Article

Joseph Naytowhow: *waniskâ* “Wake up!” to Wholeness through *nêhiyawîhtwâwin*

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Abstract: In this article, the authors present the teachings of *nêhiyaw* (Cree) Emerging Elder and Knowledge Keeper Joseph Naytowhow. In a celebrated *nêhiyaw* (Cree) fashion, storytelling and language are used as examples of a non-linear and sometimes complicated journey back to self, culture, nature and healing. Against the background of being kidnapped, imprisoned in a religious institution, and robbed of all-things *nêhiyaw* (Cree), this article offers a sense of Joseph Naytowhow’s journey back to intimacy, love, and affection which aids in one’s search for emotional safety. Joseph utilizes *nêhiyawîhtwâwin* (Cree worldview and culture) knowledge tools such as dreaming to aid in his journey back to *nêhiyawîhtwâwin* (Cree culture) and *nêhiyawêwin* (Cree language). From a residential school internee to a leader and emerging Elder, he notes the importance of mentors in a relational approach to healing. This article provides an invitation through “the sunrise song” to “Wake up!” and create a more respectful and reciprocal world of internal wholeness.

Keywords: Cree; indigenous; elder; healing; storytelling; ceremony; affection; dreams; mentor; song; wake up

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1. Introduction

In alignment with the spirit of Indigenous research methods, epistemology and worldview, research can be considered a ceremony (Wilson 2008). Ceremony, comprising a number of rituals, involves a logical and directional flow. After moments of feeling “part of the whole”, “all-that-is”, and feeling an increased life force (*mamahtâwisiwin*)¹ (Ermine 2000, p. 124 cited in Richardson 2016), one arrives at the time of sharing, celebrating and then closing the circle. Sharing takes place through storytelling and the making-meaning of each person involved. Humans are touched by some part of the story; what speaks to them becomes part of them, often making them feel more whole (King 2003; Richardson 2004). Engaging in such activities together is what binds a community, offering inclusion and belonging (Richardson and Reynolds 2014). These are all aspects of healing as they offer the opportunity to share about the past, in the present, and to ‘make peace’ or integrate past hurts.

1.1. The Beginning

The first step of a ceremonial practice is an introduction: to the land and to each other. This article focuses on *nêhiyaw* (Plains/Woodland Cree) Joseph Naytowhow, emerging Elder and Knowledge Keeper from the Sturgeon Lake First Nation Band in Saskatchewan/*kisiskâciwani-sîpiy* (meaning “swift-flowing river”) in Northern Turtle Island (the land referred to as Canada). This article is based on Joseph’s transcribed teachings from a First Peoples Studies class and guided by oral teachings received in the Restoring Our Roots and

¹ Words in *nêhiyawêwin* (the *nêhiyaw*/Cree language) are not capitalized (Vowel 2016, p. 13). In accordance with this writing system and *nêhiyawîhtwâwin* (Cree worldview), the authors do not capitalize *nêhiyaw*/Cree words within sentences or titles.

The Land is Our Teacher Indigenous youth retreats of 2018 and 2020, gatherings organized by Dr. Elizabeth Fast. The article is written on the unceded lands of Kanien'kehá:ká, who have been the protectors and custodians of the lands and waters since time immemorial. Tiohtià:ke or Teionihthiohtiá:kon (also known as Montreal) loosely translates from Kanien'kehá to "where the group divided/parted ways". As such, Tiohtià:ke/Montreal is considered home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis as a gathering point. Akin to this, the Indigenous Healing Knowledges project, led by Catherine Richardson Kinewesquao at Concordia University, aims to share dynamic and diverse Indigenous / *nêhiyawîhtwâwin* knowledges related to healing the human body, communities and Mother Earth. In recent years, Joseph has played an important part in bringing Indigenous and cultural knowledge to the Concordia community. He is also a teacher, uncle, and cultural mentor to a number of the faculty in a number of research projects.

1.2. The Essence

Through setting the stage of Joseph's approach, beginning with storytelling, an understanding of Joseph's approach to healing can be found. Informed by a Cree knowledge system (*nêhiyawîhtwâwin*) steeped in a number of particular earth/land-based concepts, he attends to his healing from a residential school internee to a mentor and Emerging Elder. Ultimately, Joseph has the cultural authority to share about experiences such as *miskâsowin*: a term that represents the act of finding one's sense of belonging (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000). By tending to his wounded 'inner child', he describes his experience with restoring *sâkihiwêwin*, or being in a state of love, affection, devotion (Naytowhow 2020). Restoring affection opens up a space for Joseph—cultural and emotional safety in which one can be guided by love within relationships. Joseph notes the importance of emotionally safe spaces for assisting other Indigenous Peoples to process experiences of colonial violence and to recover from the harm that was done. In essence, he helps others (re)create a new life and live more solidly in the present by seeing the gifts bestowed upon them by *kisê-manitow* (the Creator/Great Spirit). This includes Joseph as a 'dream-worker' studying and seeing ancestral and spiritual messages offered in dreams. The practice of dreaming can also refer to envisioning a preferred future. Hence, guided by mentors and *wâhkôhtowin* or interconnectedness and kinship beyond immediate family (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000), it becomes clear that healing requires reciprocal care and kindness from others. Rather than an individual undertaking, Joseph notes that reciprocal healing aided by mentors provides increased trust and openness. This intergenerational healing in turn helps future generations to live more peacefully and transcend colonial violence, bringing a new spirit, *mamahtâwisiwin* (a positive, loving energy), into social interaction. Lastly, Joseph's teachings relate to *miyo-pimâtisiwin* where he talks about restoring what was taken and living a good life in balance, in regard to the self (emotional, spiritual, physical, mental) and in relation to others—to Mother Earth and to more-than-human kin (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000; Hart 2002). Hence, Joseph's teachings show how Indigenous and *nêhiyaw* epistemologies are enacted through processes such as song, storytelling and ceremony while being grounded in ancestral methods of healing that have actively existed since time immemorial.

2. Prelude: Storytelling as Methodology

It is important to first note that stories have long been considered medicine by Indigenous researchers and theorists (King 2003, p. 92; Richardson 2004). Prior to the advent of colonial research, storytelling was a way to connect and bridge gaps of understanding between Elders (knowledge keepers) and children. Stories are often told in a circle, revealing how this holistic tool of transferring knowledge builds new levels of interconnected community, or *mamahtâwisiwin* (Ermine 2000, p. 124 cited in Richardson 2016). Joseph Naytowhow reminds us that stories are alive:

You heard the old people a long time ago and they planted a seed. And that seed was a story. And when that story awakens at some time in your life, or in the

future, then it's time to tell it. Never too soon or never too late. It's now. That's the way storytelling works. That's the old way of telling sacred stories or stories based on experience. (Naytowhow 2020)

Joseph continually circles back to the feelings encapsulated within a story, based largely on the emotions that spring up from the metaphor of a story's seed. As such, providing a prelude into the Cree epistemology of storytelling aligns with Joseph's sentiment that a story is the seed to further awakening. Beginning with an explanation into the aspects of storytelling tied to healing can bring further understandings into those who were robbed of agency as a child due to colonial imposed assimilation agendas. Tom McCallum (sweat lodge and Cree ceremonial leader) notes how the spiritual essence of a ceremonial experience, such as story, is similar to how "music transcends language because it's a feeling" (Iseke 2013, p. 46). In direct comparison to an art form such as music, one can understand how a story takes on a life of its own. Regarding a story as a living entity provides insight into the relationality of all beings according to a Cree ontology (Wilson 2008). In this vein, Joseph begins his conversation by sharing a recent story:

On the first day of snow it was not very cold. It was actually quite warm. It was kind of like minus nine or something but the snow was warm. And I walked out and put my first footsteps on the snow. It's like when it rains in spring. I go out and just let the rain fall on me. Those are things that I do every year. Just something tells me *kikâ wayawêwin* (to go outside), *kika-atamiskawak kiskikaw* (go outside and greet the day). So after I went and did that I was inspired to write that little piece and it basically says:

I'm really grateful that you've arrived again. Winter spirit, come inside. Come and visit me. Come and visit me like the olden days when the old women and old men used to invite the grandchildren or anybody to come and join in on the storytelling session or just to come in and do a smudge and start off with some kind of conversation. (Naytowhow 2020)

By self-locating within the context of a recent experience, Joseph provides an example of his daily practice through storytelling. As such, one can understand his position, feelings, and recent reflections. Joseph's reflections provide insight into how "narrative research involves locating oneself in terms of personal view, network of relationships, and cultural position" (Reissman 1993 vii cited in Richardson 2004, p. 94). In connection to reflection, Joseph's process of coming back into his self is aided by the practice of storytelling in which the energy gained from personal experiences of healing are told through speaking. As such, he provides insight into how narrative research can be a tool to build compassion with those who experienced violence. Hence, storytelling is central to healing (Wilson 2008).

Although stories take on a life of their own through transmission, they do not exist purely outside of an individual. Thomas King's assertion that "stories are all we are" deepens the truth that stories make up the essence of one's being due to the relationship building within receiving and reflecting a story (King 2003, p. 2). An aspect of understanding the internalization of story is through "narrative imagining" (Couros et al. 2013). It is evident that part of Joseph's healing process is through the oral retelling of stories, whether they be from his personal reckonings as a child in residential schools, deprived of love and affection, or his daily processes interacting with the world around him. These stories can become cross-ancestral when they connect to a larger tapestry of intergenerational healing. Subsequently, telling one story adds to the ancestral chain of a life-long narrative as an Indigenous knowledge keeper (Richardson 2004, p. 17). In other words, individuals "tell a story to make sense of another story", contributing to the historic makeup of a community (Couros et al. 2013, p. 551). This also connects to how Joseph's personal reflections and stories on coming into one's self extends into communal healing, aiding others in the search for belonging or *miskâsowin*. Cree knowledge keeper and academic, Neal McLeod, notes the importance of "lived narratives" in the collective sense of identity-making as a *nêhiyaw* individual, as "collective memory is an ongoing narrative from which truth emerges"

(McLeod 2007, p. 39). As such, one can understand how narrative imagining builds collective codes of meaning through deepening one's sense of self.

This article will explore Joseph Naytowhow's storytelling and narrative imaginings comprised of both memory and knowledge that aids his approach to healing. In understanding imposed colonial violence through narrative tools, Joseph comes to the vital understanding that these past events were not his fault. Author Thomas King posits that the colonial attack on Indigenous peoples can be encapsulated, for Indigenous folks, by saying 'once upon a time' or "you'll never believe what happened" (King 2003, p. 1). In this post-Truth and Reconciliation era in Canada, it is no longer relevant to try to convince readers of the realities of colonial violence, only to say that it was done, and the consequences linger on (Richardson and Reynolds 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015; Million 2015; Kaye 2016). Joseph emphasizes that Indigenous Peoples globally are dealing with the legacy of these wrongs on a spiritual level (L'Hirondelle et al. 2011, p. 42). His teachings also point to the reality that the colonial agenda of assimilation did not end when the last residential school was closed in 1996, but continues today through the harm and violence inflicted by the child welfare system (Yee 2011 cited in Clark 2016). If readers seek to inform themselves on the history, a multitude of literature exists on the topic of settlement and land theft (Vowel 2016; Churchill 2001), the interment of Indigenous children in residential schools (Wade 1997; Churchill 2001; Vowel 2016) and child welfare atrocities (Strega et al. 2012; Richardson and Wade 2008; Vowel 2016; Yee 2011 cited in Clark 2016). This article aims to pull attention away from unjust and violent colonial practices towards the love and care found in Indigenous healing practices.

3. Love and Affection as Resistance: *sâkihiwêwin*

Through a spiritual search for healing from colonial assimilation tactics such as residential schools, Joseph notes the role of resistance as restoring one's ability to heal. In order to work out of researching solely on the negative which gives "more power to disharmony," one must apply a response-based approach to state-instituted violence (Wilson 2008; Richardson and Wade 2008; Wade 1997). Response-based practitioners believe that "alongside each history of violence and oppression, there runs a parallel history of prudent, creative and determined resistance" (Wade 1997, p. 23). Subsequently, notions that portray Indigenous Peoples (among others) through the lens of passivity are disproved by multiple acts of resistance threaded through history (Wade 1997; Richardson and Wade 2008; Million 2015). This is exemplified through a Cree participant who responded to Joseph's note on the impact of residential schools on her family. She notes that although her family was submitted to this violence, it also made her a better mother as "what [she] did not receive [love and affection] is exactly what [she] poured into [her] children" (Naytowhow 2020). Ultimately, she committed to resisting what she had experienced as a child. This also connects to challenging the notion of the failure to protect, in which Indigenous parents are viewed as ill fit to care for children (Nixon et al. 2017; Miller 1996). Working outside of victim-blaming through honoring the responses of people experiencing violence reasserts dignity, which has been robbed through the continued process of colonialism (Richardson and Wade 2008; Strega et al. 2012; Fast and Richardson 2019).

Joseph notes that healing takes time. In response to the participant who noted her experiences as a mother, he shared that he and his mother (who is 81 years old) just started saying 'I love you' (Naytowhow 2020). This serves as a microcosm of the lack of affection that Joseph and his family were taught through colonialism, and the responses of healing that follow. Relating to the colonial "myth of indifferent parents" in which children mistakenly equated being sent away as a lack of love from their parents, it is evident that the oath to resisting residential schools through asserting love is a mark of healing (Miller 1996). The longevity of Joseph's intergenerational healing also aids in understanding the complex inward feelings and emotions in response to the outside existential, environmental, and historical conditions (Randall 1995 cited in Richardson 2004, p. 90). This deepens the truth that the "the personal is the social" and vice versa (Richardson 2004, p. 91).

4. Healing the Inner Child through Love, Affection and Reasserting Safety

Within the backdrop of surviving residential school and taking the oath to resist what was modelled to Joseph at a young age, there lies what Joseph was deprived of: *sâkihiwêwin*, or being in a state of love, affection, and devotion (Naytowhow 2020). He notes:

I must have wondered about love and affection because deep in some cavern of my mind and heart, I had an idea there was something missing. (Naytowhow 2020)

Joseph's recollection provides insight into how the condition of being taken and imprisoned in a state-institution complicates one's relationship with love and affection. The added weight of being robbed of any example or feeling of love reveals that one's despair points to what they long for (Todd and Wade 1994; Wade 1997; Richardson and Wade 2008). This understanding of despair aligns with the reality of residential school conditions, as between 48% and 70% of children were sexually abused and denied all forms of love: emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental (Feldthusen 2007 cited in Richardson and Reynolds 2014). This number could be as high as 100% in some schools (Richardson and Reynolds 2014).

Connected to this, Joseph reflects on the memory that he did experience affection from his grandmother prior to being forcibly taken into residential schools. As such, utilizing memories of love strengthens the ability to understand when it is being taken away. One can furthermore distinguish between relationships built on love and affection, as opposed to relationships of neglect or abuse, which serves as the definition for the broken settler-colonial state's relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

This leads one to question: how can one reconcile with an abuser? (Kaye 2016). Framing residential schools through the lens of abuse further exemplifies how violence must be properly named in order for safety to be restored, otherwise the cycle of abuse circulates (Wade 1997; Richardson and Wade 2008, 2010). Since the institutional assimilation tactics through residential schools stemmed from the government's apathy towards love bonds in order to access resources and community, a large part of healing lies in restoring what was taken away (Clark 2016, p. 3). This is exemplified through Joseph's "never ending search for truth to get the answer to what it must be like to be kissed" (Naytowhow 2020). He notes that in terms of finding guidance within this quest for restoring a connection to love, he takes comfort in the "Great Mystery". Cree scholar Alex Wilson notes that the Great Mystery affirms "that we are connected to everything by spiritual energy, joining us in a limitless circle that encompasses the past, present and future" (Wilson 2015, p. 1).

In terms of restoring affection, Joseph takes comfort in the Great Mystery, affirming that "moments of mystery will eventually reveal themselves" (Naytowhow 2020). As a method of reflection, Joseph shares a story of the first time he was kissed by a young red-haired girl:

She leans over and without hesitation, she leaned over like a willow blown by the wind. Her soft, sweet kiss touched my cheek. *ocêmit, she kissed me*. If I turned a few shades of red, I don't remember. It happened so fast. I was loved. Whether I knew that, it didn't matter at that moment. This unsuspected and simple act, my inner child welcomed. It was perfectly timed by the universe because I've never forgotten it ever. To be kissed is one thing. But to be kissed when there is no recollection of this ever happening as a child, added to my life immensely. I needed and cherished the memory of the kiss from my red haired Irish lass to this day. The universe has an unusual way of nurturing a tormented little soul of which I was one of the many who was separated from their mommies and daddies and kohkoms [grandmothers]. Thank you little red haired Irish girl. For a child who had been abandoned and traumatized due to government regulated removal from home, community and loving relationships, that was the best gift you could and did give me. That kiss would carry me for years and ultimately

transcended my fear, shock and grief. Softening my extremely difficult life as a child. (Naytowhow 2020)

Alike to the story of Charlie Brown and the Little Red Haired Girl, in which Charlie Brown yearns for the Red Haired Girl's affection, Joseph's recollection provides insight into what occurs when someone experiences love again. Specifically, Joseph's story reasserts hope for healing the inner child. Since Joseph and other survivors of government-instituted violence took an oath of restoring healing mechanisms, colonial narratives on passive victimhood can be disproved (Richardson and Wade 2008; Strega et al. 2012; Fast and Richardson 2019). Joseph's active restoring of affection reveals the central core of healing, namely repairing what was taken away. When Joseph was selected as being worthy of love and care, he was shown that he is valued human being. Even further, his intentional witnessing as an adult of his experiences as a child challenges the notion that hurt people always perpetuate and hurt others. Instead, Joseph took the oath to reasserting spiritual connectedness through relationships built on love and affection. Since he remembers his first experience of receiving love and affection, it serves as a prototype for future relationships, creating an act of not only personal healing, but also social repair. This deepens the perspective that there is still potential for healthy relationships within families that have experienced violence (Wade 1997; Richardson and Wade 2008, 2010; Fast and Richardson 2019).

Joseph also notes that love and affection adds to one's ability to relax and breathe in relation to others. This connects to how healing the inner child is through the assertion of cultural and emotional safety. Richardson and Wade (2010) note that "cultural safety relates to the possibility of an Indigenous person or member of a minority group being treated with acceptance and equanimity, and where racism or prejudice will not be encountered" (Richardson and Wade 2010, p. 143; Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen 2017). Expanding this definition of safety into one that includes the ability to enjoy life within a space can hint to the powerful joy within healing. As Joseph resists the colonial government's imposed abuse he experienced as a child through restoring affection and connection, he dedicates himself to creating more respectful, inclusive, and reciprocal relationships. Ultimately, structuring relationships with love and affection aids in the pursuit of safety and does not let the perpetrator of violence have the last word.

5. Dreams as a Gift for Guidance and a Renewed Life

Although the child welfare system tends to impose individualizing prescriptions to heal violence (which may or may not increase safety), a way to "structure safety" in accordance with Indigenous values and protocols is putting up a dreamcatcher over the child's bed (Richardson and Wade 2008; Richardson and Reynolds 2014; Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen 2017). This also connects to how Joseph considers his *nêhiyaw* (Cree) community to be "Dream Spirit People" (Naytowhow 2020). Dreams contribute to the Great Mystery, an essential aspect of Cree knowledge (Wilson 2008; Wilson 2015). In connection to dreams, Joseph shares a story about an elderly man he met at a university who kissed him. Perplexed by the reasoning behind this sudden expression of affection from a stranger, Joseph slept that night and dreamed of the older man "being pushed out to the ocean. He was saying farewell. He was letting [Joseph] know he was on this journey" (Naytowhow 2020). Subsequently, Joseph's experience with gaining information from his dreams about this man's life coming to a close, shows how one gains hints into the Great Mystery through utilizing their gifts. For Joseph, his gift is that of dreams, which helps him find his place (*miskâsowin*) within what Littlebear (2000) calls the "spiderweb of relations" (p. 81).

Joseph's approach is not dissimilar to that of Tom McCallum, Cree spiritual leader and former residential school internee, who notes that healing is not just about ceremony, sundance, and being a leader, but that everyone has a powerful gift to share and implement into their life (Iseke 2013). Within this expansive definition of what it means to be a 'healer', learning about integral spiritual gifts adds to the strength of a collective healing. The

extension of personal to communal healing is central to Joseph's journey back to wholeness. This relates to how people can find their sense of belonging, known as *miskâsowin*, within the Great Mystery through utilizing their gifts (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000).

However, harnessing one's spiritual gifts may be difficult within the settler-colonial context which attempts to rob Indigenous Peoples, especially children, of their gifts. This dilemma is explored through Metis young adult novelist, Cherie Dimaline's, book "The Marrow Thieves" (Cherie 2017) in which the non-Indigenous population has lost the ability to dream. The only people able to still dream are Indigenous children and Elders who are consequently hunted for their bone marrow (where the ability to dream is allegedly stored). Dimaline's dystopian novel serves as a metaphor for the colonial infatuation with sacred things (such as dreams) and touches on modern-day cultural appropriation of Indigenous knowledge and ceremony.

Beyond this, Dimaline also touches on an aspect of healing that Joseph notes: nothing can be truly lost, but can be dreamt up again, as explored through language flowing out of Joseph's heart. Joseph mentions that language can be regarded as a soothing salve for safety. Joseph notes:

When you haven't written or spoken in a long time, when you start writing, it seems like the flow starts to come through your body. When I write in my language [*nêhiyawascikêw*], I go to the beat of my drum. I just go with the wind. (Naytowhow 2020)

Joseph's observation that the language flows through him from his body reaffirms that the cultural knowledge stolen from him never left his body fully. Instead, one can understand that this knowledge became balled up inside of him, unable to be expressed safely within residential schools. This connects to the *nêhiyawêwin* term, *pawâkan*, or a dream spirit that will return so long as one is open and not indoctrinated to the point of closing that doorway to the spirit world. This is what is referred to by *nêhiyawak* (Cree people) within a *nêhiyawîhtwâwin* (Cree worldview). As such, writing can be regarded as a tool for insight into the interior world that can then manifest into the exterior world. Creating, dreaming, and articulating one's reflections is an act of breathing life back into one's ancestral knowledge. This concept is explored in Christopher Auchter's film, "Now is the Time" in which Haida carver Robert Davidson reflects on the experience of "blood memory" as a contributing factor to his artistic practice (Auchter 2019). This concept of "blood memory" signifies more than merely biological inheritance, but rather the internalized knowledge gained through community (Mithlo 2011). As a result, building culturally safe spaces creates an environment in which this ancestral knowledge, memory, and dreams can be expressed without consequence or fear (Richardson and Wade 2008). Since the knowledge, language, and experiences serve as a soothing tool for understanding when abuse is being inflicted upon one's heart, Joseph notes the role of spiritual guidance in helping Indigenous Peoples and specifically children build a relationship with their internal gift. Articulating one's reflections on healing through writing in ancestral language can aid in the larger process of dreaming up a more respectful, safe, and kind world free from abuse.

6. Mentored by Elders: A "Spiritual Family"

This healing journey, Joseph shares, cannot be done alone as a young person. In terms of assistance, Joseph notes that experiences as a sweat lodge leader have shown him that many people need to take their own personal time to cleanse and pray in order to utilize their gifts and help others. This connects to the concept of "wounded healers" which Inuit Arctic-protector and political representative, Sheila Watt-Cloutier notes in her book "The Right to be Cold" (Sheila 2015). Cloutier's "wounded healers" terminology denotes the fact that even people who are in 'healer' positions also are on their own healing journeys. The honest acknowledgement that even mentors have backgrounds of hurt works outside of the "colonial code" in which the mentor, healer, or therapist is seen as the perfect expert (Todd and Wade 1994). Instead, approaching mentorship from a collaborative point of

view in which empathy is built on a mutual experience of coping with wounds provides a more interconnected and relational method to healing.

In what Joseph calls a “Spiritual Family”, there is an inherent relationality to receiving and reflecting healing teachings. This relates to *wâhkôhtowin* or interconnectedness, and kinship beyond immediate family (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000). Joseph notes that kinship extends to a chosen family in which there is a reciprocal exchanging of knowledge. In specificity to knowledge, Cree Elder Willie Ermine affirms that *mamahtâwisiwin* is “the Cree word referring to the interconnectedness of all of life, everything and everyone. This experience is knowledge” (Ermine 2000, p. 106 cited in Richardson 2016, p. 258). Joseph often notes that the story of his journey from a residential school internee to an Emerging Elder and knowledge keeper is not only ‘his’, but also accredited to the past mentors and Elders who passed on healing teachings. This sentiment of relationality also “provides examples of the kinds of factors and forces that play a role in how the world is ordered” (Young et al. 2015, p. 17). According to Joseph, gaining guidance within the Great Mystery starts when one becomes a helper to Elders and teachers. By admitting that one cannot embark on this journey alone, an individual opens themselves up to the expansive knowledge of teachers from every part of life, no matter how short or long these lessons last. Joseph asserts that when one uses their gifts as a helper mentored by Elders, they are on the path to Eldership themselves.

Mentorship also connects to the need to rework the connotation of listening. Michelle LeBaron, a law professor at the University of Victoria, affirms that “the first step in truly listening is silence, not just refraining from speaking but ‘being silence’” (Regan and Taiaiake 2014 cited in Smith et al. 2015). LeBaron’s call for reworking the epistemology of listening parallels that of Inuit poet Taqralik Partridge’s note that she “can tell you how quiet is not silent/but yields to gentler sounds” (Partridge 2020, p. 19). The need to embody silence in order to lend oneself to gentler sounds connects to how listening is an integral aspect to building reciprocal and respectful relationships as a helper to a mentor. Ironically, people are mostly silent when they are asleep; Joseph calls the people to wake up, appreciate one’s life and the new day. Appreciation and gratitude are important guiding pebbles on the road to healing.

7. Conclusions: *waniskâ*, “Wake up!”

In terms of resistance to colonial inflictions of pain, a restoration of emotional and cultural safety is needed. These soothing tools of story, affection, dreams, and ceremony create a space in which the legacy of healing for future generations can thrive. Specifically, mentorship through Elders shows children that the world can truly be beautiful. This results in *miyo-pimâtisiwin*, which relates to restoring what was taken and living a good life, in balance in regard to the self (emotional, spiritual, physical, mental) and to the land (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000; Hart 2002). As such, resistance to colonialism is to create beautiful spaces in which conceptions of Indigenous ways of living—built on reciprocity, equality, and respect—are included. One way this can be actualized is through song, as exemplified through Joseph:

*‘waniskâ pêwapan ôma
sâsay pîyêsîsak nikamowak
pêmiyohnâkwan kitaskînaw
Wake up! The sun is rising
Already, the birds are singing
It is beautiful throughout our land
(Naytowhow 2020)²*

² As an emerging Elder, Joseph has recorded *waniskâ* as a Cree traditional in his *nikamok* album in 2000 with Cheryl L’Hirondelle. It was composed back in the 1940’s and the original composer is unknown.

Through Joseph's call to "Wake Up!", connections to the living spirit of healing are revealed. Waking up, facing the new day, and expressing gratitude as a *nêhiyaw* (Cree) person points to what those resisting colonialism long for: beauty and peace in one's heart and the land. As a result, the spiritual connections that live through all things within the Great Mystery can be discovered through hints provided by Indigenous knowledges. These tools driven by storytelling, an oath to resist, and dreaming up a more inclusive reality tells the story of coming back into one's integral gifts of healing and wholeness.

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"It's not over and so far we've been guided and protected every step of the way."

kamiyo kisikan kīsikaw pimohtew

(Spirit of the Day Guides Me)

-Joseph

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