other to function as a whole. We may associate the word "system" with everyday terms such as social system, nervous system, legal system, or information system. For many years, scientists believed the best way to learn about something was to take it apart and find out what it was made of. This approach has been somewhat useful in physics, biology and chemistry. However, when this approach is taken to its extreme it is known as "reductionism," meaning that something is nothing but the sum of its parts. In the 1920s, a group of scientists who realized the shortcomings of this approach began a serious study of the *patterns* of interactions

taking place between the parts, in fact looking at the *organization* of things. An interesting discovery was that no matter how different the ingredients of different systems looked, they were put together according to the same *general rules of organization*. This new field of study provided a linking together of numerous fields of knowledge, showing what they had in common. It became known as “*general systems theory*” (Kauffman, 1980). This knowledge underpins today’s technological and human systems, and provides important direction for managing massive growth and change.

System thinking is a solid foundation for effective Aboriginal program and community development initiatives. The work of Peter Senge and the MIT-grounded systems thinking applied to organizational development gained widespread recognition as a result of the book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Senge, 1990). This book presents the basic criteria necessary for the creation and maintenance of a *learning organization*. These “disciplines” are: *personal mastery*, *mental models*, *building shared vision*, and *team learning*. The fifth discipline, *systems thinking*, integrates the other four into a coherent body of theory and practice. These disciplines working in synergistic fashion create a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality, and how they can change it. In such an organization, a shift in thinking occurs that is conducive to heightened experiences of creativity, and learning takes on a meaning well beyond its conventional usage (Senge, 1990). The five disciplines advanced by Senge are briefly summarized here.

*Personal Mastery* is learning to expand our personal capacity to create the results we most desire, and creating an organizational environment that encourages all its members to develop themselves toward the goals and purposes they choose. Personal mastery means developing both people skills as well as skilled knowledge and managerial competency.

*Mental Models* is reflecting upon, continually clarifying, and improving our internal pictures of the world, and seeing how they shape our actions and decisions.

*Shared Vision* is building a sense of commitment in a group, by developing shared images of the future we seek to create, and the principles and guiding practices by which we hope to get there.

*Team Learning* is transforming conversational and collective thinking skills in terms of open dialogue, so that groups of people can reliably develop intelligence and ability greater than the sum of the individual members’ talents.

*Systems Thinking* is a way of thinking about and a language for describing and understanding, the forces and interrelationships that shape the behaviour of systems. This discipline helps us to change systems more effectively, and to act more in tune with the larger processes of the natural and economic world (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994).

### ***Culturally Appropriate Initiatives***

Community and program development work requires that we know the history and dynamics of the local area. Aboriginal communities are a collective of the individual experiences of its members. As they are also systems, systems thinking approaches are suitable and applicable to them.

Historically, the systems perspectives integral to Aboriginal peoples' existence were of a pragmatic nature. The following quote from Vine Deloria (1995) demonstrates their practical application:

Indians came to understand that all things were related, and while many tribes understood this knowledge in terms of religious rituals, it was also a methodology/guideline which instructed them in making their observations of the behavior of other forms of life. Attuned to their environment, Indians could find food, locate trails, protect themselves from inclement weather, and anticipate coming events by their understanding of how entities related to each other. (p. 57)

This notion of practical, relational interdependence needs to be revisited in our Aboriginal communities. An excellent resource for the practical applications of systems theory for building community is *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* (Senge et al., 1994).

## **CONCLUSION**

The First Peoples of North America have held out against the ravages of colonization for several centuries. The survival of the indigenous peoples in these demanding circumstances can be largely attributed to their adaptability to ever changing environments. Having made it this far through repeated cycles of crisis and renewal, the current challenge

is to live within the structures of modern day society and contribute to positive change. The challenge is not only to survive, but also to thrive in a complex world of government and politics, business and economics, education and technology, while restoring and maintaining customary values and traditions. The key to survival has been a worldview that does not separate spirituality from everyday life. This characteristic is also what ensures success in counselling assaultive men.

## NOTES

1. Aboriginal: Terms often used in reference to Native North Americans are *indigenous*, *Native*, and/or *Aboriginal*. In Canada a widely used term is *First Nations*. For clarity and to appeal to an international audience *Aboriginal* is used here most frequently. Other synonymous terms will be used only in the context of quotes or titles.

2. Anomie: a loss of identity resulting in a sense of alienation and confusion.

3. Worldview: 1. Cosmology, study of the order of the universe. 2. a perception of the world in which one lives (Corrigan, 1995). The term *worldview* will be used here to describe cultural perspectives, or ways of perceiving reality.

4. Perennial philosophy: “the worldview that has been embraced by the vast majority of the world’s greatest spiritual teachers, philosophers, thinkers, and even scientists. It’s called ‘perennial’ or ‘universal’ because it shows up in virtually all cultures across the globe and across the ages” (Wilber, 1998b, p. 7), and, “that absolute Truth which is timeless, formless, and spaceless, radically whole and complete, outside of which nothing exists—a Truth that can be known, but which can never be adequately or fully captured in any form, doctrine, system, philosophy, proposition, thought or idea . . .” (Wilber, 1998a, p. 60).

5. Spirit: “the upper reaches of consciousness itself . . . a Spirit that shines forth in every I and every we and every it, a Spirit that sings as the rain and dances as the wind, a Spirit of which every conversation is the sincerest worship, a Spirit that speaks with your tongue and looks out from your eyes, that touches with these hands and cries out with this voice—and a Spirit that has always whispered lovingly in our ears: Never forget the Good, and never forget the True, and never forget the Beautiful” (Wilber, 1998a, pp. 35-36).

6. Holarchy: in systems theory, all complex hierarchies are composed of holons, or increasing orders of wholeness, hence holarchy is the word for a *growth or actualization hierarchy*.

7. Holon: a whole that is a part of other wholes, e.g. a whole atom is part of a whole molecule; a whole molecule is part of a whole cell, and so forth.

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