

EVERYDAY

Intentions

Indigenous Wisdom for Healing, Integration
and Intentional Living

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Disclaimer

The information contained in this book is intended for educational, cultural, and personal reflection purposes only. It is not intended as medical, psychological, psychiatric, or legal advice and should not replace consultation with qualified professionals.

The ceremonial teachings, stories, and practices shared in this book reflect the lived experience, teachings, and relationships of the author. Indigenous Nations are diverse, and these teachings should not be interpreted as representing all Indigenous Peoples or ceremonial traditions.

For my children,

May you always remember that healing begins in relationship: with yourselves, with one another, with the land, and with all our relations.

Publisher's Note

This book is offered with deep respect for the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, family members, teachers, and communities who have shaped my understanding throughout my life.

The teachings shared here arise from lived experience, ceremony, relationships, and years of academic and community work. They are not presented as universal Indigenous teachings, nor as replacements for learning directly from Elders or one's own community.

Every Nation carries its own laws, stories, languages, and ceremonial traditions. My hope is that these pages encourage readers to deepen their own relationships. Expanding relationships with themselves, with the land, with Spirit, and with the communities to which they belong.

May these teachings be received with humility, respect, and gratitude.

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PART I:

CHAPTER ONE



This Book Is My Offering

I wrote this book for those who feel called toward something they cannot quite name.

Perhaps you are returning to your roots. Perhaps you are preparing for your first ceremony. Perhaps you have already walked many ceremonial paths and are wondering how to carry those teachings into everyday life. Or perhaps you simply know there must be another way of living, one rooted in relationship rather than separation.

Whatever has brought you here, welcome.

This book is my offering.

It is not a replacement for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or the living traditions held within Indigenous communities. It is not a shortcut to ceremony or culture. Rather, it is a companion for the journey, weaving together Indigenous teachings, ceremonial wisdom, personal reflection, and the Heart Resonance Framework to support the lifelong work of integration.

Ceremony does not end when the fire grows quiet or when you leave the lodge. In many ways, that is when the real work begins. The teachings ask to be lived. They ask to become part of how we walk upon the land, how we care for our relationships, how we respond to suffering, and how we return, again and again, to right relationship with ourselves, others, Spirit, and Mother Earth.

My own path has unfolded across many worlds. I have spent years in academia, eventually earning a PhD, while also walking a deeply personal path through ceremony, healing, and relationship with Spirit. Like many Indigenous people, I inherited both the gifts of my ancestors and the wounds left by colonization. Much of my life has been devoted to understanding how those truths can exist together and how healing becomes possible without leaving any part of ourselves behind.

Throughout that journey, one guide has remained beside me.

The wolf has been a guide in my life for many years. As a child, I dreamed of wolves and of shifting into wolf form, long before I understood the significance of those experiences. When I was fourteen years old, the spirit of the wolf came to me, and over the years continued to appear in dreams, visions, ceremonies, and moments of quiet knowing. Through that relationship, I came to understand that there is a wisdom deeper than fear, deeper than certainty, and deeper than the stories we inherit about ourselves. My hope is that this book encourages you to deepen your own relationships with Spirit, your ancestors, and the guides who walk beside you. The practices shared here have helped me heal in ways I never imagined possible, and it is my hope they support you on your own journey as well.

Through my relationship with the wolf, I have learned loyalty to community while remaining true to my own spirit. I have learned courage without domination, strength balanced by humility, fierce

protection of what is sacred, and the wisdom to listen before acting. Above all, the wolf has reminded me that healing happens through relationship. We are not meant to walk this path alone.

Whether the wolf is one of your own teachers or another guide walks beside you, I hope this book helps you remember something that has always lived within you. The wisdom you seek is not somewhere outside yourself waiting to be found. It grows through relationship with the land, with ceremony, with your ancestors, with Spirit, and by listening to the quiet voice of your own heart.

If this book offers anything, I hope it offers a place to begin, or perhaps a place to begin again.

May these pages become a companion as you learn to live the teachings, not only in ceremony, but in every ordinary moment that follows.

Welcome to the journey.

CHAPTER TWO



The Medicine Wheel

The Medicine Wheel: Seeing Life Through the Sacred Circle

"Everything begins and returns to the circle."

Before we begin walking together, I want to share one of the teachings that has shaped almost every part of my life.

The Medicine Wheel is far more than a symbol. It is a way of understanding ourselves, our relationships, our communities, and our place within Creation. It reminds us that healing is rarely about fixing one problem. Instead, healing asks us to step back and look at the whole picture.

Medicine Wheel teachings are shared in many forms among Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island. Every Nation carries its own teachings, stories, ceremonies, and ways of understanding the circle. While the teachings differ, many share a common understanding that life is lived through relationship, reciprocity, and balance.

THE MEDICINE WHEEL

A FRAMEWORK FOR LIVING IN BALANCE



ABOVE – THE GREAT MYSTERY (SKY)
BELOW – MOTHER EARTH
ALL AROUND – OUR RELATIONSHIPS

By honouring all directions—Above, Below, and Within—we remember that everything is connected. The Medicine Wheel teaches us to walk in a good way, with respect, gratitude, and reciprocity.

The Medicine Wheel is a sacred teaching that helps us understand the circle of life and our place within it. It invites us to live in balance with ourselves, each other, and all of Creation.



NORTH – SPIRITUAL

The place of wisdom, ancestors, and inner knowing. Guided by the energy of Winter and the element of Earth.



EAST – MENTAL

The place of new beginnings, ideas, and clarity. Guided by the energy of Spring and the element of Air.



SOUTH – PHYSICAL

The place of growth, action, and strength. Guided by the energy of Summer and the element of Fire.



WEST – EMOTIONAL

The place of introspection, dreams, and healing. Guided by the energy of Fall and the element of Water.



CENTRE – SELF

The place of balance, harmony, and connection to all that is.

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The four directions invite us to see ourselves through four interconnected dimensions:

The Mind – our thoughts, learning, beliefs, and understanding.

The Heart – our emotions, relationships, compassion, and ability to love.

The Body – our physical well-being, actions, work, and connection to the earth.

The Spirit – our purpose, ceremony, intuition, ancestors, dreams, and relationship with Creator.

Many Indigenous Nations also recognize teachings that extend beyond the four directions to include Above, Below, and the Centre. These are not simply locations in space. They are living relationships that invite us to remember our place within Creation.

Above reminds us to lift our eyes beyond the horizon and remember that we live beneath an ancient sky. The stars have guided travellers, marked the seasons, and witnessed countless generations before us. Above is our relationship with Creator, with the sky world, with the moon, the sun, and the mysteries that cannot always be understood through reason alone. It is a reminder that not everything can be measured or explained. Some things can only be experienced with humility, gratitude, and wonder.

Below calls us into relationship with Mother Earth. Every step we take rests upon her generosity. She feeds us from her soil, offers medicines through her plants, quenches our thirst through her waters, and shelters us within her forests and mountains. We often speak of walking upon the land, yet the truth is that the land has carried us since the moment we were born. Long before we learned to speak, she was already teaching us through seasons, storms, rivers, and stones. One day, when our journey in this life is complete, she will welcome us home once more.

At the Centre stands the human being. Not above Creation. Not outside it. Within it.

The Centre reminds us that our lives unfold through relationship. Every choice we make ripples outward, touching our families, communities, the animals, the waters, the plants, and the generations yet to come. We are participants in an intricate web of life, not separate observers looking in from the outside. Our well-being cannot be separated from

the well-being of the world around us because the relationships themselves are what sustain life.

Across Turtle Island, every Nation carries its own Creation Stories, each rooted in its own language, lands, and sacred responsibilities. Some Nations tell of Sky Woman descending from the heavens, gently carried by the birds before finding her place upon Turtle's back. Others speak of humanity emerging through earlier worlds, each one preparing the people for the responsibilities of this one. There are many stories, each complete within its own tradition, yet together they share a profound understanding: human beings have always belonged within a living community that includes the land, the waters, the animals, the plants, the ancestors, and the spirit world.

These stories are not simply explanations of how the world began. They are teachings about how we are meant to live within it.

This is perhaps the greatest gift of the Medicine Wheel. It offers perspective.

When life feels overwhelming, when grief settles heavily upon the heart, when relationships become strained, or when we find ourselves uncertain of the next step, the circle invites us to pause before reacting. Rather than asking whether we are succeeding or failing, it asks gentler questions.

What am I seeing?

What am I missing?

What within me is asking to be heard?

As we sit with these questions, we often discover that the answer is not where we first expected to find it.

Our body may be weary while our spirit remains resilient.

Our mind may be crowded with worry while our heart longs for stillness.

Our spirit may already know it is time to step into something new, while our body clings to the familiar because change feels uncertain.

The Medicine Wheel reminds us that imbalance is not failure. It is information. Every season of life brings movement. Sometimes one part of ourselves naturally calls for more attention than another. Rather than meeting ourselves with criticism, the circle teaches us to respond with curiosity, compassion, and honesty.

Healing is not the pursuit of perfection. Balance is not a destination we reach and remain forever. Life continues to move, relationships continue to evolve, and we are continually invited to find our footing again. Returning to balance becomes its own ceremony, one we practice throughout our lives.

For this reason, the Medicine Wheel forms the foundation of this guide.

As you move through these pages, you will return to the circle again and again. Some chapters may soften the heart and offer comfort where it has grown weary. Others may challenge familiar ways of thinking and invite new understanding. Some practices will encourage you to care for your physical body through simple, intentional acts, while others will invite you into deeper relationship with spirit through reflection, ceremony, dreams, and quiet listening.

Gradually, almost without noticing, you may begin to see your own life differently. The circle becomes more than an image on a page. It becomes a way of understanding your experiences, your relationships, your joys, and your struggles. You begin to recognize where you stand today, where healing is gently calling you forward, and where your gifts are waiting to be expressed.

Most importantly, you begin to trust that every part of yourself has a place within the circle.

Nothing needs to be discarded. Nothing needs to be hidden.

The Medicine Wheel does not ask you to become someone new.

It simply invites you to remember who you have always been.

Next Step: Your Medicine Wheel Self-Assessment

On the following pages you will complete your first Medicine Wheel Self-Assessment.

Think of it as taking a photograph of your life today.

Months from now, after working through these teachings and integrating them into your daily life, you will return to this same exercise.

You may be surprised not only by what has changed, but by how differently you now see yourself.

The circle has a way of revealing growth long before we recognize it ourselves.

Questions:

- 1) Answer the four questions and rate your feelings from one to five.
 - a) On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents a high level of stress and 5 being calm: how would you rate the current state of your mind?

Answer:

- b) On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents feeling a significant pain and discomfort versus 5 health and vitality: how would you rate the current state of the health of your body?

Answer:

- c) On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents feeling extremely sad and 5 is happy: how would you rate your current emotional state?

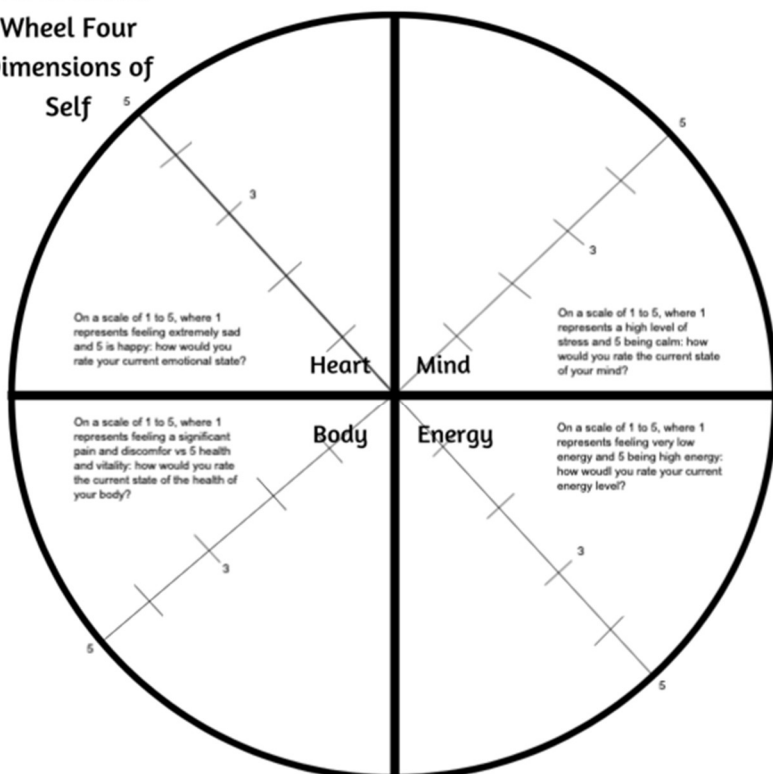
Answer:

- d) On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents a low level of energy and 5 having high energy: how would you rate your current energy level?

Answer:

- 2) Plot those points on the Medicine wheel.
- 3) Connect each dot.
- 4) In your journal (or here) comment on the current balance of your dimensions of self? Are there any areas that are very low?
- 5) In your journal (or here) if any area is low (under 3) write down how you would like to change these areas to increase them. What are ways that you could increase your energy, mind, emotions or physical health? It's important to make these ideas simple and achievable.

**The Medicine
Wheel Four
Dimensions of
Self**



Adapted for Heart-Mind Online from <https://opentextbc.ca/abeol4/medicine-wheel/>

Reflection

Take a moment before continuing.

Without judging yourself, ask:

Which part of my life feels most balanced today?

Which direction is quietly asking for my attention?

There are no right or wrong answers.

There is only the next step around the circle.

The journey begins exactly where you are.

Beginning Your Journey

“Healing doesn’t happen all at once in a single ceremony. It grows bit by bit, built on those little promises we make to ourselves every single day.”

Congratulations since you’ve just wrapped up your first Medicine Wheel Self-Assessment. Before you rush ahead, give yourself a minute. Sit with what you discovered instead of jumping straight into analysis. You don’t have to figure out what it “means” just yet. Simply look at the circle you drew, notice what stands out, and meet it honestly, without judgment.

Remember, there’s no such thing as a perfect Medicine Wheel. None of us shows up to this work fully balanced. We each carry our own histories—our celebrations and our heartaches, our natural talents and our stubborn wounds, the questions that keep us up at night and the dreams that get us out of bed in the morning. Some parts of our lives we’ve paid careful attention to; others we’ve left sitting in the corner for so long they’ve become almost invisible, waiting quietly for us to notice.

Maybe your spirit feels buzzing with energy, but your body is begging for a nap. Maybe your heart is soft with grief, while your mind races at a hundred miles an hour. Maybe your friendships and your home life seem solid, but somewhere deep down you sense that something’s shifting. Or maybe, for the first time in ages, you’ve simply allowed yourself to admit exactly where you are. And that act of clear-seeing and really naming your truth that is huge. It’s usually the very first nudge toward real healing.

A lot of our pain comes from believing we ought to be somewhere else. We look around, compare ourselves to others, criticize the parts of us that still feel cracked or incomplete. But healing never asks us to pretend

we're already fixed. It just wants us to be brave enough to tell ourselves the truth with kindness.

Awareness is where every journey begins.

Long before I came to understand this, I used to think transformation happened right in the middle of the ceremony itself. I expected a sudden, world-altering vision or some magical moment that would flick a switch and rewrite my life story. And don't get me wrong, a well-held ceremony has the power to crack open your heart, to reveal things you'd forgotten or never dared to imagine, and to remind you who you really are beneath the busyness of the world. But ceremony isn't the finish line. It's an invitation, a doorway. What happens after you step through that opening: that's what turns insights into lasting change.

That's why getting ready matters so much. Before you head into any ceremony, retreat, pilgrimage, or big life transition, you can't predict exactly what Spirit will offer you. You can't ask for specific visions or guarantee particular outcomes. But you can prepare your body, mind, and heart to receive whatever comes with humility, courage, and an open heart. Preparation is an act of respect—for yourself and for the unseen world. It tells everyone, "I'm here. I'm listening."

And you don't have to do anything complicated. Real preparation lives in ordinary moments. It's choosing a meal that nourishes instead of one that's just quick. It's drinking enough water. It's stepping outside first thing in the morning to breathe in the air. It's putting your phone down long enough to hear the birds. It's saying thank you before you eat. It's going for a walk with no destination. It's carving out a few minutes of stillness, even when your to-do list is a mile long.

These little practices might seem insignificant, but they start shifting you long before you even arrive at ceremony. They quiet the mind. They soften the heart. They strengthen the body. They teach you how to pay

attention. And paying attention by truly noticing what's happening inside and around you that is one of the best medicines there is.

Lots of people show up hoping for an overnight miracle. Occasionally, it does happen. Maybe one vision dissolves years of confusion. Maybe one encounter with Spirit lifts old fears and leaves you feeling reborn. But most often, healing moves more like this: the ceremony plants a seed, and at first nothing seems to change. Days go by, then weeks, then months. And then: one afternoon while you're doing dishes or stuck in traffic, something clicks. A dream you wrote down months ago suddenly makes sense. A conversation that used to bring on anger now only brings calm. You set a healthy boundary without rehearsing it first. You notice you're thanking the land in your own mind or letting gratitude bubble up more easily.

Those little shifts are not small. They show that the ceremony is alive inside you. Healing rarely comes with fireworks. More often it arrives as quiet proof that you're becoming someone who responds to life differently than before.

That's why I encourage you to start a personal practice right now, before your journey even begins. Not because you have to earn the ceremony or prove your worth. But because when you build a steady rhythm in daily life, the teachings have somewhere to take root.

Think of it like gardening. You can't make a seed sprout by checking on it every five minutes. You prepare the soil, you water it, you care for it regularly, without much fanfare, life begins to emerge. Your practice works the same way.

Perfection isn't the goal. Relationship is. Pick simple habits that genuinely feed your well-being, not the ones you think you "should" do. Keep what already feels good, and gently add one or two new rituals

that resonate and feel doable. Let them blend into your days until they no longer feel like chores, but like coming home to yourself.

Healing is rarely found in spectacular, one-time events. More often it grows quietly, one intentional choice at a time, through the small promises we honor for ourselves every single day.

Ideas for Your Daily Practice

Your personal practice might include:

- Breathwork
- Meditation or quiet reflection
- Prayer
- Journaling
- Listening to music that helps you feel grounded
- Creating a ceremony playlist
- Spending time on the land
- Walking beside rivers, lakes, or the ocean
- Watching sunrise or sunset
- Yoga or mindful movement
- Regular physical exercise
- Smudging or cleansing rituals
- Sweat lodge, sauna, or purification practices
- Flower baths, mineral baths, or time in natural waters
- Fasting or simplifying your diet when appropriate
- Meeting with an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, therapist, or trusted guide

- Participating in a healing circle or support group
- Reading books that nourish your spirit
- Learning through courses, podcasts, or thoughtful conversations
- Massage therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic care, physiotherapy, or other supportive health practices

There is no perfect routine.

Choose what helps you become more present, more grounded, and more fully yourself.

Creating a Map for Change

Once you have taken an honest look at your Medicine Wheel, you may already know where your attention is being called. There is often one place that quietly asks to be seen. It might be your physical health, relationships, your connection with Spirit, or simply the pace at which you have been moving through life. You do not have to fix everything at once. In fact, trying to do so usually leaves us feeling discouraged before we have even begun.

Healing has taught me something much gentler.

Real transformation rarely arrives through dramatic declarations or ambitious plans that ask us to become an entirely different person by next Monday. It grows through small, intentional choices that are repeated with care until they become part of who we are. The practices that shape our lives are often so ordinary we hardly notice them at first. Yet it is these quiet moments, practiced again and again, that slowly change the direction of our lives.

One deep breath before your feet touch the floor each morning.

A ten minute walk after dinner.

An evening each week without technology.

The difficult conversation you have been postponing because your heart knows it is time.

Choosing to speak to yourself with the same kindness you offer someone you love.

None of these actions seem extraordinary on their own. Yet every one of them is a promise. Each time you keep that promise, you strengthen something within yourself. Trust begins to grow. Your mind, body, heart, and spirit learn that your intentions can be relied upon.

If you have ever made New Year's resolutions that lasted only a few weeks, you are not alone. Many of us have been taught to create goals that are so large they become overwhelming before we even take the first step. We measure success by how quickly we arrive rather than by how faithfully we continue walking.

I have found it much more helpful to begin with what feels possible today.

Ask yourself, *What is one small thing I can do consistently that will move me toward the life I want to live?*

If you can answer that question honestly, you already have a place to begin.

One framework that many people find useful is called SMART goals. While the name comes from the business world, the principles themselves can be surprisingly helpful when approached with gentleness rather than rigid expectation. A meaningful goal is usually specific enough that you know exactly what you are committing to. It allows you to notice your progress over time. It is realistic enough that you can succeed without exhausting yourself. It reflects the person you are becoming rather than someone you think you should be. And it

gives you a simple timeframe that encourages consistency instead of urgency.

The framework matters far less than the spirit in which you use it.

These goals are not another test to pass.

They are not another opportunity to criticize yourself when life becomes complicated.

They are acts of self-respect.

Every promise you keep to yourself strengthens the relationship you are building within. Over time, those promises begin to ripple outward into every other relationship you hold. You become someone who trusts your own word. Someone who knows that lasting change is not built through intensity but through steady, compassionate practice.

As your journey unfolds, return to these intentions often. You may discover that some practices have become effortless while others no longer fit who you are becoming. You may find that Spirit gently redirects your path, inviting you toward something you had not considered when you first began. Allow that to happen. Healing is not about clinging to a plan. It is about learning to listen.

The Medicine Wheel reminds us that growth is rarely a straight line. We revisit familiar places throughout our lives, but we never return as the same person. Each time we come back to the circle, we carry new understanding. We see what we could not see before. We recognize strengths that were quietly growing beneath the surface. We discover that even the places where we once struggled have become teachers.

This is the rhythm of healing.

Not a race toward perfection, but a lifelong return to ourselves, one intentional step at a time.

REFLECTION



Looking at your Medicine Wheel, which one or two areas of your life are asking for your attention right now?

What is one small practice you can realistically commit to over the next 30 days?

What support will help you stay committed to this practice?

What kind of person are you becoming through these daily choices?

Preparing Your Heart

Understanding What Brought You Here

"Long before we choose the path, the path has already begun choosing us."

I have often wondered whether any of us truly find our way to ceremony by chance.

Looking back over my own life, I cannot point to a single moment and say, *That was the beginning*. Instead, I see a trail of moments, some beautiful, some heartbreaking, that slowly shaped the person I was becoming. At the time they seemed disconnected, each carrying its own questions and struggles. It was only years later that I realized they belonged to the same story. They were quietly preparing me for teachings I had not yet received and relationships I had not yet come to understand.

I have come to believe that many of us arrive at ceremony in much the same way.

Some are brought here by grief that feels too heavy to carry alone. Others come because illness has changed the way they understand their bodies, or because anxiety, depression, addiction, or exhaustion has made it impossible to keep living as they always have. Some arrive after losing someone they loved. Others come after discovering that success, achievement, or the life they worked so hard to build somehow failed to fill the emptiness they carried inside.

For some, the path begins with curiosity. A book appears at the right moment. A conversation lingers in the heart. Someone speaks about ceremony, and something deep within quietly responds, even before the mind understands why.

And sometimes there is no explanation at all.

There is only a feeling.

A quiet knowing.

A sense that something is calling your name, asking you to step toward a life you cannot yet see but somehow recognize.

If you pause for a moment and gently look back over your own life, you may begin to notice that this journey did not begin when you picked up this book or decided to attend a ceremony. It may have begun years ago, long before you realized you were walking this path.

Perhaps it began with someone who loved you deeply and showed you what kindness looked like.

Perhaps it began with someone who wounded you and unknowingly became one of your greatest teachers.

Perhaps it began with a dream that refused to leave you, a question that would not stop returning, or a moment that quietly altered the course of your life.

There are experiences we understand immediately, and there are others that reveal their meaning only after years have passed. We spend so much of life trying to make sense of what has happened to us, only to discover that understanding often arrives in its own time.

Whether you understand your journey through the language of Spirit, destiny, synchronicity, soul agreements, or simply the unfolding of a human life, every experience has shaped the person sitting here today. Every joy has opened your heart in some way. Every sorrow has asked something of you. Every relationship, every unexpected turn, every unanswered question has become part of the path beneath your feet.

Nothing you have lived has been wasted.

That does not mean everything happened for a reason, nor does it ask you to be grateful for experiences that caused harm. Rather, it recognizes that we are always becoming. Even the moments we would never choose can, over time, deepen our compassion, strengthen our resilience, or awaken a longing for a different way of living.

Before entering ceremony, I believe it is important to pause long enough to acknowledge the road that has brought you here.

Not to become trapped in your past.

Not to relive every painful memory.

Not to explain away every decision you have made.

Simply to witness your own story with honesty and compassion.

So often we rush toward healing without taking the time to honour the person who survived everything that came before it. Yet the version of you sitting here today deserves to be seen. They carried you through every disappointment, every celebration, every heartbreak, every unexpected gift, and every moment when they kept going even though they were unsure of the next step.

The pages that follow are an invitation to bear witness to that journey.

There is no right way to complete this exercise.

You may write only a few sentences, or you may find yourself filling page after page. You might write in paragraphs, create a timeline of important moments, sketch images that words cannot capture, compose poetry, or simply make a list of memories as they rise to the surface. Trust the way your own heart wants to speak.

This journal belongs to you.

Everything you write here is for your own healing and understanding. You are under no obligation to share these reflections with anyone. If,

in time, you choose to speak with an Elder, a Knowledge Keeper, a therapist, a trusted facilitator, or a close friend, you alone will decide what feels right to share and what remains a conversation between you and your own heart.

The purpose of this exercise is not to create a perfect narrative of your life.

It is to sit beside your own story with kindness.

To look at the person you have been without turning away.

To recognize the courage it has taken to arrive at this moment.

Again and again, I have witnessed something remarkable. Long before ceremony begins, healing often starts the moment we stop running from our own story. When we become willing to witness ourselves with compassion instead of judgment, something within us softens. The heart opens just enough to receive what comes next.

Perhaps that is where every journey truly begins.

Not with answers.

But with the quiet courage to see ourselves as we are, and to trust that it is enough.

Chapter Summary

Every meaningful journey begins with a single moment of honesty.

Throughout this chapter, you have been invited to slow down, become present, and gently look at where you are today. Not where you wish you were. Not where others expect you to be. Simply where your own life is asking for your attention.

The Medicine Wheel reminds us that healing is not about fixing ourselves because we are broken. It is about restoring relationship.

Relationship with our body, our heart, our mind, our spirit, with the land beneath our feet, and with the countless relationships that shape our lives. Like the seasons, these relationships are always changing. There will be times when one direction calls more strongly than another, and that is part of being human.

You have explored your own Medicine Wheel, reflected on the experiences that have shaped your journey, and begun creating a personal practice that can support you before, during, and after ceremony. These are not exercises to complete and forget. They are companions you can return to throughout your life. Each time you revisit them, you will see yourself with new eyes because you will no longer be the same person who first filled these pages.

As you continue reading, remember that ceremony is not something separate from everyday life. Whether you are preparing for your first ceremony or returning to one you have walked many times before, the real work begins in the ordinary moments. It is found in the choices you make each morning, the way you care for yourself and others, the gratitude you offer, the relationships you tend, and the willingness to keep returning to balance when life inevitably pulls you away from it.

There is no perfect path through this work.

There will be days when you feel deeply connected and days when you feel uncertain. There will be moments of clarity followed by moments of confusion. Both belong. Healing is rarely a straight road. Like the Medicine Wheel itself, it moves in circles, inviting us to return with greater wisdom, deeper compassion, and a more open heart each time.

As you turn the page, carry only one intention with you.

Remain curious.

Be gentle with yourself.

Trust that healing does not ask you to become someone new. It simply asks you to remember the relationships that have always sustained you and to walk forward with greater awareness, humility, and love.

The journey has already begun.

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REFLECTION



Looking back over your life, what experiences have shaped the person you are today?

These may include moments of joy, loss, success, failure, illness, relationships, spiritual experiences, or unexpected turning points.

What events or circumstances in your life have brought you to this journey at this particular moment?

Why now?

What patterns keep repeating in your life?

What lessons seem to return wearing different faces?

What are you hoping to understand, heal, forgive, release, or remember through this journey?

Complete this sentence without overthinking it.

My heart is calling me toward...

If your future self were looking back on this moment five years from now, what do you hope they would thank you for having the courage to begin today?

Journal Invitation

If you feel called, use your journal to write your story.

Begin wherever your heart naturally starts.

There is no wrong beginning.

CHAPTER THREE



Decolonization and the Sacred Land

Before we can speak about healing, ceremony, or medicine, we must first speak about relationship.

One of the greatest teachings I have received did not come from a classroom, a conference, or even from ceremony itself. It came from the quiet realization that I had spent much of my life looking at the land without ever truly seeing it. Like many people educated within Western institutions, I had learned to understand landscapes through maps, ownership, resources, and management plans. Rivers were watersheds. Forests were ecosystems. Mountains were geology. Even as an anthropologist studying Indigenous cultures, I had unknowingly inherited a worldview that encouraged observation more than relationship.

Ceremony gradually dismantled that way of seeing.

The first time an Elder asked me to place tobacco on the ground before gathering medicines, I remember wondering why such a small gesture mattered. It seemed symbolic, almost ceremonial in the superficial sense of the word. Only later did I begin to understand that the offering was not for the plant. It was for me. It interrupted the unconscious habit of

taking and replaced it with gratitude, reciprocity, and consent. It reminded me that nothing living exists simply for my benefit.

That small act contained an entire philosophy.

Indigenous worldviews begin from a remarkably different understanding of our place in Creation. Human beings are not separate from nature, nor are we its managers or owners. We exist within an intricate network of reciprocal relationships that include the land, the waters, the plants, the animals, the ancestors, the spirit world, and those yet to come. Healing, therefore, cannot be understood as an individual pursuit. It is always relational. When one relationship is broken, others are affected. When one relationship is restored, healing ripples outward through the whole.

This understanding fundamentally changes how we approach ceremony. Ceremony is not something we perform upon the land. Ceremony emerges because of our relationship with the land. The Earth is not the backdrop for our spiritual lives. She is an active participant in them.

Robin Wall Kimmerer writes that braiding together science, spirit, and story allows us to imagine a different relationship, one in which people and the land become good medicine for one another. Kimmerer⁹ uses the analogy of braiding sweetgrass “It is an intertwining of science, spirit, and story...healing stories that allow us to imagine a different relationship, in which people and land are good medicine for each other.” That phrase stayed with me because it challenged an assumption I had carried for years. I had approached healing as something I hoped to receive. Gradually I came to understand that healing also asks something of us. It asks us to become good medicine in return. Gratitude becomes an action. Stewardship becomes prayer. Reciprocity becomes the measure of our spiritual maturity.

This way of seeing also transforms our understanding of knowledge itself.

For generations, Indigenous Knowledge and Western science were often presented as opposing ways of understanding the world. Yet Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall offers another possibility through the teaching of Etuaptmumk, or Two-Eyed Seeing. Rather than asking us to choose between Indigenous Knowledge and Western science, Two-Eyed Seeing invites us to recognize the strengths of both and to allow them to exist together in respectful coexistence. Science may help us understand ecological systems, climate change, and biodiversity. Indigenous Knowledge reminds us that knowledge without relationship is incomplete. One explains how forests function. The other asks how we ought to live within them. Together they offer a fuller understanding than either could provide alone.

One teaching from Mi'kmaw Chief Charles Labrador has remained with me for years. He encouraged people entering the forest to look beyond what is visible above the ground. We notice cedar, maple, pine, and birch standing as individual trees, yet beneath the soil their roots are intertwined in relationships we rarely see. They share nutrients, water, and communication through living networks beneath our feet. "They are all holding hands," he said, before adding that people must learn to do the same. It is an elegant metaphor for human life. We often imagine ourselves as isolated individuals pursuing our own goals, forgetting the invisible relationships that have always sustained us. Ceremony reminds us that our lives, like the forest, have always been interconnected.

The Seven Grandfather Teachings provide another way of understanding these relationships. Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, and Truth are often introduced as moral teachings, but they are much more than virtues. They are ways of entering into relationship with ourselves, with one another, with the land, and with

Spirit. Throughout this book we will return to these teachings repeatedly, not as abstract concepts to memorize, but as practices to embody. Healing is measured less by what we know than by how we choose to live.

Many Indigenous Nations also remind us that every decision should be made with future generations in mind. Onondaga Faithkeeper Oren Lyons has often spoken about considering the needs of those who will live seven generations after us. This teaching shifts our attention away from immediate gratification toward stewardship and responsibility. We begin asking different questions. Instead of asking what benefits us today, we begin asking what kind of world we are helping to create for our grandchildren and their grandchildren. Ceremony is not only about personal transformation. It is also about becoming a better ancestor.

One of the foundational teachings that has shaped my understanding of Indigenous Knowledge comes from the Seven Grandfather Teachings, beautifully shared by David Bouchard and Joseph Martin in *The Seven Sacred Teachings*. While these teachings originate within Anishinaabe traditions, they have been embraced by many Indigenous peoples because they offer an ethical way of understanding our relationships with one another, with the land, and with all of Creation.

The story begins with White Buffalo Calf Woman, a sacred being who came to her people at a time when they had become disconnected from the ways of living in balance. She brought not only ceremony but also instruction for how human beings should conduct themselves if they wished to live in harmony with the Earth and with one another. Among the sacred ceremonies she entrusted to the people were the Sun Dance, fasting, the vision quest, the sweat lodge, coming of age ceremonies, the sacred pipe, and the Medicine Wheel. These ceremonies were never intended to exist apart from everyday life. They were expressions of a

deeper way of being rooted in gratitude, reciprocity, humility, and responsibility.

White Buffalo Calf Woman reminded her people that they were not separate from Creation but part of an intricate web of relationships that included the four leggeds, the winged ones, the waters, the plants, the ancestors, and those yet to come. Human beings were given a responsibility to care for the land rather than dominate it and to learn from the natural world with humility. By observing our animal relatives and living in accordance with these teachings, we gradually come to understand not only the world around us but also ourselves. Many teachings also speak of White Buffalo Calf Woman's return during a time of great imbalance, when humanity once again needs to remember how to live in peace with All Our Relations.

The Seven Grandfather Teachings are not simply values to admire. They are daily practices that ask us to embody love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth. Throughout this book, these teachings will serve as a compass, inviting us to consider not only what we know, but how we choose to live.

Decolonization begins here.

It begins not with guilt, but with awareness.

It begins by recognizing that colonization disrupted relationships between people, language, land, governance, ceremony, and community. It asks us to tell the truth about that history while also recognizing that healing cannot remain trapped in the past. Healing asks us to rebuild relationships that were fractured, to learn the history of the territory upon which we live, to approach Indigenous teachings with humility rather than entitlement, and to understand that reconciliation is not a destination but a lifelong practice of relationship.

As you continue through this book, I invite you to return often to this chapter. Every ceremony, every reflection, every integration exercise that follows grows from this single understanding.

Healing is not about becoming disconnected from the world in search of enlightenment.

Healing is about remembering that you have never been separate from the world at all.

REFLECTION



How has your understanding of your relationship with the land changed throughout your life?

When have you experienced the land as teacher rather than simply as place?

What responsibilities arise when you begin thinking of yourself as being in relationship with the land rather than living upon it?

How might the teachings of reciprocity influence the way you approach ceremony, healing, and your daily life?

Complete the following sentence:

The relationship I most need to restore is...

Grounding Before the Journey Begins

Every meaningful journey begins long before we take the first step.

Whether we are preparing for a ceremony, beginning therapy, entering a retreat, welcoming a child, grieving the loss of someone we love, or simply recognizing that life can no longer continue as it has, transformation rarely begins at the moment of change. It begins quietly, often weeks or months beforehand, when something within us starts paying attention.

Looking back over my own life, I can now see that every significant ceremony began long before I arrived at the lodge, the altar, or the circle. There were conversations that unsettled me, dreams that refused to leave, relationships that were ending, questions that could no longer be ignored, and an almost imperceptible sense that life was inviting me to become someone different. At the time these moments felt disconnected. Only later did I realize they were preparing the ground.

Indigenous teachings remind us that preparation is itself a sacred act. We prepare not because ceremony demands perfection, but because preparation demonstrates our willingness to enter with humility, honesty, and respect. Just as a gardener prepares the soil before planting a seed, we prepare our minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits so that whatever teachings emerge may find fertile ground within us.

One of the greatest misunderstandings surrounding ceremony is the belief that healing comes from the medicine itself. Medicine may open a doorway, but it does not walk through that doorway for us. Healing grows from our willingness to listen, to reflect, and to integrate what we

receive into the ordinary moments of our lives. Without preparation, profound experiences can remain little more than extraordinary memories. With preparation, they have the potential to become lasting transformation.

Preparation also asks us to think carefully about the relationships we are entering. Every ceremony takes place within relationships: our relationship with ourselves, with the facilitator or Elder, with the land upon which the ceremony is held, with the medicines, with the other participants, and with Spirit. Trust, safety, and mutual respect are not secondary considerations. They create the conditions in which meaningful healing can occur.

As you move through this book, I invite you to think about intention differently.

An intention is not simply a goal to accomplish or a question to answer. It is a relationship you are choosing to deepen.

Rather than asking, "What do I want from this experience?" you might instead ask, "Who am I becoming through this experience?" That single shift moves us away from seeking quick answers and toward cultivating lasting wisdom.

Like every seed planted in good soil, intentions require patience. Some begin to grow immediately. Others remain hidden beneath the surface until the conditions are right. We cannot force their unfolding, but we can nurture them through our attention, our daily practices, and our willingness to remain open to what the journey may reveal.

Walking with Eagle

Among many Indigenous teachings, Eagle carries prayers between the Earth and Creator. Flying higher than any other bird, Eagle reminds us to lift our hearts beyond fear and to speak honestly with the Spirit

world. Prayer is not performance. It is relationship. It is one of the oldest conversations human beings have ever known.

Before continuing, find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. You may wish to light a candle, smudge with cedar or sage if those are part of your practice, or simply sit quietly with your feet upon the Earth. Allow yourself a few slow breaths before beginning.

Instead of trying to write the perfect intention, listen for the quieter voice beneath your thoughts.

Ask yourself:

What healing am I truly ready to receive?

What part of myself am I prepared to release?

Who am I becoming through this journey?

When the words come, write them slowly.

They do not need to be polished.

They only need to be true.

After you have written your intention, write a prayer.

Speak honestly to Creator, Spirit, your ancestors, the land, or however you understand the sacred. There is no correct language for prayer. Some prayers are only a few words. Others become several pages. The sincerity of your heart matters far more than eloquence.

Throughout your journey, return to these pages often.

Notice how your intention evolves.

Notice how your understanding deepens.

Often, we discover that the prayer we thought we were writing at the beginning was only the first sentence of a much longer conversation.

REFLECTION



What does preparing yourself for change look like in your own life?

Think about another significant transition in your life. How did you prepare for it, and what did that preparation teach you?

What relationships need your attention before you begin this journey?

Write your intention.

Write your prayer.

Decolonization, Land, and Reconciliation

Before We Begin, We Acknowledge the Land Is Not Ours

Every journey begins somewhere.

Sometimes it begins with a question we cannot answer. Sometimes it begins with grief, illness, or an unexpected invitation to change. Yet regardless of what has brought you to these pages, every healing journey begins in one place that we all share: the land beneath our feet.

Long before there were roads, borders, cities, or nations, there was the land. She carried the footsteps of countless generations who learned from her rivers, gathered medicines from her forests, and offered prayers in places that remain sacred today. Those relationships did not disappear with colonization. They continue to exist, even when they have been forgotten.

One of the first teachings I received in ceremony was deceptively simple: know where you are.

At first I thought this meant learning directions or becoming familiar with the landscape. Over time I came to understand that the question was much deeper. Knowing where you are means understanding whose territory you stand upon, learning the history that shaped that place, and recognizing that every ceremony takes place within relationships that existed long before we arrived.

For many people, this is where the work of decolonization begins.

Decolonization is often misunderstood as a political idea or an academic theory. While those conversations are important, they do not capture its deeper meaning. At its heart, decolonization is about restoring relationships that have been fractured. It asks us to examine how colonial systems separated Indigenous peoples from their lands, languages, ceremonies, governance, and ways of knowing, while also asking how each of us can participate in rebuilding respectful relationships today.

In Canada, colonization was not a single historical event. It became embedded in laws and institutions that attempted to control every aspect of Indigenous life. Policies such as the Indian Act, the reserve system, Residential Schools, and the Sixties Scoop were not isolated mistakes. They formed part of a larger effort to dismantle Indigenous societies and replace them with colonial structures. The effects of those policies continue to shape communities, families, and relationships across the country.

Understanding this history is not about carrying guilt.

It is about carrying awareness.

Awareness invites responsibility, and responsibility invites relationship.

If we are willing to receive teachings that have emerged from Indigenous peoples and their relationships with the land, then we also accept the responsibility of learning the history that surrounds those teachings. Reconciliation cannot exist without truth, and truth becomes meaningful only when it changes how we choose to live.

Throughout my own journey, I have returned often to the work of Cree scholar Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt, whose Four Rs have become a foundation for Indigenous education. Although they developed these principles within education, I have come to understand that they also provide a powerful framework for healing and ceremony.

The first is **Respect**.

Respect begins long before ceremony. It is reflected in how we approach Elders, facilitators, medicines, the land, and one another. Respect reminds us that teachings are gifts rather than commodities. They cannot be demanded, purchased, or extracted. They are received through humility and relationship.

The second is **Relevance**.

Teachings become meaningful only when they speak to our lives. Ceremony is not something we leave behind when the fire is extinguished. Its purpose is to help us live differently when we return home. Healing becomes relevant when it transforms how we love, parent, work, care for the land, and move through the world.

The third is **Reciprocity**.

Indigenous Knowledge has never been based solely upon receiving. Every gift creates a relationship, and every relationship carries responsibility. If we receive wisdom from the land, we care for the land. If we receive teachings from a community, we ask how we might contribute in return. Reciprocity reminds us that healing is never a one way exchange. It is an ongoing conversation between giving and receiving.

The final teaching is **Responsibility**.

Knowledge changes us. Once we understand something, we are no longer free to live as though we do not know it. Responsibility asks us to carry our teachings with integrity, allowing them to shape our decisions long after ceremony has ended. The deepest measure of transformation is not what we learned during a journey but how we choose to live because of it.

These four teachings will quietly accompany us throughout this book. They are not simply principles for ceremony. They are principles for life.

As you prepare for your own journey, I invite you to pause before moving to the next chapter.

Take a few moments to become aware of the place where you are sitting.

Look out the nearest window or step outside if you are able.

Notice the sky.

Notice the trees.

Notice the birds, the wind, the smell of the air, and the ground beneath your feet.

Ask yourself, perhaps for the first time:

Whose homeland am I standing upon?

What stories does this place carry?

What responsibilities arise from living here?

These questions do not demand immediate answers.

Like every meaningful journey, they begin with paying attention.

Walking the Four Rs

The Four Rs are not ideas to admire. They are relationships to practice.

As you move through this book, I invite you to return to them often. You may discover that one feels familiar while another challenges you. That is part of the work.

Rather than trying to perfect all four at once, choose one that feels particularly important at this moment in your life. Allow it to

accompany you over the coming weeks. Notice how it influences your decisions, your conversations, and your relationship with the land.

Chapter Summary

Decolonization is not simply the work of examining history. It is the lifelong practice of remembering our relationships.

Throughout this chapter, you have been invited to look beyond the ways many of us have been taught to understand the world and to consider another way of seeing, one grounded in reciprocity, gratitude, and respect. The land is not a resource to be managed or a backdrop for our lives. She is a living relative who has carried us since the beginning and continues to teach us every day.

As our relationship with the land deepens, so too does our relationship with ourselves. We begin to recognize that healing is never ours alone. Every act of gratitude, every offering, every moment spent listening to the wind, the waters, the plants, or the stories of our ancestors becomes part of restoring relationships that colonization sought to separate. Decolonization is not only about reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing. It is about learning to live in right relationship with all of Creation.

This shift does not happen all at once. It unfolds slowly, often through simple acts of presence. A prayer offered before gathering medicines. A walk where we notice more than we speak. A moment of gratitude before taking what the Earth has generously provided. These seemingly ordinary acts gradually reshape the way we move through the world until stewardship becomes an expression of love rather than obligation.

As you continue this journey, remember that every ceremony begins with relationship. Before we can receive medicine from the land, we must first learn how to be good relatives to the land. When we approach

Creation with humility, gratitude, and reciprocity, we discover that healing is not something we take from the Earth. It is something we participate in together.

The path of decolonization is, ultimately, the path of remembering that we have always belonged.

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REFLECTION



Take your time with these questions. There is no need to rush your answers.

Respect

How do I currently show respect to the land, to the people who have shared these teachings, and to myself?

Relevance

Why does this work matter to me at this point in my life?

What has called me to this journey?

Reciprocity

How can I move beyond receiving teachings and begin giving something back?

Responsibility

What responsibilities accompany the knowledge I hope to receive?

How will I carry these teachings into my family, community, and everyday life?

Complete the following sentence.

As I begin this journey, I commit to walking with...

Journal Invitation

Before continuing to the next chapter, spend some time writing about your relationship with the place you currently call home.

You may wish to explore questions such as:

- When do I feel most connected to this land?
- What have I learned from spending time outdoors?
- What responsibilities do I have to the waters, forests, plants, animals, and future generations?
- If the land could speak to me today, what might she ask of me?

Allow yourself to write freely. There is no expectation that these pages will ever be shared with anyone else.

CHAPTER FOUR



Sacred Preparation and Intention

Anchoring the Journey Before It Begins

Every meaningful journey begins before we take the first step.

Long before we enter a ceremony, step into a sweat lodge, begin a retreat, or sit with a sacred medicine, something within us has already begun to move. Perhaps it begins with a question that refuses to disappear. Perhaps it is grief that has become too heavy to carry alone, a relationship that is asking to change, or a quiet sense that life is inviting us to become someone different. Whatever brings us to the threshold, transformation rarely begins at the ceremony itself. It begins in the days and weeks beforehand, when we choose to prepare ourselves with intention.

Preparation is not simply a list of tasks to complete before an event. It is an act of respect. It is how we tell ourselves, the land, and the Spirit world that we are ready to listen. In many Indigenous traditions, how we enter ceremony matters because it reflects how we enter every relationship. If we arrive distracted, hurried, or carrying the noise of everyday life, that same energy often follows us into the circle. If we

arrive with humility, openness, and honesty, we create space for deeper learning.

For many years I believed that the most important part of ceremony was the ceremony itself. Experience has taught me otherwise. The preparation is already part of the ceremony. Every decision we make before entering the circle begins shaping the experience that follows. The conversations we have, the thoughts we nurture, the food we eat, the media we consume, the sleep we allow ourselves, and the care we give our bodies all become part of the offering we bring.

One Elder once reminded me that intention is much like planting a seed. We cannot demand that the seed become a flower overnight, nor can we decide exactly how it will grow. We prepare the soil, water it with care, and trust that life knows how to unfold. Our intention works in much the same way. It is not a wish list or a demand placed upon Spirit. It is a quiet declaration of the direction in which we are willing to grow.

Preparation also invites us to simplify. In the days before an important ceremony, many people choose to spend less time with television, social media, or unnecessary distractions. Others spend more time outdoors, in prayer, meditation, journaling, or quiet reflection. Some traditions include fasting, sexual abstinence, or specific dietary practices as a way of focusing the mind and honouring the sacredness of what lies ahead. These practices are not about punishment or deprivation. They help us become more present, more attentive, and more receptive to the teachings we hope to receive.

Just as important as preparing ourselves is preparing the space around us. A clean home, a quiet room, the lighting of a candle, the fragrance of cedar or sage, a favourite blanket, a meaningful photograph, or a small stone gathered during a walk can all become gentle reminders that

this time has been set apart with intention. Sacred space is not created by expensive objects. It is created by presence.

As you prepare for your own journey, remember that there is no perfect way to enter ceremony. There is only an honest one. Bring your questions. Bring your uncertainty. Bring your hope. Bring your willingness to learn. These are among the greatest offerings any of us can make.

Grounding Before You Begin

Before entering ceremony, or even beginning a quiet period of reflection, it is helpful to become grounded. Grounding gently brings our awareness back into the present moment and reminds us that we are supported by the Earth beneath our feet.

There are many ways to ground yourself, and no single practice is right for everyone. The simplest is often the most powerful. Step outside if you can. Feel your feet on the Earth. Take several slow breaths and notice what is happening around you. Listen to the birds, the wind in the trees, or the movement of water. Allow yourself to arrive fully in this moment.

If you are indoors, place both feet firmly on the floor and notice the points where your body is supported. Take a slow breath in through your nose and exhale gently. Imagine your breath settling into your body with each exhale. Some people find it helpful to place a hand over their heart or to hold a small stone, cedar, or another object that helps them feel connected.

Grounding is not about escaping our thoughts or emotions. It is about remembering that we are here, in this moment, connected to the Earth and supported by something much greater than ourselves. From that

place of presence, we are often better able to hear the quiet wisdom that has been waiting within us.

Sitting with Eagle

Before you continue, close your eyes for a few moments and picture Eagle.

Imagine Eagle soaring high above the landscape, riding the currents of the wind with effortless grace. From that height, Eagle sees far beyond what is visible from the ground. Where we often become caught in the details of our daily lives, Eagle reminds us to lift our perspective and see the whole journey. Sometimes what feels overwhelming up close begins to make sense when viewed from a greater distance.

Across many Indigenous traditions, Eagle carries our prayers to Creator. Eagle reminds us that prayer is more than asking for what we want. It is entering into relationship with humility, gratitude, and trust. It is taking the deepest hopes, fears, and longings of our hearts and offering them with honesty. When Eagle appears, many people understand it as a good sign, a reminder that we are not alone and that our prayers have been heard.

As you sit quietly, imagine Eagle circling above you. Allow yourself to breathe deeply and notice what rises within you. If your mind becomes busy, gently return to the image of Eagle gliding effortlessly across the sky. Ask yourself what you would see differently if you viewed your life from Eagle's perspective. What has your attention become fixed upon? What larger picture might you be missing?

When you feel ready, begin writing.

REFLECTION



Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. If it is part of your practice, you may wish to light a candle, smudge with cedar or sage, or simply sit for a few moments in silence. Allow yourself several slow breaths before writing.

What part of my life is asking most deeply for healing at this moment?

What am I ready to release so that something new can begin?

If I were no longer carrying this burden, how might my life feel different?

Write your intention.

Rather than writing what you hope will happen, write about the person you hope to become through this journey.

Write your prayer.

Address it to Creator, Spirit, your ancestors, the land, or simply to the deepest part of yourself. There is no right way to pray. There is only honesty.

Journal Invitation

Over the coming days, return to your intention often. Notice whether it changes as you prepare. Some intentions become clearer with time. Others quietly transform into something we never expected. Allow your prayer to remain a living conversation rather than a destination.

As your journey approaches, ask yourself one final question:

Who am I becoming through the way I prepare?

Creating a Sacred Container

Every meaningful ceremony begins with an agreement, whether it is spoken aloud or simply understood by those gathered together.

We come together to create a space where people can tell the truth, grieve, pray, laugh, remember, and sometimes fall apart without fear of judgment. That kind of openness is only possible when everyone shares responsibility for protecting the space.

One of the greatest gifts we can offer another person is our full presence.

In a world filled with constant distractions, ceremony asks something different of us. It asks us to slow down, to listen more than we speak, and to become fully present with ourselves and with those around us. This means putting away our phones, leaving cameras behind, and resisting the impulse to document every meaningful moment. Some experiences are meant to be remembered by the heart rather than preserved by a photograph.

Many ceremonial traditions also discourage unnecessary conversation before, during, and immediately after ceremony. Silence is not emptiness. It allows us to notice what is happening within us before the noise of ordinary life returns. When words do come, they should arise from sincerity rather than habit.

Sacred spaces are also not places for social competition or romantic pursuit. People often arrive carrying grief, vulnerability, fear, or hope. They deserve the opportunity to experience ceremony without wondering whether they are being watched, judged, or approached for reasons unrelated to their healing. The focus of ceremony is not finding a partner or impressing others. It is entering into relationship with yourself, with Spirit, and with the teachings that are unfolding.

Perhaps the most important commitment we make is to confidentiality.



Every person enters ceremony carrying a different story. Some may speak openly. Others may remain silent. Some may weep. Others may laugh. Still others may have experiences that they choose never to share.

Those stories belong to them.

You are always free to speak about your own experience. Your insights, your emotions, your healing, and your journey are yours to share as you choose. What belongs to someone else does not.

When we repeat another person's story without their permission, even with good intentions, we remove it from the sacred relationship in which it was offered. Trust begins to weaken, and the safety that allows people to be fully honest begins to disappear.

Protecting confidentiality is therefore much more than keeping a secret. It is an act of respect. It tells everyone in the circle, "You are safe here. Your story will remain in your hands."

As you prepare for any ceremony, retreat, healing circle, or gathering, consider these simple commitments.

I will arrive with humility.

I will be fully present.

I will respect the protocols of the ceremony and the guidance of those entrusted to lead it.

I will honour the privacy and dignity of every person present.

I will share only my own story.

In doing so, I help create the kind of sacred space where healing becomes possible.

REFLECTION



Think about a time when someone trusted you with something deeply personal.

How did you honour that trust?

What helps you remain fully present when you enter a meaningful conversation or ceremony?

How can you help create spaces where others feel emotionally and spiritually safe?

What commitment will you make as you enter your next ceremony or sacred gathering?

The Oral Tradition: Remembering Our Relations

Long before there were books, universities, governments, or written laws, there were stories. Around campfires, beside rivers, during winter gatherings, and within ceremony, Elders passed teachings from one generation to the next through the spoken word. These stories were never simply entertainment. They carried law, history, ethics, ecology, spirituality, and the collective memory of a people. Through the oral tradition, each generation inherited not only knowledge, but also the responsibility to care for that knowledge and pass it forward with integrity.

Unlike a book that remains fixed upon a shelf, the oral tradition is alive.



Every time a story is told it enters into a relationship with a new generation. Elders may emphasize different teachings depending on the needs of the listeners, current events, or the challenges facing the community. The heart of the story remains the same, yet it continues to grow, breathe, and guide. In this way, oral traditions are not relics of the past. They are living teachings that continue to evolve while remaining rooted in the wisdom of our ancestors.

Many of our oldest stories begin in what some Nations describe as the time of the Transformers, when the world existed very differently from the one we know today. Others begin with emergence stories, in which human beings journey upward through earlier worlds before arriving in this one. Across the Eastern Woodlands, the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe tell the story of Sky Woman, who fell from the Sky World toward an endless ocean below. The birds gathered to catch her, Turtle offered his back as a place of refuge, and although many powerful

animals tried and failed to retrieve earth from the depths, little Muskrat emerged carrying a small handful of mud from which Turtle Island was formed. These are not simply stories about how the world began. They are teachings about humility, cooperation, gratitude, and the responsibilities we owe one another and the living world.¹

Among the Secwépemc, Coyote is remembered as one of the great Transformers. He brings order to a world that was once chaotic, creating day and night, establishing the rhythm of the seasons, and restoring balance where disorder once existed. Across many Indigenous Nations, the landscape itself becomes a living library. Rivers, mountains, islands, rock formations, and ancient trees all carry stories that remind us how to live in relationship with the places we now call home.²

Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us that creation stories are not primitive attempts to explain the natural world. They are stories about relationships. They ask different questions than modern science. Rather than asking, *How was the world created?* they ask, *What responsibilities arise because we are here?* Creation stories teach us that gratitude comes before taking, reciprocity before consumption, and relationship before ownership. They invite us to understand ourselves not as separate from the rest of Creation, but as participants within it.³

Modern evolutionary biology offers a remarkable complement to these teachings. Scientists now understand that every living organism on Earth shares common ancestry through the great branching tree of life. More than a billion years ago, the lineage that would eventually become animals and the lineage that would become fungi shared a common ancestor before following different evolutionary paths.⁴ Although our forms have changed over immense stretches of time, we remain part of the same living family. Ecology has further revealed that forests themselves function through relationships. Beneath the soil, fungal

mycelial networks connect trees, exchanging nutrients, water, and chemical signals across entire ecosystems. What appears above ground as individual trees is, below the surface, an interconnected community.⁵

For many Indigenous peoples, this understanding is not surprising.

*The teaching of **All My Relations** has always reminded us
that our relatives extend far beyond human beings*



The cedar is our relative. The salmon is our relative. The sturgeon is our relative. The eagle, the wolf, the fungi beneath our feet, the rivers that sustain us, and even the stones that have witnessed countless generations all participate in the same great community of life. As Stó:lō Knowledge Keeper Sonny McHalsie often reminds people, the sturgeon and the trees are our relatives because relationship, not ownership, is the foundation of life.

This is where the teaching of Two-Eyed Seeing offers such wisdom. Indigenous Knowledge teaches us that everything exists within relationship. Western science increasingly reveals the extraordinary biological networks through which many of those relationships are expressed. Neither perspective diminishes the other. Together they invite us into a richer understanding of the living world.

Ceremony is one way we remember those relationships.

When we enter a sweat lodge, spend days alone on a mountain during a fast, dance beneath the summer sun, sit quietly beside moving water, harvest medicines with gratitude, or simply walk through the forest with an open heart, we are not creating relationship. We are remembering relationships that have always existed. Ceremony gently returns us to the understanding that we have never been separate from the living world. Gratitude naturally follows that remembrance. Reciprocity

becomes our response. We begin asking not only what we can receive from the Earth, but also what we are called to give back.

When we speak the words **All My Relations**, they are not merely a beautiful closing to a prayer. They are a reminder that we belong to one another. We belong to the forests that breathe for us, the waters that sustain us, the animals that teach us, the ancestors who walked before us, and the generations yet to come. To remember our relations is to remember ourselves.

The Seven Grandfather Teachings: An Ethical Compass for the Journey

Throughout this book we will return often to the Seven Grandfather Teachings. Rather than presenting them as lessons to memorize, I invite you to think of them as companions that quietly walk beside you. Every ceremony, every relationship, every challenge, and every moment of integration offers another opportunity to understand them more deeply.

The teachings do not ask us to become perfect. They invite us to become more aware of how we live, how we treat one another, and how we honour our relationships with the land, our ancestors, and all our relations.

As you move through each chapter, return to these teachings often. You may discover that one speaks more strongly to you than another. At different stages of your life, a different teaching may become your greatest teacher.

Wisdom (Nbwaakaawin) reminds us to listen before we speak, to observe before we judge, and to recognize that knowledge becomes wisdom only when it is lived with humility and compassion.

Love (Zaagidiwin) teaches that love is more than affection. It is expressed through gratitude, generosity, forgiveness, and our willingness to care for all living beings as relatives rather than resources.

Respect (Mnaadendimowin) invites us to honour the dignity of every person, every creature, every plant, every river, and every place. Respect asks us to move through the world gently, remembering that we never walk alone.

Bravery (Aakode'ewin) is the courage to face ourselves honestly. It asks us to step toward the difficult conversations, the painful memories, and the shadows we would rather avoid, trusting that healing is found on the other side of fear.

Honesty (Gwayakwaadiziwin) encourages us to live authentically. It asks us to release the masks we wear for others and to allow our words, actions, and intentions to become aligned.

Humility (Dabaadendiziwin) reminds us that we are one small part of a much greater circle of life. We are neither above nor below any other being. Every life carries gifts, and every life deserves respect.

Truth (Debwewin) emerges when all of the other teachings are lived together. Truth is not simply something we say. It is something we embody through our relationships, our choices, and the way we walk through the world.

These teachings will quietly accompany every chapter that follows. As you prepare for ceremony, deepen your relationship with the land, reflect on your experiences, or integrate what you have learned, consider which of these teachings is asking for your attention. In time, they become less like principles to study and more like trusted companions who gently guide us back toward balance whenever we lose our way.

Chapter Summary

Every ceremony begins long before we enter the circle.

The way we prepare ourselves reflects the way we move through every relationship in our lives. When we slow down, clarify our intentions, and arrive with humility rather than expectation, we create space to receive whatever teachings are meant for us. Preparation is not about controlling the outcome of a ceremony. It is about preparing our heart to meet whatever unfolds with courage, openness, and trust.

Throughout this chapter, you have been invited to reflect on the importance of intention, personal practice, and honest self-examination. You have explored what has brought you to this moment, the experiences that have shaped your path, and the small daily choices that quietly prepare you for deeper transformation. These practices are not separate from ceremony. They are ceremony. Every prayer offered with sincerity, every promise you keep to yourself, and every act of gratitude becomes part of the sacred work of preparing your heart.

As you continue your journey, remember that no one can prepare for ceremony perfectly. There will always be uncertainty, unanswered questions, and moments when you wonder whether you are ready. The truth is that readiness is not measured by having all the answers. It is measured by your willingness to arrive honestly, with an open heart and a humble spirit.

When we prepare ourselves with intention, we discover that ceremony has already begun. Every step we take before entering the circle becomes part of the teaching, reminding us that transformation is not found in a single moment, but in the way we choose to walk toward it.

Carry your intention gently, and trust that Spirit will meet you where you are, not where you think you should be.

Footnotes

1. Braiding Sweetgrass; Ojibway Heritage.
2. BC First Nations Studies 12; Alberta Education. *Creation Stories as Spiritual Foundation*.
3. Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*.
4. Recent evolutionary research supports that animals and fungi diverged from a common opisthokont ancestor over one billion years ago. Opisthokonta
5. Finding the Mother Tree.

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- Alberta Education. (2005). *Creation stories as spiritual foundation*. LearnAlberta.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2006). *BC First Nations Studies 12*. Queen's Printer.
- Johnston, B. (2010). *Ojibway Heritage*. McClelland & Stewart. (Original work published 1976)
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- Simard, S. (2021). *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the wisdom of the forest*. Knopf Canada.

REFLECTION



Sacred Preparation and Intention

"Preparation is not about becoming worthy. It is about becoming present."

What has called you to this journey at this moment in your life?

How do you hope to be different because of this experience, rather than simply what you hope to experience?

What practices help you become quiet enough to truly listen?

What distractions, habits, or fears are you ready to gently set aside before entering sacred space?

Read your intention again. Has it changed since you first wrote it? If so, how?

PART II

CHAPTER FIVE



Relationships as Ceremony

The Teachers We Call Family

If the land is our first teacher, then relationships are often our second.

Long before we consciously choose a path of healing, the people around us begin shaping who we become. From the moment we enter this world, we are learning. We learn what love looks like through those who hold us, comfort us, or perhaps struggle to do either. We learn about trust through promises that are kept and promises that are broken. We learn about belonging through the families, communities, schools, and workplaces that either welcome us or make us feel as though we must earn our place. Every relationship becomes part of the story we tell ourselves about who we are.

Many of these lessons happen quietly. As children, we absorb them without question. We learn how conflict is handled by watching the adults around us. We learn whether emotions are welcomed or hidden. We learn whether asking for help is safe or dangerous. We learn how love is expressed, how apologies are offered, and whether forgiveness

is possible. Long before we have the words to describe these experiences, they begin shaping the way we move through the world.

As we grow older, these early lessons often follow us into adulthood. We may find ourselves choosing familiar relationships, even when they no longer serve us, simply because they feel recognizable. We repeat patterns we promised ourselves we would never repeat. We react to situations with emotions that seem far larger than the moment itself. Sometimes we wonder why the same struggles seem to return again and again, wearing different faces but telling remarkably similar stories.

Some relationships nourish us. They encourage us to grow, celebrate our successes, and remind us of who we are when we forget. They become places of safety where we can be fully ourselves without fear of judgment.

Other relationships leave wounds. They expose our insecurities, challenge our sense of worth, or awaken grief we thought had long since passed. Some relationships are brief but life changing. Others remain with us for decades, slowly shaping the course of our lives through thousands of ordinary moments.

And then there are the relationships that do both.

Some of the people who have loved us most have also hurt us. Parents do not always know how to love in the ways their children need. Children do not always understand the burdens their parents carried. Partners may bring deep joy while also revealing old wounds that neither person realized were still waiting to heal. Friends sometimes drift apart as each person grows in a different direction. Life is rarely simple enough to place people neatly into categories of heroes and villains.

Over the years, ceremony has changed the way I understand these relationships. I no longer see them simply as successes or failures.

Instead, I have come to see them as some of our greatest opportunities for growth.

Whether we understand our lives through Indigenous teachings, psychology, attachment theory, ancestral healing, or the language of soul agreements, one truth seems to remain remarkably consistent. Relationships reveal us. They show us the places where we feel secure and the places where we still carry fear. They reveal the stories we believe about ourselves, the boundaries we struggle to maintain, and the healing that still asks for our attention.

For many years I asked the same questions that so many of us ask.

Why did I have these parents?

Why did that relationship end?

Why do I keep attracting the same kind of person?

Why does this particular wound continue to return?

Why does healing sometimes feel like taking two steps forward and one step back?

There are countless ways to answer these questions. Some people find meaning through the idea of karma or soul agreements. Others understand these experiences through family systems, attachment theory, trauma, or intergenerational patterns carried across generations. Each perspective offers valuable insight, and none can fully explain every human experience.

Over time, I became less interested in finding the perfect explanation and more interested in finding the lesson.

Ceremony taught me to stop asking, **"Why is this happening to me?"** and begin asking, **"What is this relationship asking me to learn?"**

That single question changed everything.

Instead of searching for someone to blame, I began looking for opportunities to grow. Instead of seeing painful relationships as evidence that something was wrong with me, I began to see them as mirrors reflecting places within myself that were still asking for compassion, courage, and healing.

Sometimes the lesson was learning healthy boundaries.

Sometimes it was learning to receive love without believing I had to earn it.

Sometimes it was learning to leave.

Sometimes it was learning to stay present during difficult conversations instead of running from discomfort.

Sometimes the lesson was discovering that another person's behaviour was never really about me at all.

Every relationship became a teacher.

When we begin to see relationships this way, our perspective changes. We stop measuring their value only by how long they lasted or whether they ended happily. Instead, we begin asking how they changed us. Some people arrive to walk beside us for a lifetime. Others come only long enough to redirect our path before continuing on their own journey.

Each one leaves something behind.

Some leave laughter.

Some leave grief.

Some leave strength we never knew we possessed.

Some leave questions that take years to answer.

Some leave wisdom that only becomes visible long after the relationship has ended.

Healing does not ask us to erase these relationships or pretend they never happened. The work of ceremony is not forgetting. It is transforming our relationship with what has happened so that our past no longer determines our future. We cannot always choose what happens to us, but we can choose how we carry those experiences forward. That choice becomes one of the greatest ceremonies of all.

Transformation often begins with forgiveness.



Forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood words in our language. If relationships are among our greatest teachers, then forgiveness is often one of their hardest lessons.

For many years, I misunderstood what forgiveness meant. I thought it required me to excuse what had happened or somehow convince myself that the pain was not as deep as it really was. I believed forgiveness meant letting someone "off the hook," pretending the past no longer mattered, or allowing someone back into my life who had already shown me they could not be trusted. None of those things felt honest, and because they did not feel honest, forgiveness often felt impossible. It has taken years of ceremony, reflection, and life experience for my understanding to change.

Today, I see forgiveness very differently. Forgiveness is not something we do for another person. It is something we offer ourselves. It does not erase accountability, nor does it remove the natural consequences of another person's choices. It does not require reconciliation, and it

certainly does not require us to remain in unhealthy or harmful relationships.

Instead, forgiveness asks a much quieter question.

How long am I willing to carry this?

There comes a point when anger, grief, disappointment, or betrayal no longer belongs to the person who caused it. It becomes something we continue carrying ourselves. Sometimes we carry it so long that it begins to feel like part of our identity. We tell the story so many times that we no longer remember who we were before the wound.

Ceremony has taught me that healing begins when we gently loosen our grip.

This does not happen all at once. Forgiveness is rarely a single decision made in one beautiful moment. More often, it is a practice. We return to it again and again, each time setting down another small piece of the burden we have been carrying. Some days we feel lighter. Other days we discover there is still more work to do. Healing has its own rhythm, and it cannot be rushed.

One of the greatest surprises on my own journey was realizing that forgiveness is not always directed toward another person.

Sometimes the person we need to forgive is still living.

Sometimes they have already crossed into the spirit world.

Sometimes the person who needs our forgiveness most is ourselves.

Many of us carry guilt for things we said, things we failed to say, choices we made when we were hurting, or opportunities we believe we missed. We replay old conversations, wishing we had responded differently. We judge the younger versions of ourselves without remembering that they

were doing the best they could with the knowledge, resources, and support they had at the time.

I often wonder how much suffering comes not from what happened to us, but from the endless conversations we continue having with ourselves long after the moment has passed.

One of the deepest teachings I have ever received came through my relationship with my father.

Like many families, ours was complicated. There was love, but there was also silence. There were misunderstandings, unspoken expectations, moments of closeness, and moments of distance. Looking back now, I can see that each of us was carrying burdens that the others could not fully understand. At the time, I saw only pieces of the story. It was not until years later that ceremony invited me to see the whole.

By then, my father had already crossed into the spirit world.

Part of me believed the opportunity for healing had ended with his death. I thought the conversations we never had would remain unfinished forever. I assumed that whatever needed to be said had been lost with him.

Ceremony showed me something entirely different.

I came to understand that love does not end when a life ends. Neither does grief. Neither does relationship.

Our relationships continue to live within us through memory, through the stories we carry, through the choices we make, and through the ways our ancestors continue shaping our lives. Death changes the form of a relationship, but it does not always end it. Sometimes healing continues across that threshold in ways we cannot easily explain.

During one ceremony, I found myself standing before my father in a way that felt more real than memory alone could account for. I did not

arrive with prepared words or a plan for what I wanted to say. Instead, something remarkable happened. Words of forgiveness began to emerge that had never existed in my conscious mind before that moment. They did not feel rehearsed or imagined. They arrived as though they had been waiting patiently for the right time to be spoken.

As I listened to those words, I realized they were not only changing my relationship with my father.

They were changing me.

In forgiving him, I began to understand my mother differently. I began to understand my family differently. I began to see generations of pain with greater compassion instead of judgment. The stories I had carried for so many years no longer felt fixed or permanent. They became part of a much larger story, one that included resilience, survival, love, and the imperfect ways families try to care for one another while carrying wounds of their own.

That ceremony taught me something I have never forgotten.

Forgiveness does not change the past.

It changes the relationship we have with the past.

The events themselves remain exactly as they were. What changes is the weight they hold over our lives. The memories lose their power to define us. We stop organizing our future around old pain and begin creating space for something new.

This is why forgiveness is so powerful. When one person begins to heal, the effects are rarely limited to that individual. Families begin to change. Children inherit different stories. Communities become places where compassion slowly replaces judgment. Even when no one else changes, our own hearts become lighter, and that alone can transform the way we move through the world.

The ceremony that follows is one of the most personal I have ever shared. Whether you understand it as spiritual guidance, deep intuition, or simply the wisdom that can emerge when we allow ourselves to listen deeply is entirely your own journey. My hope is not that you will see it exactly as I do. My hope is that somewhere within these words you may discover your own invitation toward forgiveness, whatever that looks like in your life.

Because healing is not about rewriting the past.

It is about refusing to let the past write the rest of your story.

Relationships Continue to Teach Us

Not every relationship is meant to last forever.

Some people accompany us for a season.

Some remain for a lifetime.

Some leave before we feel ready.

The measure of a relationship is not how long it lasted, but what it awakened within us.

As you continue your journey, you may discover that certain relationships return to your awareness more than once. This is natural. Healing often unfolds in layers. Each time we return, we may discover that we are able to release a little more, understand a little more deeply, and offer a little more compassion to ourselves and to others.

The goal is not to erase the past.

The goal is to carry it differently.

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What relationship continues to ask for your attention?

What part of that relationship are you still carrying?

What wisdom has this relationship offered, even if you did not recognize it at the time?

What would become possible if you laid this burden down today?

Write a few words of blessing for yourself as you continue walking forward.

Forgiveness

One of the greatest teachings ceremony has given me is that healing is rarely confined to a single person.

We often think of healing as something deeply personal. We talk about *my* healing, *my* grief, *my* trauma, or *my* journey. While that is certainly true, it is only part of the story. None of us arrives in this world untouched by those who came before us. We are born into families, communities, and histories that have shaped us long before we took our first breath. Along with our eye colour, our laughter, or our gifts, we may also inherit silence, resilience, fear, strength, loss, or ways of relating that have been passed quietly from one generation to the next.

Some of these inheritances are beautiful. Others ask to be healed.

Ceremony has taught me that we do not carry these stories to blame those who came before us. Most of our parents, grandparents, and ancestors did the best they could with the knowledge, opportunities, and wounds they carried. When we begin looking at our families through that lens, something begins to soften. Compassion gradually makes room where judgment once lived.

The Forgiveness Ceremony became much more than healing between my father and me. It revealed something I had never fully understood before. As forgiveness moved through that experience, it reached beyond one relationship. It changed how I saw my mother. It changed how I understood the struggles within my family. It even changed the stories I had been telling myself about my own life.

That experience taught me that healing has a way of rippling outward. When one person begins to release old pain, the effects are often felt far beyond that individual. Conversations become possible that once seemed impossible. Children witness different ways of responding to conflict. Old family patterns begin to loosen. Even when other family

members never change, we change the way we carry the relationship, and that alone can alter the future.

I have often wondered how many generations quietly benefit when one person chooses to heal instead of passing their pain forward.

In many Indigenous teachings, we are reminded to think beyond ourselves. We consider the generations who came before us and those who have yet to arrive. Every act of healing becomes an act of responsibility, not only to ourselves but to our families, our communities, and those who will inherit the world we leave behind.

This understanding has changed the way I approach my own healing. I no longer see it as something I do only for myself. I do it for my children. I do it in honour of my parents and ancestors, who carried burdens I may never fully understand. I do it for future generations who deserve to inherit more love than fear, more compassion than shame, and more hope than silence.

Perhaps this is one of ceremony's greatest gifts. It reminds us that healing is never just about one person. Like a stone dropped into still water, every choice we make creates ripples. We may never know how far those ripples travel, but that does not make them any less real. When we choose healing, forgiveness, and compassion, we are helping to write a different story, one that future generations may one day call their inheritance.

Sometimes one person is willing to step forward and begin carrying a burden differently, and in doing so something begins to move throughout an entire lineage.

You might be that person.



Trauma is often carried through families, not because people choose suffering, but because pain that remains unresolved is passed from one generation to the next. The same is true of love, courage, compassion, and forgiveness. When one person begins healing with sincerity, that healing can ripple outward in ways we may never fully understand.

I cannot fully explain exactly how those movements occur, nor do I believe they can be measured or proven in the ways many people expect. I can only bear witness to what I experienced. The ceremony transformed my relationship with my father, deepened my understanding of my family, and revealed that healing sometimes extends far beyond the individual standing in the circle.

This is why I have come to think of forgiveness as an act of lineage healing.

We are not changing the past.

We are changing our relationship with it.

In doing so, we may loosen burdens that have been carried for generations and create a different inheritance for those who follow us.

The Forgiveness Ceremony that follows is shared exactly as it was given to me during that ceremony. Over the years I have returned to these words many times and have witnessed them help others begin releasing grief, anger, guilt, and burdens that seemed impossible to carry any longer.

I offer it with deep respect, trusting that each person will receive only what is meant for them.

The Forgiveness Ceremony

The words that follow are offered as a simple ceremony of release.

You may speak them to someone who is living, someone who has crossed into the spirit world, or a younger version of yourself who is still carrying pain. You may also speak them without naming anyone at all, allowing the person or relationship that needs attention to rise naturally within you.

This ceremony does not require reconciliation or renewed contact. It does not require you to feel ready before you begin. Sometimes willingness is enough. You may still feel anger, grief, confusion, or resistance. Let those feelings be present without judging them. Forgiveness cannot be forced, and healing does not follow a predictable timeline.

Find a quiet place where you feel safe and supported. You may choose to sit near a candle, hold a meaningful object, or spend a few moments grounding yourself before you begin. Bring the person or relationship gently into your awareness. Notice what you feel in your body, but do not push yourself beyond what feels manageable.

Read each line slowly. Pause between the words and allow them to settle. Some lines may come easily, while others may feel difficult or even impossible. You do not need to pretend that you feel something you do not. You can return to the ceremony later, repeating only the words you are ready to speak.

There is no single way this ceremony should feel. You may cry, feel relief, remember something unexpected, or feel very little in the moment. Sometimes the change is immediate. More often, it unfolds quietly through the days, months, or years that follow.

When you are finished, take time to return fully to the present. Feel your feet against the ground. Take several slow breaths. Drink water, step outside, or rest. You may wish to write about what arose, but you do not need to explain or analyze the experience immediately.

Let the words do their work in their own time.

The Forgiveness Prayer

I acknowledge you (or I see you).

I forgive you for any harms you caused me.

I'm sorry for any harms I caused you.

I love you.

I release you.

And I forgive myself.

Walking the Ceremony

Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. You may wish to light a candle, smudge with cedar or sage if that is part of your practice, or simply sit quietly for several moments. Take a few slow breaths and allow yourself to become fully present.

When you are ready, write the name of the person, people, or relationship you are bringing into the ceremony. This may be someone who is living, someone who has passed into the spirit world, or even a younger version of yourself.

Read the Forgiveness Prayer slowly, allowing each sentence to settle before moving to the next. If you need to pause, pause. If you need to repeat a line several times, allow yourself that space.

When you feel complete, safely burn the paper in a fireproof bowl or, if you prefer, bury it beneath a tree or return it to the Earth in another respectful way that feels appropriate to you.

Close the ceremony by quietly speaking the words,

"It is done."

Remain in silence for several moments before continuing with your day.

A Teaching About Forgiveness

One of the most important lessons I have learned is that forgiveness is rarely a single moment. We often imagine that if we truly forgive someone, the pain should disappear immediately and never return. When old feelings surface again, we may wonder whether we failed or whether the healing was ever real.

My experience has taught me something very different.

Healing unfolds in layers. A relationship that seems complete today may reveal another layer of grief months or even years later. As we grow, our understanding changes, and we often find ourselves returning to the same relationship with new eyes and a more open heart. This does not mean the previous work was lost. It simply means we are ready to release something we were not yet able to let go of before.

There have been people in my own life for whom I have spoken this forgiveness prayer many times. Each time I returned to it, something else softened. Sometimes it was anger. Sometimes it was sadness. Sometimes it was guilt or disappointment. With each ceremony, I found myself carrying a little less of the burden that had weighed so heavily on my heart.

Because of this, I have learned not to measure healing by speed. Healing is not a race, nor is it something that can be completed according to a timeline. Instead, I have come to measure it by my willingness to continue showing up with honesty, courage, and compassion, even when the work feels difficult.

Often, we do not notice the change while it is happening. Instead, one ordinary day we realize that the memory no longer holds the same power it once did. We think of the person without feeling overwhelmed.

The story that once defined us has become only one chapter in a much larger life. What was once an open wound has become a source of wisdom, empathy, and strength.

Whether that transformation comes after one ceremony or many is not what matters. Every time we choose to return to forgiveness, we loosen our attachment to the pain we have carried. Little by little, we create more space for peace, compassion, and freedom to take root. That, perhaps, is one of forgiveness's greatest gifts. It does not change what has happened, but it changes the way we carry it as we continue walking forward.

You Are Safe. You Are Loved. You Are Never Alone.

One of the first teachings I ever received in ceremony came at a time when I needed it most.

By then, I had already spent many years on a healing journey. I had sat in counselling offices, attended workshops and retreats, practised yoga, participated in ceremony, and devoted much of my life to understanding healing. Yet despite all of that work, there was still a part of me that felt profoundly alone.

It was not the kind of loneliness that comes from being by yourself. It was much deeper. It was a feeling that somewhere along the way I had lost my connection with Spirit. I couldn't explain it, but I carried that feeling with me for many years. No matter how much healing work I did, there was still an ache inside me that longed to remember something I could not quite reach.

During one ceremony, I found myself in the presence of the Buddha. Over the course of my healing journey, I have encountered many different spiritual teachers and sacred beings. I don't expect everyone

to understand these experiences in the same way, and I have no need to convince anyone of what I experienced. What I can say is that, in that moment, I experienced what I can only describe as a profound remembrance of our interconnectedness or unitive consciousness. Every sense of separation dissolved. I felt deeply connected to Creator, my ancestors, the Earth, and every living being across time. It was one of the most profoundly healing experiences of my life, and one of the most difficult to put into words. I asked one simple question.

"Why did you leave me?"

The answer came immediately.

"We never left."

There was no hesitation. There was no judgment. There was only love.

The message continued.

"We have always been here. Through space and through time, we are all connected. We always have been, and we always will be."

In that moment, something within me changed.

The loneliness I had carried for so many years disappeared. I experienced a profound sense of connection that went beyond words. It was not something I understood intellectually. I felt it with every part of my being. I knew that I was connected to Creator, to my ancestors, to the Earth, and to every living thing. I understood that nothing exists separately. Even when we cannot feel that connection, it has never been broken.

We simply forget.

Since that ceremony, I have often reflected on how many of us spend our lives searching for something we have never actually lost. We search for belonging, for love, for connection, and for a place where we finally

feel at home. Yet perhaps what we are truly seeking is the remembrance that we have always belonged.

For anyone who has experienced abandonment, rejection, grief, or deep loneliness, remembering this can become one of the greatest acts of healing. To know, not just in your mind but in your heart, that you have never been abandoned by love changes the way you walk through the world.

You are not forgotten.

You are not separate.

You are not alone.

Years later, as I studied trauma, psychology, and the nervous system, I realized that modern science was describing something ceremony had already taught me. Before we can fully heal, our bodies need to experience safety.

When our nervous system senses danger, whether the threat is real or remembered, it moves into survival mode. We may fight, flee, freeze, or fawn as our body does everything it can to protect us. These responses are not signs of weakness or failure. They are adaptive survival strategies that once helped us survive difficult experiences. We will explore these trauma responses in greater depth in the Shadow Work section. The challenge is that many of us continue living as though the danger is still present, even long after it has passed.

Healing begins when the body receives a different message.

You are safe.

You are loved.

You are not alone.

These words may seem simple, but I have witnessed their power many times. I have whispered them to people during ceremony as they moved through fear and grief. I have spoken them quietly during prayer. I have repeated them to myself during moments when I felt overwhelmed or uncertain.

Each time, I noticed something begin to soften.

The breath became slower.

The shoulders relaxed.

The body became quieter.

The heart began to open.

This is not because the words themselves are magical. It is because they remind us of something our spirit has always known. They remind our nervous system that it no longer has to remain on guard. They invite us to move from fear into connection, from survival into presence, and from separation back into relationship with ourselves, with Spirit, and with all our relations.

I often invite people to place one hand over their heart and one over their abdomen. Feel the support of the Earth beneath you. Breathe slowly. There is nothing to force and nothing to prove. Simply allow yourself to receive these words, even if part of you is not quite ready to believe them.

With each breath, repeat quietly:

You are safe.

You are loved.

You are not alone.

Over time, these words become more than something we say. They become something we begin to feel. Eventually, they become something we know.

Perhaps that is one of ceremony's greatest gifts. It does not give us something we have been missing. It helps us remember what has always been true.

We have never been alone.

We have always been connected.

And we have always been loved.

Closing Reflection

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

It is not surrendering your truth.

It is not saying that what happened was acceptable.

Forgiveness is choosing not to let yesterday determine who you become tomorrow.

It is an act of courage.

It is an act of compassion.

It is an act of freedom.

May you walk forward with a lighter heart.

May those who came before you find peace.

May those who come after you inherit a gentler path.

All My Relations.

Chapter Summary

Relationships are among our greatest teachers. Some enter our lives to love us, support us, and remind us of who we are. Others challenge us in ways we never expected, revealing wounds that have been waiting for our attention. Whether joyful or painful, every relationship offers an opportunity to learn, grow, and deepen our understanding of ourselves.

Throughout this chapter, you have been invited to see relationships as ceremony. Rather than asking who was right or wrong, the deeper invitation is to ask, "What is this relationship teaching me?" Sometimes the lesson is about love. Sometimes it is about forgiveness, boundaries, grief, accountability, or learning to let go. Sometimes the most important relationship needing healing is the one we have with ourselves.

Forgiveness does not erase the past or excuse harmful behaviour. It changes the way we carry our experiences. As we release what no longer belongs to us, we create space for compassion, freedom, and new possibilities to emerge. Healing often unfolds in layers, and every step we take toward forgiveness has the potential to ripple through our families, our communities, and future generations.

Ceremony also reminds us that healing begins with safety. When we feel connected to ourselves, to the Earth, to Spirit, and to one another, our nervous system can begin to soften. We move from surviving to living, from fear to trust, and from separation back into relationship. In those moments we remember a simple but profound truth:

You are safe.

You are loved.

You are never alone.

As you continue your journey, remember that healthy boundaries are also an act of ceremony. They honour your dignity while creating space for relationships rooted in respect, reciprocity, and care. Sometimes healing means drawing closer. Sometimes it means walking away with love. Both require courage.

Every person you meet leaves something behind. Some leave joy. Some leave sorrow. Some leave wisdom that only becomes clear years later. The invitation is not to avoid difficult relationships, but to allow each one to deepen your capacity for compassion, strengthen your connection to yourself, and guide you back into right relationship with all your relations.

Every relationship is a ceremony. Every ending is a beginning. Every act of healing creates ripples that extend far beyond ourselves.

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REFLECTION



Who or what have I continued carrying long after the relationship changed?

What burden no longer belongs to me?

What would freedom from this burden look and feel like in my life?

How might forgiveness change my relationship with myself, my family, my ancestors, or future generations?

Have there been times in my life when I felt disconnected, abandoned, or alone? What helped me remember that I was supported, even if I could not feel it at the time?

When I slowly repeat the words, "You are safe. You are loved. You are not alone," what thoughts, emotions, or sensations arise within me? What part of me most needs to hear these words today?

What helps my nervous system feel safe? Consider the people, places, practices, or experiences that help you feel grounded, connected, and at peace.

What would change in my life if I truly believed, every day, that I am safe, I am loved, and I am never alone?

As you leave this chapter, what intention do you want to carry into your relationships moving forward?

CHAPTER SIX:



Integration

Many people believe the ceremony ends when the songs become quiet, the fire burns low, or the medicine leaves the body. In my experience, nothing could be further from the truth. Ceremony is not the destination. It is the beginning of a conversation that continues long after we return home.

When I first began working with ceremony, I thought the visions themselves were the teaching. I carefully recorded every image, every conversation, every symbol that appeared before me, believing that if I could understand them all I would somehow understand myself. Over time I came to realize that the visions were only one part of the journey. The greater challenge was learning how to live differently because of what I had been shown.

This is the work of integration.

The Path of Integration

Integration asks us to carry the teachings of ceremony into ordinary life. It asks us to notice whether we are becoming more patient, more compassionate, more honest, and more courageous. It asks whether our relationships begin to change, whether we speak differently to our

children, whether we walk more gently upon the Earth, and whether we finally find the courage to release burdens we have carried for years. Ceremony may reveal the path, but integration is how we choose to walk it.

Over the years I began noticing that, although every healing journey is unique, healing often unfolds through a recognizable rhythm. We become aware that something within us is asking for attention. We begin exploring its origins with curiosity rather than judgment. We gradually find the courage to feel what has been held inside and release what no longer serves us. As our nervous system experiences greater safety, we become less driven by old survival patterns and more able to respond from the heart. Over time, these intentional choices reshape the way we think, feel, relate, and live until they become our natural way of being.

I have come to understand this as the Path of Integration.

The Path of Integration¹ figure below offers a visual map of this journey. Rather than seeing these stages as steps to be mastered, I invite you to think of them as companions you will return to again and again. Healing is rarely linear. Like the changing seasons, it unfolds in cycles, each one bringing us a little closer to wholeness.

Although every healing journey is unique, I have noticed that integration often unfolds through a familiar rhythm. Something within us asks for attention. We begin to notice patterns we can no longer ignore. With time, we become curious about where those patterns came from instead of judging ourselves for having them. We gradually find the courage to feel what has been held inside and release what no longer serves us. As our nervous system begins to experience greater safety,

¹ This section is informed by research on nervous system regulation, self-compassion, and post-traumatic growth, while the Path of Integration itself is the author's original framework.

new ways of thinking, feeling, and relating naturally emerge. Over time, those choices become woven into the fabric of our everyday lives.²

The Path of Integration is not a straight line. We rarely move neatly from one stage to the next. More often, we circle back to the same lessons throughout our lives. Each experience offers another opportunity to release Shadow Resonance, strengthen Heart Resonance, cultivate Light Resonance, and return to Right Relationship with ourselves, our families, our communities, Mother Earth, and Spirit.

Rather than thinking of these stages as steps to complete, I invite you to see them as companions. You will return to each one many times. Some seasons call for awareness. Others ask for forgiveness, release, or deeper understanding. Healing moves in cycles, much like the changing seasons. Each cycle brings us a little closer to living with greater presence, compassion, and intention.

Awareness

Every healing journey begins with awareness.

Long before we understand why we are struggling, something inside us knows that change is needed. We may notice recurring emotions, unhealthy relationships, physical symptoms, or a persistent feeling that we are living the same story with different people. Sometimes awareness arrives quietly through reflection. Other times it comes through crisis, loss, illness, or ceremony. Whatever opens the door, awareness invites us to stop running long enough to honestly see what is in front of us.³

² This section is informed by research on nervous system regulation, self-compassion, and post-traumatic growth, while the Path of Integration itself is the author's original framework (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Neff, 2011; Tedeschi et al., 2018).

³ The importance of awareness as the foundation for personal transformation is supported by research in interpersonal neurobiology and mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Siegel, 2020).

This can be uncomfortable. We may discover grief we have avoided, fears we have buried, or patterns we learned long ago to keep ourselves safe. We may recognize ways we have protected ourselves that no longer serve us. None of this is cause for shame.

Awareness is not about blaming ourselves or anyone else. It is about seeing clearly.

We cannot change what we refuse to acknowledge.

This is the moment Shadow Resonance begins to lose its power. What has remained hidden is gently brought into the light, where healing can finally begin.

Understanding

Once awareness begins, curiosity can slowly replace judgment.

Instead of asking, *What is wrong with me?*, we begin asking different questions.

What happened to me?

What did I need that I didn't receive?

What was I trying to protect?

How did these behaviours help me survive?

These questions shift us away from shame and toward compassion. They remind us that many of the ways we learned to cope were not signs of weakness or failure. They were intelligent responses to circumstances that once felt overwhelming.⁴

⁴ Contemporary trauma research recognizes that many coping behaviours develop as adaptive survival responses rather than personal flaws (Maté & Maté, 2022; van der Kolk, 2015).

As we begin to understand our stories through this lens, we stop seeing ourselves as broken. We begin recognizing that our nervous system, our emotions, and our behaviours have all been trying to protect us in the best ways they knew how.

Understanding does not excuse harmful behaviour, nor does it remove personal responsibility. Instead, it gives us the compassion needed to move forward without carrying unnecessary shame. We can acknowledge where we have been while also choosing a different path.

Understanding creates the conditions for self-compassion. And self-compassion creates the conditions for lasting change.⁵

Release

Healing requires movement.

For many of us, emotions become trapped because they were never safe to express when they first arose. We learned to push them down, ignore them, or carry them quietly so we could keep moving forward. Fear, grief, anger, disappointment, shame, and even joy can remain stored within us long after the experiences that created them have passed.⁶

Integration invites those emotions back into motion.

Release does not mean forgetting or pretending something never happened. It means allowing ourselves to acknowledge what we have been carrying so it no longer needs to define us. Every person finds their own way of releasing. For some it happens through forgiveness. For others it comes through prayer, ceremony, time on the land, movement, creativity, tears, laughter, journaling, or quiet reflection.

⁵ Kristin Neff's research demonstrates that self-compassion supports resilience, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Neff, 2011).

⁶ This understanding is informed by trauma research exploring how unresolved emotional experiences are carried in the body and nervous system and the importance of emotional processing for healing (van der Kolk, 2015).

There is no single right path. What matters is that what has been held inside is finally given permission to move.

Release cannot be forced.

Sometimes a burden falls away in a single moment of insight or ceremony. More often it unfolds gradually over months or years. We release only what we are ready to release, and every time we return to the work we set down another small piece of what no longer belongs to us.

Every act of release softens Shadow Resonance. Each burden we lay down creates space for something new to emerge.

Transformation

As we begin releasing what we have carried, something else begins to change.

Our nervous system slowly learns that it no longer has to live in a constant state of protection.⁷ Energy that was once devoted to surviving becomes available for living. We begin noticing moments of peace that once seemed impossible. Creativity returns. Joy feels more accessible. Our relationships become healthier because we are no longer responding only from old wounds.

Transformation is rarely dramatic.

More often, it reveals itself through ordinary moments.

One day you notice that you responded with patience instead of anger.

You set a boundary without feeling guilty.

⁷ Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory describes how repeated experiences of safety support nervous system regulation, allowing individuals to shift from survival responses toward connection, creativity, and well-being (Porges, 2021).

You speak more kindly to yourself.

You pause before reacting.

You laugh more easily.

You spend more time noticing beauty than anticipating danger.

These moments may seem small, but together they become evidence that healing is taking root.

Over time, we discover that transformation is not about becoming someone new. It is about uncovering the person we have always been beneath the fear, the grief, the conditioning, and the survival strategies that once protected us.

This is where Heart Resonance begins cultivating Light Resonance.

Healing becomes less about fixing ourselves and more about remembering ourselves.

Integration

Integration is where healing becomes a way of life.

A ceremony may last a few hours. A retreat may last a weekend. A vision may come in a single moment. But healing is measured by what happens after we return home.

Integration is found in ordinary moments.

It is found in the conversation where you choose to listen instead of react. It is found in the boundary you set with kindness instead of guilt. It is found in the apology you are finally able to offer, the forgiveness you are ready to receive, and the compassion you extend to yourself on difficult days. It is found in the way you speak to your children, the way you care for the land, the way you treat strangers, and the choices you make when no one else is watching.

This is where the teachings of ceremony become part of everyday life.

Integration does not mean we never struggle again. It does not mean we stop feeling grief, anger, fear, or uncertainty. Life will continue bringing change, loss, joy, challenge, and unexpected lessons. Each experience becomes another invitation to return to the path.⁸

With every cycle we deepen our understanding.

We become a little more grounded.

A little more patient.

A little more compassionate.

A little more resilient.

A little more willing to meet life with curiosity instead of fear.

Little by little, we spend less time living from Shadow Resonance and more time living from Heart Resonance. As compassion, gratitude, courage, and presence become woven into our daily lives, Light Resonance begins to emerge naturally. It is not something we achieve. It is something we embody through the choices we make every day.

This is why I believe healing is not a destination.

It is a lifelong relationship.

Every ceremony prepares us for life, but life itself becomes the greatest ceremony. Every conversation, every challenge, every act of kindness, every moment of forgiveness, and every step we take upon Mother Earth becomes another opportunity to live the teachings we have received.

⁸ Research on resilience, post-traumatic growth, and contemplative practice suggests that lasting transformation develops through repeated intentional actions that gradually reshape patterns of thinking, feeling, and relating over time (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Tedeschi et al., 2018).

That is the true work of integration.

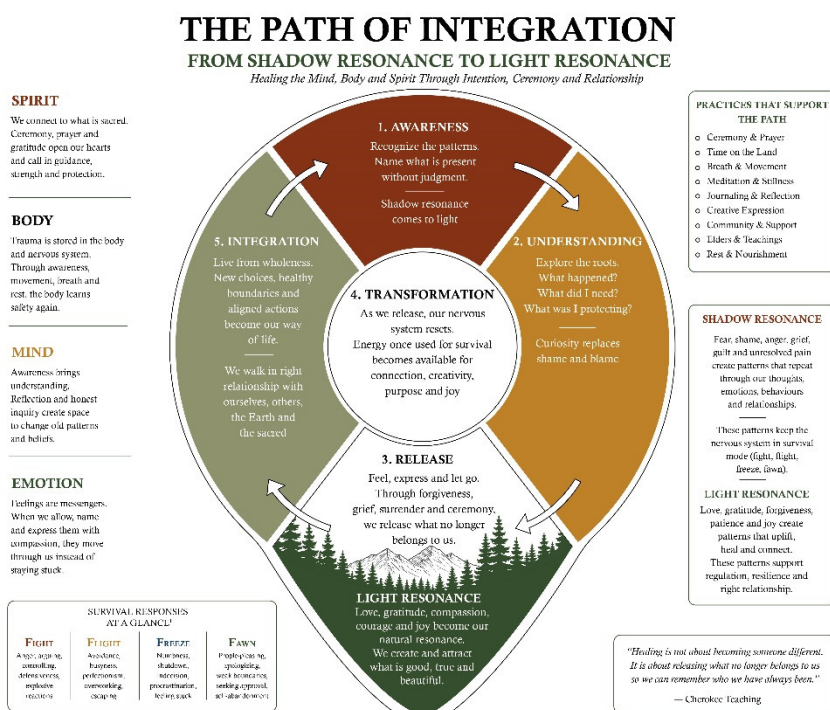
Not simply remembering what happened during ceremony.

But allowing ceremony to change the way we live.

This is the path of integration.

This is the practice of everyday ceremony.

The Path of Integration Visual



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ABOUT THE MEDICINE WHEEL

The Medicine Wheel is a symbol of wholeness, balance and the interconnectedness of all things. It reminds us that nothing happens alone; we honor every aspect of who we are: mind, body, emotion and spirit and walk in right relationship with ourselves, each other and the Earth.



CITATIONS

- 1 Porges, 2011; Walker, 2013
- 2 Mink, 2022; van der Kolk, 2014
- 3 Mink, 2018
- 4 Levine, 2010

Use of this resource does not replace professional medical or mental health care. Seek support when needed.

One of the most important lessons I have learned is that not every experience in ceremony is asking us to take immediate action. Especially after profound journeys, it is easy to become captivated by visions, dreams, symbols, and synchronicities. The world suddenly seems alive with messages, and in many ways it is. Yet wisdom lies not only in receiving guidance but in learning how to carry it responsibly.

Over the years I have received teachings that were unmistakably clear. Sometimes they arrived as words spoken directly during ceremony. Sometimes they came through dreams that returned night after night until I understood their meaning. Occasionally they came as instructions that made little sense to my logical mind but settled so deeply within me that I could not ignore them.

One such teaching concerned the simple act of extending an invitation.



There have been times when, during ceremony, I was given the clear instruction to invite someone into ceremony or into healing. These were not always people who were close to me. Some were individuals with whom I had lost contact. Some had been part of difficult chapters in my life. My first response was often resistance. My mind immediately began constructing reasons why the instruction could not possibly be correct. Surely someone else would be better suited to reach out. Surely enough time had passed. Surely they would not understand.

Yet the instruction remained.

As I continued sitting with those teachings, I slowly realized that the invitation itself did not belong to me. My responsibility was simply to carry it with integrity. Whether the person accepted, declined, ignored

it, or never responded was never mine to control. Spirit had asked me to extend an invitation, not to determine the outcome.

That distinction changed the way I understand responsibility.

Too often we believe we are accountable for how other people respond to our kindness, our apologies, our forgiveness, or our invitations. Ceremony taught me otherwise. We are responsible for offering what has genuinely been placed in our care. We are not responsible for another person's readiness to receive it.

This is where discernment becomes one of the most important companions on the ceremonial path.



People often ask how we know whether a message truly comes from Spirit or from our own hopes, fears, or imagination. There is no formula that answers this question for everyone. Discernment grows slowly through relationship, humility, and experience. It develops as we spend time in prayer, in silence, on the land, and in conversation with trusted Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and ceremonial leaders who know us well enough to ask difficult questions when needed.

One of the greatest dangers after a powerful ceremony is believing that every impression demands immediate action. Sometimes the deepest teachings are not instructions to change the world but invitations to change ourselves. A dream may ask us to forgive before we speak. A vision may invite patience rather than movement. A symbol may take months or years before its meaning becomes clear. Like seeds resting beneath the soil through winter, some teachings require time before they are ready to emerge into the light.

Discernment is not the opposite of faith. It is one expression of faith. It reminds us that humility is often wiser than certainty and that Spirit

is never diminished because we choose to move carefully rather than impulsively.

This is particularly important when the teachings involve other people. If a message encourages us to manipulate, pressure, frighten, or override another person's boundaries, it deserves careful examination. Likewise, if acting upon a message would place ourselves or someone else in danger, wisdom asks us to pause rather than proceed. Throughout my own journey I have learned that genuine spiritual guidance never requires us to abandon common sense, healthy boundaries, or personal safety. The sacred and the practical are not opposites. They walk together.

Perhaps this is one of the greatest lessons integration has to offer. We do not leave ceremony trying to become someone extraordinary. We return home learning how to become more fully ourselves. We cook meals, go to work, care for our families, walk our dogs, tend our gardens, apologize when we have caused harm, and forgive when we are ready. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the teachings become less about what happened during ceremony and more about how we choose to live each ordinary day.

In time we discover that the most profound ceremonies are not always the ones filled with visions. Sometimes they are the quiet mornings when we finally respond differently than we once would have. Sometimes they are the difficult conversations we no longer avoid. Sometimes they are the moments we choose compassion instead of judgment, courage instead of fear, or forgiveness instead of resentment.

That is how ceremony continues.

Not because we keep returning to the medicine, but because the medicine has quietly begun returning us to ourselves.

One of the greatest mistakes we can make after a profound ceremony is believing that we must understand everything immediately.

Many of us have been educated to think in straight lines. We move from beginning to end, from question to answer, from cause to effect. We imagine time as something that unfolds neatly before us, one day after another. Yet ceremony has repeatedly shown me that the spirit world does not always communicate in the same way. Teachings often arrive outside our ordinary understanding of time.

You may receive a vision that makes no sense for years.

You may hear a single sentence during ceremony that quietly returns to you a decade later, only then revealing its meaning.

You may be shown a place you have never visited, meet someone whose importance you do not yet understand, or receive guidance that seems completely unrelated to your present life. It is tempting to dismiss these experiences because they do not fit neatly into our current understanding. My experience has taught me to do the opposite.

Record everything.

Write down your dreams, your visions, your conversations, the symbols that appeared, the emotions you felt, the songs that emerged, and even the smallest details that seem insignificant at the time. Resist the temptation to edit your journal according to what makes sense today. Often it is the details we almost leave out that later become the most meaningful.

Over the years I have returned to journals from ceremonies that took place many years earlier and found teachings that I simply could not have understood when they were first given. Life had not yet unfolded in the way it needed to. Certain people had not yet entered my path. Certain losses had not yet occurred. Certain responsibilities had not yet

been entrusted to me. The teaching was not wrong. I simply had not yet grown into it.

This is one of the reasons I encourage people not to rush back into ceremony seeking another experience before they have spent time living with the last one. Sometimes the next chapter of our healing does not require another vision. It requires living faithfully with the one we have already received.

Think of your journal as another form of oral tradition.

When our ancestors carried teachings through story, they understood that the full meaning of a story could unfold over an entire lifetime. The same is true of the stories we receive in ceremony. They continue to teach us each time we return to them because we are no longer the same person who first heard them.

Trust that what needs to return will return.

If a teaching has truly been given to you, you do not need to cling tightly to it or fear forgetting it. The teachings have a way of finding us again when we are ready. Sometimes they return through a dream. Sometimes through another ceremony. Sometimes through an unexpected conversation or a passage in a book. Sometimes they arrive quietly while walking in the forest or watching the river move.

Your responsibility is not to force understanding.

Your responsibility is to become a careful witness.

Record what you receive with honesty. Carry it with humility. Live your life with integrity. Then allow the teachings to unfold in their own time.

The spirit world is not hurried, and neither should we be.

The Gift of Remembrance

One of the greatest gifts ceremony offers is not simply the vision itself but the opportunity to remember.

Remembrance is more than memory. Memory recalls what happened. Remembrance returns us to the meaning of what happened. It asks us to revisit our experiences with new eyes, recognizing that as we continue to grow, the teachings themselves continue to unfold. The ceremony has not changed. We have.

Our ancestors understood this well. Through the oral tradition, stories were told and retold across generations because they revealed different teachings at different times in a person's life. A child, an adult, and an Elder could all hear the same story and receive entirely different teachings. The wisdom did not change. The listener did.

Ceremony invites us into that same relationship with our own lives.

A vision that seems confusing today may become perfectly clear after an unexpected conversation five years from now. A sentence spoken during ceremony may suddenly return while standing beside a river, holding a newborn child, mourning the loss of a loved one, or facing an important decision. A dream that once appeared mysterious may quietly reveal itself after years of living.

This is why I encourage everyone to keep a ceremonial journal.

Your journal is not simply a record of extraordinary experiences. It becomes a sacred bundle of teachings that grows alongside you. Each time you return to its pages, you are entering into relationship with your former self and allowing today's understanding to meet yesterday's experience. Sometimes you will discover that you have completely misunderstood a teaching. Sometimes you will realize that what seemed

insignificant was quietly preparing you for something that had not yet arrived.

Do not become discouraged if your ceremonies leave you with more questions than answers.

The spirit world is not limited by the linear way in which we experience time. Teachings may arrive years before the events that help us understand them. Guidance may be given long before we possess the experience, maturity, or responsibility to carry it wisely. Rather than becoming frustrated by what you do not yet understand, receive it with gratitude and trust that what has been given will return when the time is right.

Your responsibility is not to force meaning.

Your responsibility is to remember.



To write.

To reflect.

To return.

To live the teachings as they reveal themselves throughout your life.

This is the gift of remembrance.

It allows ceremony to continue speaking long after the songs have ended and the fire has grown quiet.

The Ceremony

Before writing, find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Light a candle if you wish, sit beside a tree or moving water if that is

available to you, or simply take a few slow breaths and allow yourself to become present.

Place your journal before you and quietly offer a prayer of gratitude for everything that has been revealed, whether you understand it yet or not.

As you begin writing, do not worry about chronology or polished sentences. Simply become a witness to your own experience.

Record whatever comes to mind, including:

- The date and place of the ceremony.
- Your intention before entering the ceremony.
- The people who were present.
- Images, visions, dreams, symbols, colours, animals, songs, or words that stood out to you.
- Teachings that felt clear.
- Teachings that remain mysterious.
- Any instructions, invitations, or guidance you received.
- The emotions you experienced during and after the ceremony.
- Changes you noticed in the days and weeks that followed.

When you have finished writing, close your journal for a moment and place your hands upon it.

Offer these words:

I receive these teachings with gratitude.

I do not need to understand everything today.

What is meant for me will continue to unfold in its own time.

May I carry these teachings with humility, discernment, and integrity.

May I remember what serves the highest good, and may the rest reveal itself when the time is right.

Sit quietly for several minutes before ending your ceremony.

In the months and years ahead, return to these pages often. Add new reflections in a different colour of ink or write notes in the margins. Notice what has changed, what has remained constant, and what has only now begun to make sense.

Integration is not something that happens once after ceremony.

Integration is its own ceremony.

It continues throughout your life.

Each time you remember, reflect, forgive, change, or choose to live differently because of what you were shown, the ceremony begins again.

In this way, ceremony is never truly over.

It simply continues to unfold within the life you are living.

*Integration is not something that happens once after ceremony.
Integration is its own ceremony.*



Heart Resonance

Over the years I have participated in many forms of healing. Some came through Indigenous ceremony. Others came through my academic work in anthropology, trauma-informed practice, Reiki, energy healing, meditation, and other training. At first these approaches appeared very different. Each had its own language, practices, and explanations for why healing occurs. Some spoke about trauma and the nervous system. Others spoke about energy, spirit, relationship, or ceremony.

As I continued learning, however, I found myself returning to the same question.

What is it that actually helps people heal?

Not simply cope.

Not simply survive.

But genuinely heal.

It would have been easy to conclude that one approach held the answer, yet that was never my experience. Rather, each path seemed to illuminate a different part of the same landscape. Whether I was sitting in ceremony, studying anthropology, participating in Reiki attunements, reading the work of Gabor Maté, or reflecting on my own healing journey, I kept arriving at a similar understanding.

Healing begins with relationship.

Relationship with ourselves.

Relationship with others.

Relationship with Mother Earth.

Relationship with Spirit.

Relationship with our own hearts.

One of the teachings that has stayed with me most deeply came during training. We were encouraged to think of ourselves as Love Warriors and to carry one simple question into our lives:

How do I respond to this situation through love?

At first I thought the question was too simple. Surely healing was more complicated than that. I had spent years studying trauma, Indigenous knowledge systems, leadership, anthropology, and energy healing. I

knew healing involved grief, accountability, forgiveness, and change. Could one question really hold all of that?

Over time I discovered that it could.

The question was never asking me to ignore difficult emotions or pretend everything was okay. It was asking something much more difficult. It was asking me to pause before reacting. To notice whether I was responding from fear or from love. To become aware of whether Shadow Resonance was leading my choices or whether I could intentionally choose another way.

This became the beginning of what I now describe as **Heart Resonance**.

Heart Resonance is not simply love as an emotion. Emotions naturally rise and fall throughout our lives. Heart Resonance is an intentional practice. It is the ongoing choice to cultivate love, empathy, compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, courage, and presence in the way we meet ourselves, others, and the world.

My understanding of Heart Resonance deepened through Reiki. While many people approach Reiki as an energy healing modality, what stayed with me most were the attunements themselves. They cultivated a way of being. They invited me to become quieter, more present, and more aware of the quality of attention I brought into every interaction. Over time I realized that the healing did not reside only in the technique. It also lived in intention. The more I entered heart space, the more I found I could simply be present with another person's suffering without needing to fix or change it.

Ceremony has taught me something similar.

The most profound teachings I have received have rarely ended when the ceremony was over. If anything, that is when the real work begins.

Ceremony creates an opening, but integration happens in everyday life. It happens in the conversations we have with our families. It happens in how we respond when someone hurts us. It happens when we choose forgiveness over resentment, gratitude over entitlement, or compassion over judgment.

Mother Earth has perhaps been my greatest teacher of all.

Whenever I feel disconnected, I return to the land. I sit quietly beside water. I walk among the trees. I place my hands on the earth. The land reminds me that I belong to something much larger than myself. Healing cannot be forced. Like the changing of the seasons, it unfolds in its own time. We cannot rush spring. We can only create the conditions for growth.

Heart Resonance is cultivated in much the same way.

Every prayer.

Every ceremony.

Every act of forgiveness.

Every expression of gratitude.

Every laugh shared with family.

Every walk upon the land.

Every time we respond with compassion rather than fear.

These moments may seem ordinary, yet together they slowly reshape us. Our nervous system begins learning safety instead of constant vigilance. Shadow Resonance gradually loses its influence. In its place, new ways of thinking, feeling, and relating become embodied within our minds, our bodies, and our spirits.

This is what I call **Light Resonance**.

Light Resonance is not something we pursue directly. It is the natural expression of a life lived through Heart Resonance. As love becomes our orientation, our relationships begin changing. We become less reactive and more intentional. We discover that healing is not only personal. The way we live influences our families, our communities, and the generations yet to come.

Perhaps this is why so many wisdom traditions, despite speaking different languages, ultimately point toward the same truth.

Healing begins in relationship.

Relationship begins in the heart.

The question, then, is not whether we will encounter fear, grief, or suffering. We all will.

The question is whether we can return, again and again, to a single intention:

How do I respond to this situation through love?

Breath as a Path to Heart Resonance

Breath is one of the simplest and most accessible ways to support nervous system regulation and return to the present moment. According to Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory, slow, intentional breathing helps communicate safety to the nervous system, allowing us to move from states of protection toward connection, presence, and relationship (Porges, 2021). When we feel overwhelmed, our breathing often becomes shallow and rapid, reinforcing our body's survival responses. By intentionally slowing the breath, we create space between stimulus and response, allowing us to choose our actions with greater awareness and compassion. One effective practice is box breathing: inhale for four counts, hold for four counts, exhale for four counts, and hold again for four counts before repeating the cycle. Even a few

minutes of conscious breathing can help settle the body, quiet the mind, and restore Heart Resonance, reminding us that healing often begins with a single intentional breath.

Practice: Box Breathing

Box breathing is a simple practice that helps regulate the nervous system by slowing the breath and bringing your awareness into the present moment. Find a comfortable seated position with both feet on the floor. Relax your shoulders and allow your jaw to soften.

- Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of four.
- Hold your breath gently for a count of four.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of four.
- Hold again for a count of four.
- Repeat the cycle for four to six rounds.

As you breathe, notice any changes in your body. Has your heartbeat slowed? Has the tension in your shoulders softened? Has your mind become quieter? There is no need to force anything. Simply observe with curiosity.

REFLECTION



How did your body feel before you began this practice?

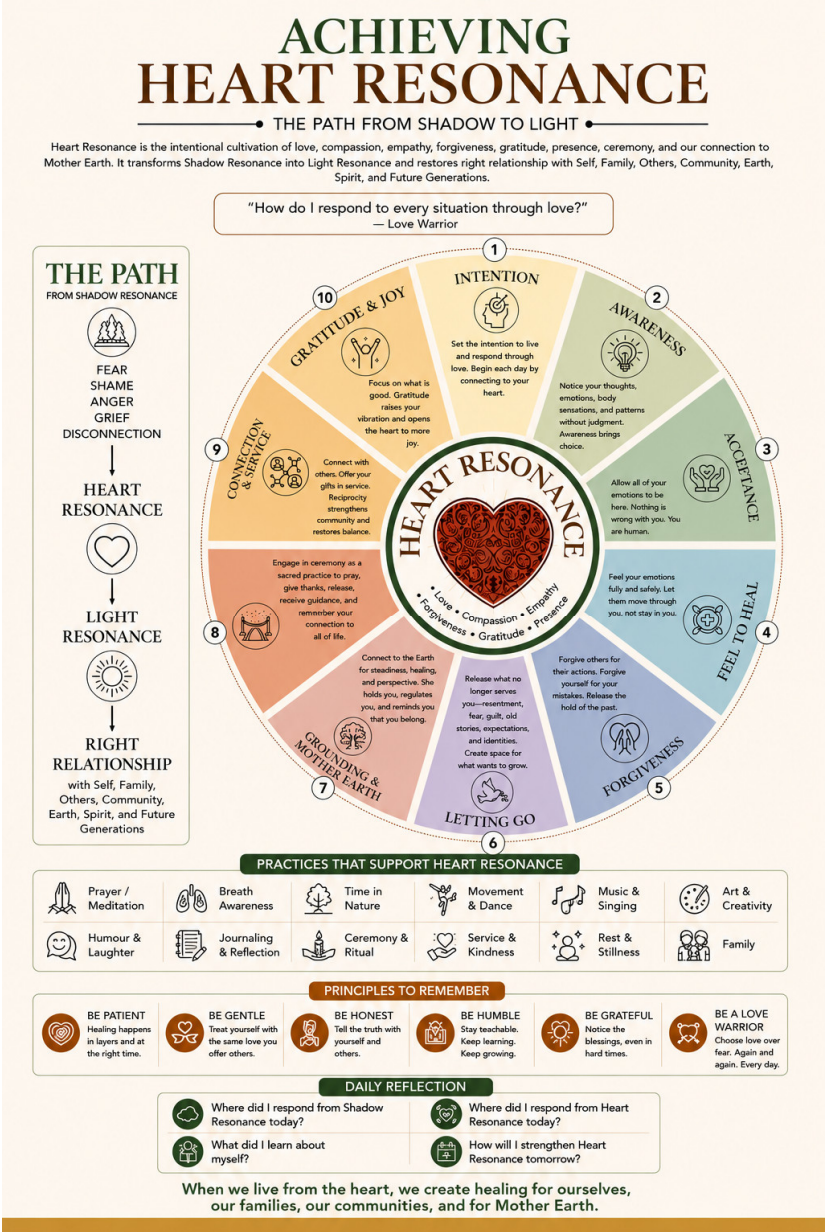
What sensations do you notice now?

When might intentional breathing help you respond with greater awareness rather than react from stress or fear?

How could you incorporate this practice into your everyday intentions?

Remember, healing does not always begin with a profound breakthrough. Sometimes it begins with a single conscious breath that reminds your body it is safe enough to be present.

Achieving Heart Resonance Visual: The Path from Shadow to Light (Visual)



Ten Practices for Cultivating Heart Resonance

Heart Resonance is not something we achieve once and keep forever. It is something we cultivate through the choices we make each day. These practices are not meant to be completed in order. You will return to them many times throughout your life. Some seasons ask for forgiveness. Others call for courage, gratitude, or simply remembering to slow down. Together they create a way of living that continually brings us back into right relationship with ourselves, with others, with Mother Earth, and with Spirit.

Intention

Every day begins with a choice.

Before we speak, before we react, before we become caught up in the demands of life, we have an opportunity to ask ourselves: *how do I want to show up today?*

Healing rarely happens by accident. It grows from the intentions we carry into our relationships, our work, and our everyday actions. When we choose to lead with love, compassion, and integrity, we create the conditions for Heart Resonance to grow.

Awareness

Awareness is the practice of paying attention.

It asks us to notice our thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and behaviours without immediately trying to change them. Rather than becoming trapped in old patterns, we begin observing them with curiosity.

Awareness creates the space between what happens to us and how we choose to respond. Within that space, new possibilities begin to emerge.

Acceptance

Acceptance is not resignation.

It is the willingness to meet ourselves honestly, without denying or fighting what is present.

Every emotion carries information. Fear, grief, sadness, joy, disappointment, and anger all have something to teach us. Healing begins when we stop resisting our experience and begin listening to what it is asking us to understand.

Feeling to Heal

What we refuse to feel often remains with us.

Emotions are meant to move through us, not become permanent residents within us. When we allow ourselves to experience them safely, they gradually lose their grip.

Feeling is not weakness.

It is one of the ways our hearts begin making space for healing.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an act of freedom.

It does not excuse harmful behaviour or erase the past. It changes the relationship we have with what happened.

As forgiveness deepens, we release the burdens we were never meant to carry forever. We also begin extending compassion toward ourselves, recognizing that we made many of our choices while doing the best we could with the knowledge, resources, and support we had at the time.

Letting Go

There comes a time when we are invited to put something down.

Sometimes it is resentment.

Sometimes shame.

Sometimes expectations, fear, or an identity that once helped us survive.

Letting go does not diminish our story. It allows us to stop living inside it so something new has room to grow.

Grounding with Mother Earth

Healing happens in relationship.

The land reminds us that we belong.

Whether we are walking through a forest, sitting beside a river, tending a garden, or simply feeling our feet against the Earth, nature has a way of bringing us back into balance.

Mother Earth teaches patience, reciprocity, resilience, and renewal. She reminds us that every season has its purpose and that growth often happens quietly beneath the surface before it becomes visible.

Ceremony

Ceremony helps us remember what is sacred.

Whether through prayer, gratitude, meditation, song, traditional teachings, or quiet moments of reflection, ceremony reconnects us with Spirit and with the values that guide our lives.

Ceremony may open the heart, but it is through daily practice that its teachings become part of who we are.

Connection and Service

Healing is never only about ourselves.

As our hearts open, we naturally begin looking outward. We strengthen our relationships, contribute to our communities, care for the land, and

recognize that our well-being is deeply connected to the well-being of others.

Service is not something we do because we have finished healing.

It is part of how healing continues.

Gratitude and Joy

Gratitude reminds us to notice what is already present.

Joy reminds us that healing is about more than releasing pain. It is also about making room for wonder, laughter, beauty, creativity, and love.

As Heart Resonance becomes woven into our lives, gratitude begins to arise naturally. Joy becomes less dependent on circumstances and more connected to the way we choose to meet the world.

Perhaps these are among the clearest signs that Light Resonance is beginning to take root.

The Heart Resonance Framework

The Heart Resonance Framework brings together the teachings explored throughout this book. It begins with awareness, deepens through intentional practice, and gradually becomes a way of living rooted in compassion, connection, and right relationship.

This is not a linear journey. We move between these practices throughout our lives, returning to them whenever life presents new challenges, new opportunities for growth, or new invitations to heal.

Heart Resonance is not about perfection.

It is about continually choosing to return to the heart.

Closing Reflection

These practices are not meant to be mastered.

They are meant to be lived.

Some days you will find gratitude easily. Other days you may simply find the courage to begin again. Both are part of the journey.

Healing is not measured by how quickly we change, but by our willingness to keep returning to ourselves with honesty, compassion, and hope.

Heart Resonance is not a destination.

It is a way of walking through the world.

And every day offers another opportunity to choose that path.

Chapter Summary

Integration is where ceremony becomes a way of life.

The teachings we receive in ceremony are precious, but they are only the beginning. Their true purpose is not to remain as beautiful memories, powerful visions, or meaningful stories. They are meant to shape the way we live. They ask us to bring greater awareness into our relationships, greater compassion into our conversations, and greater intention into the ordinary moments that make up our days.

Throughout this chapter, you have been invited to see integration as an ongoing relationship rather than a destination. Some teachings reveal themselves immediately, while others continue unfolding months or even years after the ceremony has ended. There is no need to force understanding. Like a seed planted in good soil, wisdom emerges in its own season when we remain open, attentive, and willing to listen.

Walking between worlds is not about leaving ordinary life behind in search of the sacred. It is about discovering that the sacred has been quietly present within ordinary life all along. The challenge is not remembering what happened in ceremony. The challenge is allowing

those experiences to soften your heart, deepen your relationships, and transform the way you move through the world.

As you continue your journey, trust that integration is happening even when it feels invisible. Each time you choose patience over anger, gratitude over entitlement, presence over distraction, or love over fear, you are embodying the teachings. Little by little, ceremony becomes less about what happened on a particular day and more about the person you are becoming.

The greatest measure of any ceremony is not what you experienced. It is how deeply you allow its teachings to become woven into the life you choose to live every day.

Footnotes

1. This section is informed by research on nervous system regulation, self-compassion, and post-traumatic growth, while the Path of Integration itself is the author's original framework.
2. The importance of awareness as the foundation for personal transformation is discussed extensively in interpersonal neurobiology and mindfulness research.
3. Contemporary trauma research recognizes that many coping behaviours develop as adaptive survival responses rather than personal flaws.
4. Kristin Neff's work on self-compassion demonstrates that responding to ourselves with kindness rather than self-criticism supports resilience, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being.
5. This understanding is informed by trauma research exploring how unresolved emotional experiences are carried in the body

and nervous system and the importance of emotional processing for healing.

6. Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory and related trauma research describe how repeated experiences of safety support nervous system regulation, allowing individuals to shift from survival responses toward connection, creativity, and well-being.
7. Contemporary research on resilience, post-traumatic growth, and contemplative practice suggests that lasting transformation develops through repeated intentional actions that gradually reshape patterns of thinking, feeling, and relating rather than through a single transformative event.

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Take a few quiet moments to reflect on your own journey of integration. There are no right or wrong answers. Simply notice what arises with honesty and compassion. You may wish to write in the space provided, continue in your journal, or return to these questions over time as your understanding deepens.

What teaching or insight from this chapter resonated with you most deeply?

Looking back on your life, where do you see yourself on the Path of Integration?

What patterns, habits, or survival strategies are you becoming more aware of?

What are you being invited to release at this stage of your journey?

How has ceremony, prayer, or time on the land changed the way you move through your everyday life?

What practices help you cultivate Heart Resonance?

What does Right Relationship mean in your life today?

What is one intention you will carry with you over the coming weeks as you continue your journey of integration?

PART III

CHAPTER SEVEN



Shadow Work

There is a common misunderstanding that healing is about becoming lighter. We imagine that if we meditate enough, pray enough, or attend enough ceremonies, we will eventually leave behind our grief, anger, fear, shame, or pain. We hope that healing will somehow erase the difficult parts of ourselves.

Ceremony has taught me something very different.

We do not heal by turning away from the darkness. We heal by learning to see within it.

Shadow work is not about fixing what is broken. It is about remembering what has been forgotten and welcoming home the parts of ourselves we were taught to hide. Every experience that has shaped us leaves something behind. Sometimes it leaves wisdom. Sometimes it leaves fear. Sometimes it leaves gifts that were buried because they were not safe to express. The work of healing is not deciding which parts of ourselves deserve to belong. It is learning how to bring them back into relationship with compassion, honesty, and balance.

Much of what we call the shadow is not darkness at all. It is simply the places where love stopped flowing.

Some of those places were shaped by childhood. Others emerged through loss, violence, addiction, betrayal, or grief. Some have been carried through families for generations until they became so familiar that we mistook them for our own nature. Colonization, too, has left deep shadows within Indigenous families and communities through generations of displacement, Residential Schools, the outlawing of ceremony, and the disruption of language, kinship, and relationship to the land. None of these experiences define who we are, but they do shape the burdens we may carry until they are acknowledged and healed.

Shadow work begins with a simple but courageous question.

What have I refused to feel?

The answer rarely comes first through the mind.

It lives in the body.

It is the tightening in your chest whenever grief begins to surface. It is the tension you carry in your shoulders after years of trying to remain strong for everyone else. It is the anger that rises unexpectedly because beneath it sits an old hurt that has never been given a voice. It is the loneliness we try to silence through work, achievement, distraction, substances, or endless busyness.

These are not signs that something is wrong with you.

They are invitations.

Your body has been carrying stories that your words have not yet spoken.

For many years I believed that these uncomfortable places were obstacles standing in the way of healing. Ceremony gradually revealed

something else. The places I most wanted to avoid often became the places holding the greatest medicine. Every time I turned toward grief instead of running from it, every time I met fear with curiosity rather than judgment, another piece of myself returned home.

This is why I no longer think of the shadow as an enemy.

It is a teacher.

It is the place where forgotten stories wait to be heard, where ancestors continue speaking through the threads of memory and lineage, and where healing asks us to become honest enough to stop pretending that we are only light. We are not called to choose between light and darkness. We are called to learn from both.

In my own ceremonial life, Wolf has often appeared as a guide through these landscapes. Wolf does not remove the darkness or walk the path for us. Wolf teaches us how to move through it with courage, awareness, and trust. Every person will have their own guides and teachings, yet the invitation remains the same. We are not being asked to fear the shadow. We are being asked to walk into it with humility, compassion, and the willingness to discover what has been waiting there all along.

Perhaps this is the deepest teaching of shadow work.

The shadow is not where we lose ourselves.

It is often where we begin remembering who we have always been.

Becoming Whole

One of the greatest misunderstandings about healing is that it is always gentle.

Many people begin ceremony hoping to find peace, clarity, forgiveness, or joy. They imagine that healing will feel like light entering the body,

burdens lifting from the heart, and finally becoming free from suffering. Sometimes it does.

Just as often, however, ceremony asks something far more difficult.

It asks us to meet ourselves.

Not the version we present to the world. Not the person we wish we were. Not even the wounded child we already know lives within us. Ceremony has a remarkable way of introducing us to the parts of ourselves we have spent years avoiding. Our anger. Our jealousy. Our grief. Our addictions. Our fear. Our need for control. Our shame. Even our gifts can become part of the shadow if we have learned that it is safer to hide our brilliance than risk being seen.

For many people this can feel unsettling. We leave ceremony wondering why difficult emotions appeared when we had come searching for healing. Yet this is often where healing truly begins.

Healing is not the absence of darkness.

Healing is learning to carry the light and the darkness together with wisdom.

This understanding appears in many different traditions. Carl Jung described the shadow as those parts of ourselves that remain hidden from our conscious awareness. Indigenous teachings have long recognized similar truths, although often expressed through story, ceremony, and relationship rather than psychological language. Across many Nations there are teachings that remind us what happens when fear, greed, pride, or imbalance begin governing our lives. These teachings are not meant to frighten us. They invite us to return to balance.

One teaching that has deeply influenced my own understanding is the story of the Wendigo.

Although the stories differ among Cree, Anishinaabe, and other Algonquian-speaking Nations, the Wendigo is often understood as a warning about spiritual hunger that can never be satisfied. It consumes endlessly because it has forgotten relationship. It takes without gratitude. It hungers without remembering that enough already exists.

As I have reflected on this teaching over the years, I have come to understand that the Wendigo lives far beyond old stories. We see it whenever fear convinces us that we must always have more. More wealth. More status. More recognition. More power. More certainty. More consumption. We see it in addictions that promise relief but deepen our suffering. We see it in the loneliness created when relationships are replaced by accumulation. We even see it in the spiritual world when we chase one ceremony after another without ever allowing ourselves to integrate what has already been given.

The opposite of the Wendigo is not perfection.

It is relationship.

Relationship reminds us that we already belong.

Relationship teaches gratitude before consumption, reciprocity before taking, and enough before excess.

Shadow work, then, is not about fighting ourselves. It is about becoming curious enough to ask what our shadow has been trying to protect all along. Behind anger we often find grief. Behind control we often find fear. Behind perfectionism we often discover a longing to be loved exactly as we are. Even addiction frequently begins as an attempt to soothe pain that once felt impossible to carry.

This is why compassion is so important.

If we approach the shadow as an enemy, we create another battle inside ourselves.

If we approach it as a teacher, something remarkable begins to happen.

The shadow softens.

It no longer needs to shout because it has finally been heard.

This is where ceremony, forgiveness, and integration meet one another.

The purpose is not to eliminate the shadow.

The purpose is to bring it back into relationship.

When the shadow is welcomed home, it no longer governs us from the darkness. Instead, it becomes another source of wisdom, humility, and compassion.

Perhaps becoming whole has never meant becoming only light.

Perhaps wholeness has always meant learning to love every part of ourselves enough that nothing inside us needs to remain hidden any longer.

Ceremony of the Four Gates of Shadow Work

Shadow work is not something we complete in a single ceremony. Like the seasons, it returns again and again throughout our lives, each time revealing another layer of ourselves that is ready to be seen. There have been parts of me that I thought I had healed, only to discover years later that they were asking for my attention in a different way. I no longer see this as failure. I see it as the spiral of healing. We return to the same teachings because we are no longer the same person who first encountered them.

Over the years I have come to think of shadow work as passing through four gates. We rarely move through them in a straight line. Sometimes we stand before one gate for years before another begins to open. Sometimes we find ourselves returning to the first gate after believing

we had already passed through it. This is the nature of healing. Be patient with yourself.

The First Gate: Acknowledgement

Every journey begins by telling the truth.

The shadow does not ask us to become someone different. It asks us to become honest enough to acknowledge what already lives within us. The parts we judge, avoid, hide, or deny do not disappear simply because we refuse to look at them. They wait quietly, often speaking through our bodies, our relationships, our fears, and our reactions.

As you begin this ceremony, sit quietly with your journal. Take several slow breaths before writing. There is no need to rush. Simply become curious.

Reflect on the following questions.

What emotions have I learned to judge as weakness, failure, or somehow "unspiritual"?

What parts of my story have I never fully spoken, even to myself?

When have I hidden my truth or made myself smaller because it felt safer than being fully seen?

What wounds, fears, or ways of surviving may have travelled through my family and continue to live within me today?

Naming a shadow does not make it stronger.

Naming it is often the beginning of its release.

The Second Gate: Listening

Once we have named what we carry, our next task is not to fix it.

Our culture often teaches us to solve problems as quickly as possible. Ceremony has taught me something different. Sometimes healing begins by sitting quietly beside our pain long enough for it to tell us its story.

Light a candle if you wish.

Place one hand upon your heart.

Close your eyes.

Breathe slowly.

Instead of asking, "How do I get rid of this?" ask,

What are you trying to teach me?

Allow whatever arises to come without judgment. You may notice memories, emotions, dreams, sensations in your body, or images that seem unrelated. Resist the temptation to explain them immediately. Simply listen.

When you are ready, write what you experienced.

The Third Gate: Returning Home

Healing is not about forcing the shadow to disappear.

It is about welcoming home the parts of ourselves that have carried burdens for far too long.

Choose one part of yourself that has asked for your attention. It may be fear. Shame. Anger. Grief. Loneliness. Perfectionism. Whatever comes forward is enough.

Write a letter beginning with these words:

Dear _____,

Tell this part of yourself that you see it.

Ask what it has been protecting you from.

Thank it for helping you survive when it believed there was no other way.

When you feel complete, read your letter aloud.

If it feels appropriate, offer the letter to the fire or return it to the Earth with gratitude, allowing its teachings to remain while releasing the burden of carrying them alone.

Sit quietly for several moments before continuing.

The Fourth Gate: Embodiment

Healing is not measured by what happens during ceremony.

It is measured by how we begin living afterward.

Embodiment is the quiet practice of walking through the world differently because of what we have learned.

Perhaps it is finally setting a boundary without carrying guilt.

Perhaps it is allowing yourself to experience joy without waiting for something to go wrong.

Perhaps it is speaking honestly even when your voice trembles.

Perhaps it is choosing rest instead of proving your worth through constant work.

Whatever has emerged through your shadow now asks to become part of the way you live.

As you prepare to leave this ceremony, write one simple commitment that you will carry into your everyday life.

Not something extraordinary.

One small action that honours the person you are becoming.

Healing is not about becoming someone new.

It is about remembering that every part of you has always belonged within the circle.

When we stop fighting ourselves, we discover that the shadow was never standing in the way of our healing.

It was waiting to walk beside us.

Shadow Work: Releasing Shadow Resonance

Every one of us carries both light and shadow. Before we go further, it is important to understand what I mean by shadow. Shadow is not evil, nor is light inherently good. Both are essential aspects of life. We see this reflected throughout the natural world: day and night, the sun and the moon, the changing seasons, life and death. Many traditions express this balance through concepts such as yin and yang, where seemingly opposite forces are understood not as enemies, but as complementary aspects of a greater whole.

Within ourselves, light and shadow also exist together. Our shadow holds the parts of ourselves that have been wounded, hidden, rejected, or left unresolved. It may carry grief, fear, shame, anger, loss, or betrayal, but it can also hold forgotten gifts, wisdom, creativity, resilience, and strength waiting to be reclaimed. Likewise, our light is more than happiness or positivity. It is our capacity for love, courage, compassion, gratitude, generosity, forgiveness, and presence.

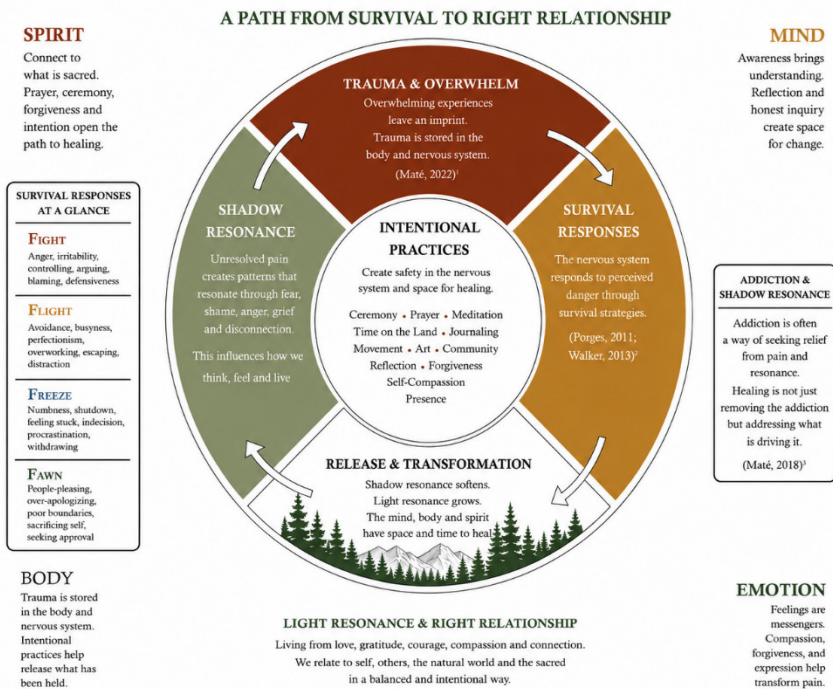
The purpose of shadow work is not to eliminate the darkness or to chase only the light. The goal is balance. When we deny our shadow, it often gains influence outside of our awareness. When we meet it with honesty, compassion, and intention, it begins to transform. Healing is not choosing light over shadow. It is bringing both back into right relationship.

Trauma is often one of the ways shadow develops. As physician and trauma expert Gabor Maté explains, trauma is not simply what happens to us, but what happens inside us as a result of overwhelming experiences. Trauma is stored in the body and continues to shape the nervous system until it is acknowledged, processed, and integrated.¹

When we experience overwhelming events, our nervous system instinctively shifts into survival. These protective responses are

Fight: becoming angry, controlling, argumentative, or confrontational in an attempt to regain safety. Flight: avoiding conflict through busyness, perfectionism, overworking, escaping, or constantly staying in motion. Freeze: feeling numb, disconnected, overwhelmed, unable to make decisions, or emotionally shutting down. Fawn: prioritizing everyone else's needs, people-pleasing, avoiding conflict, and sacrificing personal boundaries to feel accepted or safe. These responses are not weaknesses. They are intelligent adaptations that helped us survive when we had no other choice.

SHADOW WORK: RELEASING SHADOW RESONANCE



ABOUT THE MEDICINE WHEEL

The Medicine Wheel is a symbol of wholeness, balance and the interconnectedness of all things. It reminds us that healing happens when we honor every aspect of who we are—mind, body, emotion and spirit—and walk in right relationship with ourselves, each other and the Earth.



From my own understanding, unresolved trauma can create what I call shadow resonance. Trauma leaves more than memories. It leaves patterns of energy, emotion, and perception that continue to influence our lives. Fear resonates with fear. Shame feeds shame. Anger calls forth more anger. Grief that has never been witnessed continues asking to be seen.

The opposite is also true. As we intentionally heal, we begin cultivating light resonance. Love strengthens love. Gratitude deepens gratitude. Forgiveness creates more freedom. Compassion expands our capacity for relationship. Courage makes future acts of courage easier. Every choice we make strengthens one resonance or the other.

Whether through ceremony, prayer, meditation, time on the land, journaling, creative expression, movement, or quiet reflection, intentional practices create conditions where the nervous system can begin to settle. As safety returns to the body, what has been held inside may gradually begin to unlock.

Many people struggling with addiction are not seeking pleasure as much as they are seeking relief. Alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, work, shopping, social media, unhealthy relationships, or constant busyness can all become ways of escaping unresolved pain. As Gabor Maté writes, the question is often not, “Why the addiction?” but “Why the pain?”³

From my perspective, addiction can also be understood through the lens of shadow resonance. If the shadow resonance remains unchanged, the mind and body often continue searching for another way to numb, distract, or escape.

As we intentionally begin releasing shadow resonance through forgiveness, self-compassion, reflection, prayer, ceremony, time on the land, movement, creativity, community, or other intentional practices,

the nervous system gradually experiences greater safety. The body remembers what ease feels like. The mind becomes quieter. The heart opens. Spirit has room to breathe again.

Recovery is not simply the absence of addiction. It is the restoration of relationship with ourselves, with others, with the natural world, and with whatever we understand as sacred. Healing is not about becoming someone different. It is about releasing what no longer belongs to us so we can remember who we have always been.

Footnotes

1. Maté defines trauma as the enduring adaptations that remain after overwhelming experiences, emphasizing that trauma is stored in the body and continues to influence health, emotions, and relationships until integrated (Maté, 2022).
2. Fight, flight, freeze, and fawn are adaptive survival responses that help protect us when our nervous system perceives danger. Fight seeks safety through confrontation, flight through escape or overactivity, freeze through immobilization or shutdown, and fawn through people pleasing and appeasement (Porges, 2011; Walker, 2013).
3. Maté argues that addiction is best understood by asking not 'Why the addiction?' but 'Why the pain?' (Maté, 2018).

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Shadow work is not about judging ourselves or dwelling in our pain. It is an invitation to become curious about the parts of ourselves that have been shaped by fear, loss, trauma, or survival. As you reflect on these questions, remember that healing begins with honesty and is sustained through compassion. There are no right or wrong answers. Simply write what comes to your heart, trusting that awareness is often the first step toward transformation.

What part of yourself has been quietly asking for your attention rather than your judgment?

Are there emotions you have spent years avoiding because they felt too painful or overwhelming to experience? What might happen if you allowed yourself to acknowledge them with compassion?

Are there patterns, relationships, or situations that continue repeating throughout your life? What might these experiences be trying to teach you?

Have you inherited beliefs, fears, survival strategies, or ways of relating that no longer serve the life you are creating? Which are you ready to release?

What would it look like to meet your shadow with curiosity, compassion, and forgiveness rather than shame or fear?

Which relationships have revealed parts of yourself that still long for healing? What have those relationships taught you about yourself?

Which burdens truly belong to you, and which may have been carried through your family or lineage? How might you begin laying down what no longer belongs to you?

In what areas of your life have you been surviving rather than truly living? What would living with greater freedom, balance, and authenticity look like?

Looking back over your life, what gifts, strengths, or wisdom have emerged because of the struggles you have endured?

Imagine that every part of yourself was welcomed home with love and acceptance. How would your life, your relationships, and your way of walking in the world begin to change?

Intentional Practices for Shadow Work

Healing is not something we understand through knowledge alone. It becomes real through the choices we make, the ceremonies we return to, and the ways we intentionally engage with our lives each day. The following Intentional Practices are invitations to deepen your reflection and integration. Each practice explores a different aspect of healing, offering teachings, questions, ceremony, and affirmations to help you strengthen your relationship with yourself, your ancestors, the natural world, and Creator. You do not need to complete them in order. Trust your intuition and begin with the practice that speaks most deeply to where you are today.

Wendigo

Category: Shadow / Hunger / Lineage

Keywords: Addiction, Consumption, Unmet Need, Soul Hunger

Message:

The Wendigo has become one of the teachings I return to when reflecting on shadow work. To me, it represents the places where fear, scarcity, or unresolved pain create a hunger that can never truly be satisfied. This teaching invites us to look honestly at the patterns we carry, not with judgment or shame, but with curiosity and compassion. By bringing those patterns into awareness, we create the possibility of choosing relationship, balance, and healing instead.

Guidance Prompt:

- Where am I feeding myself things that do not nourish me?
- Are there places where fear, scarcity, or old wounds have shaped the choices I make? What might they be asking me to understand?

Ceremony: Ancestral Hunger Ceremony

1. Prepare a small bowl of nourishing food.
2. Light a candle or fire. If it feels meaningful to you, offer a prayer or speak words of gratitude for your ancestors. You might say: "To my ancestors, I honour your journey and the lives that came before mine. May this offering be made with gratitude, healing, and peace. May the cycles of fear and scarcity end with me, and may those who come after me walk in greater balance."
3. Eat mindfully. With each bite, release judgment.

Affirmation:

I break the chain of hunger. I no longer consume to fill a void. I am nourished by truth.

Ceremony: Releasing the Hunger

Message

Healing does not ask us to deny our needs or judge ourselves for them. Instead, it invites us to look beneath the surface and ask what our hunger is truly seeking. Sometimes we hunger for belonging, safety, love, certainty, or connection. When these deeper needs go unmet, we may find ourselves searching for fulfillment in ways that offer temporary comfort but leave us feeling disconnected. This practice is an invitation to meet that hunger with compassion, restore balance, and return to right relationship with yourself, others, the land, and Creator.

1. Prepare a small bundle of tobacco wrapped in cloth or paper.
2. Light a candle or a fire. Hold the bundle to your heart and take several slow breaths, reflecting on the places in your life where you long for greater balance.

3. If it feels meaningful to you, speak aloud: "I acknowledge the places within me that seek comfort, certainty, or protection through fear, scarcity, or disconnection. I meet these parts of myself with compassion, not judgment. Today, I choose to release what no longer serves me and to return to a path of gratitude, balance, and right relationship with myself, others, the land, and Creator."
4. Offer the tobacco to the fire or return it to the Earth with gratitude, setting the intention to release patterns that no longer support your healing.
5. Sit quietly for a few moments and notice what has shifted within you.

Affirmation

I choose balance over fear, gratitude over scarcity, and relationship over disconnection. Each day, I walk with greater awareness, compassion, and enough.

Broken Chain

Category: Ancestral Healing / Karmic Release

Keywords: Lineage, Generational Patterns, Soul Contracts, Liberation

Message:

We are all shaped by the stories, experiences, and survival strategies of those who came before us. Some of these become gifts we carry forward, while others no longer serve the lives we are creating. The Broken Chain invites us to reflect on the patterns we have inherited and to consider how healing can begin with awareness, compassion, and the

courage to choose a different path. In doing so, we honour our ancestors while creating new possibilities for future generations.

Guidance Prompt:

- What patterns, beliefs, or ways of relating have been passed through my family or lineage?
- Where in my life am I being invited to choose a different path with compassion and intention?

Ceremony: The Ancestral Binding Cut

1. Prepare a piece of string or thread. Hold it gently between your hands and take several slow breaths.
2. If it feels meaningful to you, speak aloud: "To my ancestors, I honour your lives, your resilience, and the paths that brought me here. With gratitude, I release the burdens that are not mine to carry. May I walk forward with wisdom, compassion, and balance."
3. Tie the thread into a loop. As you gently cut it, reflect on one pattern or belief you are ready to release.
4. Offer the thread to the fire, or return it to the Earth with a small tobacco offering, if that is part of your practice, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to begin again.

Affirmation:

I honour the path that brought me here. With compassion and intention, I choose to release what no longer serves me and to create new possibilities for those who walk beside me and those who come after me.

Ancestor Wound

Category: Lineage / Soul Healing

Keywords: Inherited Pain, Intergenerational Trauma, Unspoken Stories, Deep Grief

Message:

Some wounds begin long before we are born. They may echo through families, communities, and generations, shaping the ways we relate to ourselves, to others, and to the world. The Ancestor Wound invites us to meet these inherited stories with compassion rather than judgment. As we acknowledge what has been carried forward, we also create space for healing, resilience, and new ways of being. We honour our ancestors not by carrying all of their pain, but by living with greater awareness, balance, and intention.

Guidance Prompt:

- What pain in my body or spirit feels ancient, familiar, but not quite mine?
- What stories in my lineage were silenced: and am I ready to listen?

Ritual: Honouring the Unspoken

1. Light a candle and place it in front of a photograph, bundle, or symbol of your ancestors.
2. Speak aloud:
“To the ones who came before—I honour your strength. I feel what you could not feel. I grieve what you could not grieve. I offer this light in your name.”
3. Allow tears, memories, or silence to rise.

4. Journal: *What do you need me to carry forward—and what are you asking me to release?*

Affirmation:

I am the living altar of my ancestors. I witness their pain with love. I choose healing for all who walk behind me.

The Unsettling

Category: Shadow / Transformation / Warning

Keywords: Collapse, Truth, Endings, Awakening, Necessary Disruption

Message:

The Unsettling often comes before renewal. It is the space between what was and what is becoming, when familiar ways of living, thinking, or relating no longer fit. Although this season can feel uncertain, it also offers an invitation to pause, listen deeply, and trust the wisdom that emerges through change. Rather than rushing to restore what has fallen away, allow yourself time to notice what is asking to be released and what is quietly beginning to grow in its place.

Guidance Prompt:

- What am I clinging to out of fear that is already dead?
- Where am I being asked to break cycles I once depended on?

Ceremony: Standing in the Rubble

1. Stand outside on bare earth. Speak aloud:

"I welcome the Unsettling. I am not afraid of the storm. I ask only to be shown what is real."

2. Place your hands on your heart. Breathe deeply. Journal what shakes loose.

Affirmation:

I stand in the fire. I trust the falling. I am the one who rebuilds with truth.

Short Message:

This is the breaking open. Let it fall. The Earth is ready for something new.

The Trickster

Category: Archetype / Shadow Catalyst

Keywords: Disruption, Ego Mirror, Cosmic Humor, Lessons in Disguise

Message:

The Trickster is a teacher found in many cultures and traditions, often arriving when we have become too certain, too rigid, or too attached to one way of seeing the world. Rather than punishing us, Trickster invites humility, curiosity, and perspective. Through unexpected moments, laughter, or even discomfort, we may discover new ways of understanding ourselves and the world around us. Sometimes the greatest wisdom comes when we are willing to loosen our grip on certainty and remain open to what life is trying to teach us.

Guidance Prompt:

- Where have I taken myself too seriously?
- What lesson is hiding behind this disruption?

Ceremony: Laugh + Let Go

1. Light a candle and say:
“Trickster, show me what I refuse to see. Make me humble enough to grow.”
2. Reflect on a recent situation that unraveled your plans.
3. Write what it taught you, and laugh, even through the pain.

Affirmation:

I welcome the Trickster's lessons. I laugh at illusion and walk toward truth.

Short Message:

What you think is a curse may be the clearest path of all.
Surrender. Laugh. Learn.

Chapter Summary

Shadow work is not a journey into darkness for its own sake. It is a journey toward wholeness.

Throughout this chapter, you have been invited to look with compassion at the parts of yourself that have been shaped by pain, fear, grief, shame, or loss. Rather than asking you to reject these experiences, the work of healing asks something far more courageous. It asks you to meet them with honesty, curiosity, and love. Often, what we call the shadow is not something broken within us. It is simply a part of ourselves that has been waiting to be seen, understood, and welcomed home.

Ceremony teaches us that healing is not found by chasing the light while avoiding the darkness. Both are necessary. Just as the forest depends upon sunlight and rich dark soil, our own growth depends upon our willingness to embrace every part of our story. The places that once felt

like burdens often become our greatest teachers, revealing compassion, resilience, wisdom, and strength that could not have emerged in any other way.

As you continue this journey, remember that shadow work is not something we complete once and leave behind. Life continually invites us into deeper layers of understanding. Each season reveals another opportunity to release what no longer serves us and to reclaim another forgotten part of ourselves. This is not a sign that you are failing. It is a sign that you are growing.

Healing does not ask you to become someone brighter, stronger, or more perfect than you are today. It asks you to become more fully yourself. When every part of your story is held with compassion, the shadow is no longer something to fear. It becomes another doorway leading you home to your own heart.

PART IV:

CHAPTER EIGHT:



Ceremony for Everyday Life

“The purpose of ceremony is not to become more powerful. It is to learn how to carry the power you already hold it is with intention, humility, and accountability.”

There is no single ceremony for thanking water.

There is no single ceremony for grieving.

There is no single ceremony for beginning again.

Ceremony lives within relationship, not rigid instructions. The examples throughout this chapter are offered as places to begin, not scripts to follow. Over time, as your own relationship with the land, Spirit, and your heart deepens, your ceremonies will naturally become your own.

When someone steps onto a ceremonial path for the first time, a quiet question often hovers beneath their breath, like smoke curling toward the rafters of a lodge. It rarely emerges in direct words, but it flickers in the eyes and trembles in the heartbeat: How can I receive visions more vividly? How do I tune my ears to Spirit’s whispers? Where do my gifts lie hidden? Can I become a healer—feel that gentle current of medicine

moving through my hands? Do I even possess the herbs of healing within me?

I know these questions intimately, because I once carried them like stones in my pocket. I thought the road of ceremony was a secret key to unlock dormant talents, to unveil a luminous self I imagined lay beneath my ordinary skin. I believed that if I entered enough lodges, sang enough prayers, fasted until the edges of hunger blurred, or sat with enough plant medicines in the pale glow before dawn, I would finally arrive at a place of completeness—where my spirit would hum with certainty.

Years later, I smile at that younger soul, so earnest and searching. I see her wonder-bright eyes and her conviction that power existed “out there,” waiting to be discovered. Ceremony has taught me otherwise: it showed me that the deepest work is never about accumulating strength, but about learning to carry what we already bear: with reverence and humility. That simple distinction has changed everything.

In our culture, we are drilled to believe that power is measured by the height of our towers, the breadth of our influence, the weight of our wallets, the numbers on our follower counts. We celebrate those who stand out, whose voices boom from podiums, whose resumes gleam with accolades. Achievement becomes a spotlight.

Ceremony flows the opposite way. The deeper I have walked its winding path, the less I yearn to be seen or praised. Instead, my heart lingers beside the quiet ones—the Elders whose soft footsteps seem to hush an entire room, the grandmother whose kitchen exudes warmth so profound you feel safe as soon as you cross the threshold, the Knowledge Keeper who leans in to listen more than to speak. The one who moves through the forest as though each blade of grass were kin, each stone a silent companion, each bird a treasured guest.

These are the teachers who have stirred my spirit—not through proclamations of authority, but through the steady pulse of relationship. When I recall those who carried the truest medicine, I rarely remember their first words. I recall the hush settling over my mind, the gentle unlacing of tension in my chest, the way my own breathing softened—as if my spirit recognized theirs before my thoughts could catch up. There was no performance, no need to prove holiness. They simply lived the teachings they carried, as naturally as trees reach toward sunlight.

That is the kind of power ceremony reveals: subtle, unassuming, woven into the fabric of kindness.

All around us, stories of ecstatic visions, psychic gifts, awakenings, near-death revelations, and plant-medicine odysseys capture our imagination. These experiences shimmer with meaning. I have felt their fire lighting my bones. Yet I have learned that dazzling encounters and spiritual maturity are not the same. A person might witness radiant visions yet lash out at loved ones. Another may never utter the word “vision” aloud, and still every meeting with them feels like a balm—gentle, restorative, patient. Over time, I have come to place far more trust in the quiet healer than the one who boasts of profound journeys.

Ceremony is not judged by what transpires beneath the lodge’s smoke-swirled canopy or around the crackling fire. Its measure lies in what shifts when we return home. Does this experience leave us softer in our judgments? More compassionate in our words? More willing to forgive, to apologize, to examine our own shadows before pointing at another’s? These are subtle metamorphoses, impossible to package into a social-media post, yet they are among the greatest miracles ceremony offers.

One teaching humbles me still: every gift bears a weight of responsibility. I once believed gifts belonged only to a select few. Now

I understand that each of us arrives threaded with unique medicines the world needs. Some heal with laughter that loosens grief like water dissolving salt. Others carry hands that steady, words that mend, songs that settle restless hearts. Some are visited by vivid dreams; others by an uncanny instinct that steers those around them. The form each gift takes matters less than the relationship we cultivate with it. Tended with humility, a gift becomes true medicine. Clutched by ego, it can turn toxic.

That is why ceremony continually returns us to relationship. Relationship with Creator, with the land, with our ancestors, with our families, with our communities, and ultimately with ourselves. The moment we start believing our gifts exist for our own glory, we drift away from the very teachings that gave them breath. In truth, the gifts are not ours to possess; they are entrusted to us.

This realization has reshaped how I see leadership, healing, and service. The ones I trust most are seldom those who proclaim their gifts. They are the seekers who continue asking questions, who remain curious, who invite guidance, who own their uncertainties, who understand that learning does not cease once a title is conferred. In many Indigenous traditions, knowledge brings responsibility: the more we know, the more accountable we become for our actions. Wisdom is not proved by how much one can explain, but by how kindly one treats the beings both human and more-than-human, placed in one's care.

Perhaps this is why ceremony always circles back to ordinary gestures: offering gratitude before a meal, gathering stray garbage along a riverbank, checking on an Elder, honoring our promises, speaking truth when it feels risky, admitting harm when we inflict it. In the moment, these acts may seem mundane. Yet in their quiet accumulation, they shape character far more profoundly than any singular mystical event.

That, I believe, is ceremony's quiet secret: the most powerful people I have known were never ruled by power. They were devoted to relationship—to the gentle art of carrying responsibility, of serving something larger than themselves, of remaining ever open to learning.

As I have grown, I ask less whether someone has visions or spiritual gifts. Instead, I listen for other signs: Do they leave people feeling more whole than before? Do they honor the land with gratitude? Will they admit when they are wrong? Do their actions reflect the teachings they speak? Can they hold conviction and humility in the same breath? Those questions reveal more than any anecdote of the extraordinary.

Ceremony has never been about sculpting an extraordinary self. It has always been about becoming more profoundly human—more honest, more compassionate, more accountable, more rooted in love. Perhaps that is the truest expression of power we can ever know.

Life Is Ceremony: Walking the Sacred Every Day

When most people imagine ceremony, they envision something set apart: a sweat lodge glowing beneath a star-spangled sky, drums thundering as smoke curls into the night, days spent fasting atop a mountain, or the hush and mystery of a medicine journey. These are indeed vital portals to the sacred. But if we believe that ceremony only exists in those charged moments, we miss one of its greatest teachings.

Ceremony was never meant to be an escape from ordinary life. Its purpose is to return us, more awake, more present, to the everyday. Every ceremony poses the same question: How will you live differently now? This query follows us home, into our kitchens where the scent of chopping onions mingles with gratitude, into workplaces where we choose integrity over convenience, into gardens where we bend to heed the lessons of each plant. It lingers beside us as we wash dishes under wan morning light, feed our children, care for aging parents, walk the

dog while dawn drapes the sky in soft pinks, or pause to watch an eagle wheel overhead. The sacred does not vanish when the drum falls silent; it simply changes its clothing.

This is what I have come to call Life Is Ceremony. Ceremony is not an event we attend; it is a path we walk with awareness. It lives in the way we greet the first light before reaching for our phones. It breathes in the gratitude we offer before taking a bite, in the permission we seek before harvesting a plant, in the sincerity of our apologies, and in our choice to release resentment. Ceremony thrives in how we listen to Elder stories, how we comfort a grieving friend, how we speak to our children, and how we weigh our words—knowing they carry life beyond the moment they leave our lips.

As we practice living this way, the line between the sacred and the ordinary begins to dissolve. Morning coffee becomes an altar of thanks for another sunrise. A walk through the forest transforms into a conversation with our oldest relatives. Preparing a meal becomes an act of gratitude for every plant, every insect, every unseen spirit woven into the food's journey. Even washing our hands can morph into a small prayer—releasing what no longer serves before stepping into the world again.

Life itself becomes the ceremony.

This journey also reshapes how we understand love. Love is no longer a prize we chase; it becomes a lifelong practice—expressed through generosity, patience, forgiveness, laughter, hospitality, and the quiet blessing of another's path, even if it diverges from ours. Blessing is not always agreement; it is the humble recognition that every soul walks a story we may never fully know.

Living ceremonially invites us to dwell in mystery. We are not obligated to explain every dream, every vision, or every unanswered longing.

Some teachings unfold all at once; others reveal themselves over decades. Some remain inscrutable, urging us to hold curiosity more tightly than certainty. Humility teaches us that not everything needs explaining to be honoured.

This is why I return again and again to gratitude. Gratitude is more than words; it is a way of seeing. It reminds us that nothing arrives to us alone—every breath depends on trees, every meal on a web of visible and invisible relationships, every step on the Earth’s embrace. Gratitude naturally leads to reciprocity: once we recognize how much we have received, giving back becomes a joy rather than an obligation.

Perhaps this is what ceremony has been teaching us all along—not how to break away from the world, but how to belong deeply to it. The greatest ceremonies are not always marked by visions, chants, or extended fasting. Often, they appear in the hush of choosing kindness over judgment, courage over fear, patience over anger, or forgiveness over resentment. They unfold each time we remember that this life—this breath, this meal, this relationship—is itself sacred.

That is the invitation: not to wait for the next lodge gathering or mountain retreat, but to recognize that this moment—this day, this breath, this walk upon the Earth—is already asking us to participate in something holy. Life is ceremony. The only question is whether we are awake enough to notice.

Throughout these pages, we have journeyed through ceremony as preparation, relationship, forgiveness, discernment, and integration. Yet the greatest teaching of all is that ceremony does not end when we leave the lodge, descend from the mountain, or conclude a medicine journey. Ceremony becomes the way we choose to live every single day.

Below are simple invitations—small ceremonies to help you remain in relationship with the teachings you have received. There is no order, no

finish line. Allow yourself to be drawn toward the one that calls to you in this season of your life. Some may become daily practices. Others may accompany you through grief, celebration, uncertainty, or renewal. Return to them often. Like every ceremony, they will reveal new depths of teaching as you continue to grow.

Ceremony of Gratitude

Gratitude is one of the first teachings many of us receive, yet it is often one of the last we truly understand.

For much of my life I thought gratitude meant saying thank you after something good had happened. If life was going well, gratitude came easily. If life became difficult, gratitude disappeared just as quickly. Ceremony slowly taught me something different.

Gratitude is not a reward for an easy life.

It is a way of seeing.

When we begin to look through the eyes of gratitude, the world begins to change. The cedar offering its medicine, the raven calling from a fence post, the rain that interrupts our plans but nourishes the forest, the Elder who corrects us, the child who reminds us to laugh, the difficult conversation that eventually leads us toward healing. None of these moments arrive wrapped as gifts. Often they arrive disguised as inconvenience, discomfort, or even heartbreak.

One of the greatest teachings ceremony has given me is that gratitude is practiced before understanding arrives.

We give thanks for the lesson before we fully know why it came.

We give thanks for the people who walk beside us and, eventually, for those whose paths lead away from ours. We give thanks for the prayers

that were answered and, sometimes much later, for those that never were.

This does not mean pretending everything is beautiful.

It means trusting that life continues to teach us, even when we cannot yet understand the lesson.

Gratitude is not denial.

It is relationship.

It reminds us that every day we are receiving gifts from the land, from the waters, from those who came before us, and from countless living beings whose work allows our own lives to continue.

When gratitude becomes a ceremony rather than an occasional feeling, even ordinary moments begin to feel sacred.

Ceremony

At the beginning or end of each day, sit quietly for a few moments.

Rather than searching for extraordinary experiences, notice the ordinary gifts that made this day possible.

The water that quenched your thirst.

The meal that nourished you.

The tree that offered shade.

The friend who listened.

The lesson that challenged you.

Offer thanks for each one in your own words.

Allow gratitude to become less about counting blessings and more about deepening your relationship with the world around you.

REFLECTION



Which gifts have become so familiar that I no longer notice them?

Has there been a difficult experience that later revealed itself to be an unexpected teacher?

How might my life change if gratitude became my way of seeing rather than simply something I occasionally felt?

Meditation

Sit quietly for several minutes and imagine your gratitude extending outward in widening circles: to yourself, your family, your community, the land beneath you, the waters that sustain life, your ancestors, and all your relations.

Affirmation

Today I receive this life with gratitude and walk gently within it.

Ceremony of Remembering

One of the greatest gifts ceremony has given me is the understanding that not everything is meant to be understood immediately.

Our minds are accustomed to linear time. We want experiences to make sense before we move on. We want answers today for questions we asked yesterday. Ceremony rarely works that way.

In ceremony, a vision may come that feels confusing or incomplete. You may hear words whose meaning is unknown, meet someone you do not recognize, or receive instructions that seem impossible to understand. Months or even years later, something happens in your life and suddenly the teaching returns with remarkable clarity. What once appeared mysterious now makes perfect sense.

This is why remembering is its own ceremony.

Do not assume that because something feels unclear it has no meaning.

Do not dismiss your dreams because they seem strange.

Do not discard your journals because years have passed.

Our ancestors understood that knowledge unfolds in relationship with time. Teachings reveal themselves when we are ready to receive them, not always when we first encounter them.

For this reason, I encourage you to write everything down.

Record your ceremonies while they are still fresh in your heart. Write your dreams before they disappear with the morning light. Sketch the symbols you were shown. Record the songs, colours, animals, words,

emotions, and people who appeared. Even the smallest detail may become important many years from now.

Often, what seems insignificant today becomes one of the most important teachings of your life.

Remembering is not about collecting experiences.

It is about building a relationship with the conversation that Spirit has already begun.

Ceremony

After every ceremony, meditation, significant dream, or meaningful spiritual experience, spend time recording everything you can remember without trying to interpret it.

Write freely.

Allow the experience to exist exactly as it came to you.

If understanding does not come today, trust that it may arrive in its own time.

Return to your journal often.

You may discover that the same teaching has been quietly unfolding across months or even years.

REFLECTION



Is there a dream, vision, or ceremony that I have forgotten because I believed it had no meaning?

Can I remember a time when something I experienced only made sense much later? What did that experience teach me about trust and patience?

How might my relationship with ceremony change if I stopped expecting immediate answers and instead learned to walk with the questions?

Meditation

Sit quietly with one of your older journal entries or a dream you have not thought about in some time.

Read it slowly.

Rather than asking, "What does this mean?" ask, "What is this teaching me today?"

Allow the answer to emerge naturally.

Affirmation

I remember with an open heart. The teachings arrive when I am ready, and I trust their unfolding.

Ceremony of Self-Compassion

For many of us, compassion is easier to offer than it is to receive.

We comfort our children, stand beside our friends, and show patience to strangers, yet when we make a mistake, we often become our own harshest critic. We replay old conversations, question our worth, and carry shame far longer than we would ever ask another person to carry it.

During ceremony I have come to understand that healing does not happen through judgment.

Healing happens through compassion.

This does not mean avoiding responsibility for the harm we have caused. It does not ask us to ignore difficult truths or excuse unhealthy behaviour. Rather, it asks us to meet those truths with honesty instead of condemnation. Growth becomes possible when we stop fighting ourselves and begin listening.

Many of us carry burdens that never truly belonged to us. Expectations placed upon us as children. Family roles we accepted in order to survive. Stories that told us we were not enough, that we were too much, or that love had to be earned. Over time those stories become so familiar that we mistake them for our own voice.

Self-compassion is the quiet work of returning home.

It is learning to recognize which voices belong to fear and which belong to love.

It is remembering that the child you once were did the very best they could with the understanding they had at the time.

Just as we offer grace to those we love, we must eventually learn to extend that same grace to ourselves.

This is not weakness.

It is one of the deepest acts of courage.

Ceremony

Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted.

You may choose to sit before a mirror or simply close your eyes.

Place one hand over your heart and one over your abdomen.

Take several slow breaths.

Imagine yourself at a younger age.

Not to relive your pain, but simply to meet yourself again.

Notice what you see.

Without trying to change anything, gently say,

"I see you.

I know what you carried.

Thank you for helping me survive.

You do not have to carry it alone anymore.

You are loved.

You are safe.

You may rest."

Remain with yourself for as long as you need.

When you are ready, place both hands over your heart and simply whisper,

"I welcome myself home."

REFLECTION



What expectations or beliefs about myself have I carried for so long that I have mistaken them for the truth?

If I spoke to myself with the same kindness I offer someone I deeply love, what would I say today?

What part of myself is still waiting to be welcomed home with compassion rather than judgment?

Meditation

Sit quietly with your hands over your heart. As you breathe, imagine each inhale gathering every part of yourself that has felt lost, rejected, or forgotten. With each exhale, welcome those parts back with gentleness. There is nothing to fix. There is only someone who has been waiting to come home.

Affirmation

I release judgment and return to compassion. I welcome every part of myself home with love.

Ceremony for Grief

Grief is one of life's greatest teachers.

It arrives when something we have loved changes, ends, or is taken from us. Sometimes grief follows death. Sometimes it follows the end of a relationship, the loss of a home, the passing of an Elder, the fading of our health, or the realization that the future we imagined will never unfold as we once believed. We grieve people, places, dreams, identities, and even the parts of ourselves that could only exist during a particular season of life.

For many years I believed grief was something to move through as quickly as possible. I wanted to heal it, understand it, and somehow leave it behind.

Ceremony taught me something different.

Grief is love that no longer has a place to land in the physical world.

It is not something we overcome.

It is something we learn to carry with tenderness.

Like the changing seasons, grief has its own rhythm. Some days it sits quietly beside us. Other days it arrives unexpectedly through the scent of cedar, a familiar song, the sound of laughter, or a place we once shared with someone we loved. None of this means we are moving backwards. It simply means that love continues its conversation with us.

Our ancestors understood that grief was never meant to be carried alone.

They gathered together.

They prayed.

They sang.

They cried.

They prepared food for one another.

They remembered stories.

In doing so, they reminded one another that although someone may leave this world, relationship does not end.

Love continues.

The shape of that relationship simply changes.

There are times when grief asks us to sit quietly.

There are other times when it asks us to move, to sing, to cry, to walk beside the river, or to speak aloud the name of the one we miss.

Each of these can become ceremony.

Not because they remove our grief, but because they remind us that love remains worthy of our attention.

Ceremony

Choose a quiet place where you feel safe.

Light a candle or sit beside a fire if one is available.

Place beside you a photograph, a meaningful object, or simply hold the memory of the person, place, or season you are grieving.

Speak their name if it feels right.

Tell them what remains in your heart.

Share what was never spoken.

Express your gratitude for what they gave your life.

If tears come, allow them.

If silence comes, honour that too.

When you feel ready, place your hands upon your heart and say,

"Thank you for walking beside me.

Thank you for the love we shared.

Though our relationship has changed,

love continues.

May I carry it forward with peace."

Remain quietly for a few moments before closing your ceremony.

REFLECTION



What loss am I carrying that still asks to be witnessed with compassion?

How has grief changed the way I understand love, family, or my relationship with Spirit?

If my grief could speak without fear, what would it ask me to remember?

Meditation

Close your eyes and imagine yourself sitting beside a gentle river.

With every breath, allow your grief to rest beside you rather than within you.

Notice that you do not need to push it away.

You do not need to carry it alone.

The river continues flowing, and so does love.

Remain here for as long as you need.

Affirmation

I honour my grief because I honour my love. I carry both with gentleness, trusting that neither is ever truly lost.

Ceremony of Transition

Life is always asking us to become someone new.

Some transitions arrive with celebration. Others arrive through loss. We cross invisible thresholds throughout our lives, often without realizing that we have left one season behind and entered another. A child becomes an adult. A student becomes a teacher. A daughter becomes a mother. A relationship ends. A loved one dies. A diagnosis changes everything. We retire from work, move to a new place, or discover that the life we built no longer fits the person we have become.

Many of us try to move through these changes as quickly as possible. We rush toward what comes next without taking time to honour what has ended. Yet ceremony teaches us that every ending deserves to be acknowledged, and every beginning deserves to be welcomed.

Nature reminds us of this every year.

Autumn does not apologize for letting go of its leaves.

Winter does not hurry toward spring.

The river does not cling to the mountain once it begins its journey to the sea.

Everything in Creation understands transition except, perhaps, human beings.

When we resist change, we often prolong our suffering. When we pause to acknowledge it, something begins to soften. We honour the life that was while creating space for the life that is waiting to emerge.

Transition is not simply about leaving something behind.

It is about carrying forward the wisdom while releasing what no longer belongs to us.

Sometimes we do not yet know what the next chapter will look like.

That is all right.

Ceremony reminds us that we do not have to see the entire path before taking the next step. We need only trust that the path will continue revealing itself as we walk.

Ceremony

Choose a place where you feel connected to the land.

Bring a journal and a small offering if appropriate within your tradition.

Spend a few moments reflecting on the season of life that is ending.

Offer gratitude for what it taught you.

Acknowledge both the joys and the hardships that have shaped you.

Then turn your attention toward what is beginning.

Without needing all the answers, ask yourself,

"Who am I becoming?"

If you feel called, step across a small stream, a fallen log, a doorway, or simply draw a line in the earth with your foot and intentionally step across it.

As you cross, say:

"I honour where I have been.

I welcome what is becoming.

May I walk this next part of my journey with courage, humility, and grace."

Remain quietly for a few moments before continuing your day.

REFLECTION



What season of my life is coming to a close, even if I have been reluctant to acknowledge it?

What lessons am I carrying forward from this chapter of my life?

Who is Spirit inviting me to become as I enter this next season?

Meditation

Close your eyes and imagine yourself standing at the edge of a forest path.

Behind you lies the road you have already travelled.

Ahead of you is a path you cannot yet fully see.

Take one slow step forward.

Feel the Earth beneath your feet supporting you.

Breathe deeply and trust that each new step will appear when you are ready to take it.

Affirmation

I honour what has ended with gratitude. I welcome what is beginning with courage. I trust that every transition is preparing me for the next chapter of my journey.

The Water and Fire Ceremony

Water Ceremony

Returning to the First Medicine

Long before we take our first breath, we are held by water.

We begin our lives surrounded by water within our mother's womb. Before we ever see the light of day, water nourishes us, protects us, and carries us safely into the world. Throughout our lives it continues to sustain every heartbeat, every breath, and every cell of our bodies. When we are thirsty, we seek water. When we are weary, we are restored by it. When we grieve, our tears become another expression of its presence.

Across Indigenous cultures throughout the world, water has always been understood as far more than a resource.

Water is life.

Water is relationship.

Water is one of our oldest teachers.

Many Nations speak of water as the first medicine because without it nothing can live. Rivers have carried our ancestors for countless generations. Lakes have reflected the changing seasons. Rain nourishes the forests, and our tears remind us that healing often flows rather than

arrives all at once. Like every living being, water is part of the great web of relationships that sustains us.

For me, the Water Ceremony is not simply about cleansing.

It is about remembering.

Remembering that I belong to something much older than myself.

Remembering that healing is never mine alone.

Remembering that, like water, I am always invited to keep flowing.

Preparing for the Ceremony

Gathering in Relationship

Find a place where you can spend quiet time with water. If possible, visit a river, lake, stream, ocean, or another natural place that calls to you. If this is not possible, fill a bowl with clean water and create a simple space for prayer and reflection.

You may wish to gather:

- A small offering such as tobacco, cornmeal, or another respectful offering from your own tradition.
- A cloth or towel.
- Your journal.
- A comfortable place to sit quietly.

Hold the water in your hands for a few moments before beginning.

Offer a simple prayer.

"I honour you as the first medicine.

Thank you for sustaining all life.

May I enter this ceremony with humility, gratitude, and an open heart."

Preparing Your Heart

Before approaching the water, allow yourself a few moments of silence.

Breathe deeply.

Ask yourself gently:

What grief have I been carrying?

What joy have I forgotten how to receive?

What emotions have I held back because they felt too difficult to express?

There is no need to search for answers.

Simply notice what begins to surface.

Water has always known how to receive what we are ready to offer.

The Ceremony

The Calling

Approach the water slowly.

If you are beside a river or lake, kneel if it feels appropriate. If you are using a bowl, cradle it gently in your hands.

Speak these words, or allow your own prayer to emerge.

"To the waters that carried my ancestors,

To the waters that will sustain those who come after me,

I come with an open heart.

Receive what I am ready to release.

Teach me how to return to balance."

The Offering

Offer your tobacco, cornmeal, or another respectful gift with gratitude.

If you are working indoors, place a small pinch of salt into the bowl as a reminder of the oceans from which all life emerged.

As you make your offering, quietly name what you are placing into the care of the water.

"Today I offer..."

Allow your own words to complete the sentence.

The Water

Dip your fingers gently into the water.

Touch your eyes.

May I see clearly.

Touch your throat.

May I speak with honesty and kindness.

Touch your heart.

May I live with compassion for myself and for all my relations.

Remain quietly with the water for a few moments before continuing.

The Prayer

Cup a small amount of water in your hands.

Offer a blessing for someone you love.

Offer a blessing for someone with whom you have struggled.

Offer a blessing for your ancestors.

Offer a blessing for yourself.

Then return the water gently to the Earth or to the bowl, saying,
*"As these waters continue their journey,
may I continue mine.
May I return, again and again,
to balance, to gratitude, and to love."*

Walking with Water

The ceremony does not end when you leave the shoreline.

It continues every time you drink a glass of water, every rainfall you pause to notice, every river you cross, and every tear that reminds you healing is still unfolding.

Over the coming days, you may wish to continue your relationship with water by:

- Offering gratitude each time you drink. You may choose to write "Love" or "Thank You" on your water bottle or container as a simple reminder to receive this first medicine with appreciation.
- Drinking slowly and mindfully, allowing each sip to become part of your daily ceremony.
- Recording dreams or memories connected to water, noticing how this teacher continues speaking long after the ceremony has ended.
- Returning to the same body of water whenever possible, allowing a relationship to grow over time.

When the Water Feels Heavy

Sometimes water brings forward emotions we were not expecting.

Grief.

Fear.

Old memories.

Ancestral stories.

If this happens, do not force yourself to continue.

Place both feet firmly upon the Earth.

Slow your breathing.

Hum softly if it helps calm your nervous system.

Ask gently,

"What part of this story is asking to be seen today?"

Allow the answer to come in its own time.

REFLECTION



As you complete this ceremony, spend a few quiet moments with your journal. Water has a way of revealing what we are ready to remember.

What memories arise when you think about your relationship with water? Are there places, people, or experiences that continue to live within you?

How might you honour water as part of your everyday life, not only during ceremony? What simple acts of gratitude or relationship feel meaningful to you?

If your tears could speak, what story would they tell? Is there grief asking to be witnessed, gratitude longing to be expressed, or healing quietly continuing beneath the surface?

The Water Ceremony is never truly finished.

Every stream, every rainfall, every cup of water, and every tear invites us back into relationship.

Water continues flowing.

So do we.

The Fire Ceremony

Sitting with the Sacred Fire

For as long as human beings have gathered together, they have gathered around fire.

Fire has warmed us through winter, cooked our food, protected us through the darkness, and brought families, communities, and Nations together in prayer and ceremony. Long before many teachings were written down, they were shared beside a fire. Stories, songs, laughter, grief, and wisdom have all travelled on smoke rising into the night sky.

Because of this, fire is much more than heat or light.

Fire is relationship.

Across many Indigenous cultures, fire is understood as a living presence and a sacred witness. It is approached with respect, humility, and gratitude. We do not command the fire. We sit with it. We speak honestly before it. We listen to it. In return, it reminds us that transformation is part of every living thing.

The Fire Ceremony is not about destroying what we no longer want.

It is about transforming it.

When we place our prayers, fears, grief, hopes, or gratitude into the fire, we are entering into a sacred exchange. We are acknowledging that there are burdens we no longer need to carry alone and dreams we are ready to place into the care of something greater than ourselves.

Fire does not judge what we bring.

It simply transforms.

As one Elder once shared with me,

"The fire doesn't ask you to be perfect. It asks you to be honest."

There are no masks in firelight.

Only truth.

Preparing for the Ceremony

Creating Sacred Space

Whether you are sitting beside a ceremonial fire, a small campfire, or a single candle burning quietly in your home, begin by creating a space that feels intentional and respectful.

Take a few moments to settle yourself.

If it is part of your practice, cleanse yourself and the space with cedar, sage, sweetgrass, or another sacred medicine that has been shared with you through respectful teaching.

Pause before lighting the flame.

Take several slow breaths and offer a simple prayer.

"I come with humility and gratitude."

May this fire receive my prayers.

May only what serves the highest good remain."

Allow yourself to become fully present before continuing.

Gathering Your Offerings

Every offering represents relationship.

Traditionally, many Indigenous Nations offer tobacco as a way of carrying prayers. Depending upon your own teachings or traditions, other respectful offerings may include cedar, sweetgrass, local medicines, cornmeal, oats, or written prayers placed carefully into the fire.

Before placing each offering into the flames, hold it for a moment.

Speak your intention.

Offer it with gratitude rather than expectation.

The ceremony is not about controlling the outcome.

It is about trusting the process.

Introducing Yourself

Before speaking your prayers, take a moment to introduce yourself.

Say your name.

Remember your family.

Remember the land upon which you stand.

Remember those who walked before you.

Then quietly speak the reason you have come.

Like sitting with an Elder, there is no need to hurry.

Leave space for listening as well as speaking.

The Ceremony

Lighting the Fire

As the flame begins to grow, allow yourself to settle into its rhythm.

Some people choose to drum, sing, or pray quietly.

Others simply sit in silence.

There is no single right way.

Let the fire teach you how to be present.

Offering Your Prayers

One by one, place your offerings into the fire.

As each offering is given, speak honestly.

Perhaps you are releasing fear.

Perhaps you are asking for courage.

Perhaps you are expressing gratitude.

Perhaps you simply wish to sit in relationship without asking for anything at all.

Whatever comes from your heart is enough.

Sitting with the Fire

After your offerings have been made, resist the urge to fill the silence.

Watch the flames.

Listen.

Allow your thoughts to settle.

If tears come, let them come.

If laughter comes, welcome it.

Sometimes the deepest teachings arrive when we stop trying to receive them.

Returning the Ashes

When the ceremony has come to its natural conclusion, offer words of gratitude.

Thank the fire.

Thank the land.

Thank your ancestors, guides, and helpers.

If you have been sitting beside an outdoor fire, allow the ashes to cool completely before returning them respectfully to the Earth if appropriate within the place where you are gathered.

If you have been working with a candle, extinguish the flame gently and with gratitude.

Remember that the ceremony does not end when the fire grows quiet.

It continues in the way you choose to live afterward.

The fire has received your prayers.

Now allow your life to become the answer.

REFLECTION



As the fire burns low, remain with it a little longer. Resist the urge to rush back into the world. Fire has a way of continuing its teaching long after the flames have quieted. Spend some time with your journal and allow your thoughts to settle naturally. There are no right or wrong answers. Simply notice what has shifted within you.

As you sat with the fire, what did you find yourself most ready to release? Was it a belief, a fear, a relationship, a burden, or perhaps a version of yourself that has completed its work?

What did the fire teach you about surrender? Were there places where you noticed yourself wanting to hold on rather than let go?

Fire transforms everything it touches. As you reflect on your own life, what part of you is asking to be transformed rather than simply endured?

What new intention, hope, or way of living emerged from this ceremony? How might you honour that intention through one simple action in your everyday life?

If the fire could leave you with one final teaching before the ceremony closed, what do you feel it would say?

Take a final moment to offer gratitude. Thank the fire for receiving your prayers, thank the land that held the ceremony, and thank yourself for having the courage to come honestly. Remember that the ceremony is not measured by what happened around the fire, but by the

Chapter Summary

Ceremony is not something we visit from time to time. It is a way of living.

Throughout this chapter, you have explored a variety of ceremonies, not as fixed formulas to be followed, but as invitations into relationship. Whether you are offering gratitude to the waters, seeking forgiveness, honouring your ancestors, praying with the wind, or simply greeting the sunrise with intention, the heart of every ceremony remains the same. It is not found in the words you speak or the objects you carry. It is found in the sincerity of your intention and the quality of relationship you bring to the moment.

Over time, you may find yourself creating ceremonies that no one has ever taught you. A quiet prayer before gathering medicines. A moment of gratitude before planting a garden. A walk through the forest after receiving difficult news. Sitting beside a river to ask for guidance before making an important decision. These moments become ceremony because they arise from presence, humility, reciprocity, and love. They are not performances. They are conversations with the living world.

As your relationship with the land, Spirit, and your own heart deepens, your ceremonies will naturally evolve. They may become simpler rather than more elaborate. You may find that the most meaningful ceremonies are often the quietest ones, woven into the ordinary rhythm of everyday life. The sacred has never been confined to lodges, mountains, or special occasions. It has always been waiting for us in the simple act of paying attention.

Carry these ceremonies lightly. Allow them to grow and change as you do. Let them reflect your relationships rather than your desire to do everything perfectly. The greatest ceremony is not the one that appears the most beautiful from the outside. It is the one that transforms the way you live when no one else is watching.

When life itself becomes ceremony, every sunrise is an invitation, every relationship becomes a teacher, every act of gratitude becomes a prayer, and every step upon the Earth becomes an opportunity to walk in right relationship.

CHAPTER NINE



Tools for the Path for Integration & Protection

The Ground Beneath Your Feet

Integration isn't just about processing visions. It is about anchoring them into the bones of your daily life. The Spirit Walker knows that ceremony doesn't end when the fire burns out; it continues in the mundane moments: the way you sip your morning tea, the way you greet the sunrise, the way you set boundaries with those who don't understand your path. Grounding is the first act of integration. Without it, the medicine floats like smoke, beautiful but untethered. To ground is to remember that you are both spirit and soil, that your body is not a cage but a sacred vessel. The Earth is your oldest ally, and she will hold you if you let her.

"The most powerful prayers are the ones whispered with your hands in the dirt."

Start with the simplest act: bare feet on grass, palms pressed to a tree trunk, forehead bowed to the ground. These are not metaphors as they are direct lines to the Earth's energy. If you live in a city, find a park, a potted plant, or even a bowl of salt. The key is presence. Feel the

texture, the pulse, the hum of life beneath you. When the mind races with post-ceremony revelations, the body knows how to return to center. Breathe into your belly, where the root of your spine meets the memory of the land. This is where integration begins. Not in the mind, but in the body's quiet knowing.

Spiritual Hygiene: Cleansing & Clearing

Not all energies you encounter are yours to carry. Some belong to the collective, to ancestors, to the unresolved wounds of those around you. Spiritual hygiene is the practice of discerning what is yours and what is not. It is about releasing what doesn't serve. Smudging with sage, cedar, or sweetgrass is one way, but there are others: salt baths, sound cleansing with bells or drums, even visualization of golden light washing through your aura. The goal isn't to become "pure" (a colonial concept), but to return to your natural state of balance.

After ceremony, you may feel porous, sensitive, or oddly magnetic to others' emotions. This is normal. Your energy field has expanded, and like any open door, it needs protection. Create a simple ritual: light a black candle (a traditional protector), trace a circle of salt around your bed, or wear a stone like black tourmaline or obsidian. Speak aloud: *"I call back my energy. I release what is not mine. Only love and truth may enter here."* These acts are not superstition: they are agreements with your own sovereignty.

Journaling as a Sacred Mirror

The blank page is a quiet witness. It does not judge, interrupt, or forget. After ceremony, journaling becomes a conversation with yourself, with Spirit, and with the teachings that are still unfolding. Write as honestly as you can, without worrying about grammar, structure, or whether it makes sense. These pages are for you alone.

Record everything you can remember while it is still fresh. Write down your experiences, emotions, symbols, visions, physical sensations, and even the small details that seem insignificant. If you dream in the days and weeks that follow, record those as well. Many teachings do not reveal themselves immediately. A dream that feels confusing today may become deeply meaningful months or even years later. Often, life catches up to the teaching long after the ceremony has ended.

You may find these questions helpful as you begin:

- What did the medicine reveal that I have been afraid to acknowledge?
- What emotions or sensations continue to stay with me?
- What old story, belief, or pattern am I ready to release?
- What symbols, dreams, or recurring themes keep returning?
- How can I honour these teachings through one simple action in my everyday life?

Over time, your journal becomes more than a record of experiences. It becomes a map of your becoming. As you revisit earlier entries, you will begin to notice patterns, recurring lessons, and the quiet ways your relationship with Spirit continues to deepen. Keep your journal somewhere that feels meaningful to you, perhaps beside your altar, wrapped in a special cloth, or simply in a place where you will return to it often. It is more than a notebook. It is a living conversation with your own unfolding.

The Art of Boundaries

Integration often requires saying "no" so your "yes" can mean something. Boundaries are not walls. They are the gates through which you choose what nourishes you. After a profound journey, you might

feel pressured to explain, defend, or perform your healing for others. Don't. Your process is sacred, and not all ears are worthy of your story.

Practical boundary-setting tools:

Write Down Everything as Soon as Possible. Make no drastic changes: journal everything that you can remember from your journey, even things that don't make sense. Often something will happen later and something you saw or felt will make sense. Time is needed to integrate.

Take 6-12 months before making any drastic changes in your life. The longer the better.



The Broken Record: For intrusive questions, repeat: *"I'm still integrating. I'll share when I'm ready."*

Energetic Cord-Cutting: Visualize scissors snipping ties to draining people or situations. Say: *"I release all hooks, cords, and obligations that no longer serve my highest good."*

Remember: Boundaries are love in action both for yourself and for others. When you honor your limits, you teach others how to honor them too.

The Daily Altar

Integration is woven through small, consistent acts. Create a daily altar: not elaborate, just a dedicated space for a candle, a stone, a feather, or a photo of an ancestor. Light the candle each morning and name one intention: *"Today, I walk with clarity,"* or *"Today, I release fear."* Let the flame carry your prayer. This ritual roots the cosmic into the commonplace, reminding you that the sacred is not separate from the sink full of dishes or the commute to work.

The Evolution of Self

These tools are not one-time fixes but lifelong companions. Some days, grounding will feel effortless; other days, you'll forget everything you've learned. That's okay. The path isn't linear. Return. Begin again. The Earth remembers you even when you forget yourself.

"Integration is not a destination. It's the art of walking with one foot in the spirit world and the other firmly on the ground."

Chapter Summary

Integration is not something we achieve once. It is a practice of returning to ourselves, again and again, as life continues to unfold.

Throughout this chapter, you have been introduced to practical tools that support your journey after ceremony. Grounding, protection, discernment, prayer, and daily practices are not separate from the teachings you have received. They are the means by which those teachings become embodied. They remind us that profound transformation is sustained not through extraordinary experiences alone, but through the quiet rhythms of everyday life.

As your awareness deepens, so too may your sensitivity to the world around you. This is not something to fear. Like any relationship, your connection with Spirit grows stronger through balance, healthy boundaries, and regular care. The tools in this chapter are offered not as rigid rules, but as companions that help you remain centred, connected, and rooted as you continue to walk between the seen and unseen worlds.

Remember that your greatest protection is not found in any object, ritual, or technique. It is found in the quality of your relationships.

When you live with integrity, humility, gratitude, and respect for all your relations, you naturally strengthen the foundation beneath your feet. The more deeply rooted you become in your body, the land, and your own heart, the more confidently you can meet whatever life places before you.

As you continue walking this path, trust the wisdom that has brought you this far. Return often to the Earth. Listen more than you speak. Care for your body as lovingly as you care for your spirit. In doing so, you will discover that the strongest foundation is not built upon certainty, but upon a life lived in right relationship.

The path will continue to unfold before you, one grounded step at a time.

CHAPTER TEN



The Way Forward

Returning to the Circle: A Final Reflection

Everything begins and returns to the circle.

When you first opened this book, I invited you to spend some time with the Medicine Wheel, not simply as a symbol or a teaching, but as a way of gently reflecting on your own life. The wheel offers no grades, no judgments, and no expectation that every part of life will always be in perfect balance. Instead, it reminds us that life moves in cycles. There are seasons when one direction asks more of us than another. There are times when our bodies require rest, when our emotions ask to be acknowledged, when our minds need quiet, or when our spirits call us back to the land, to prayer, or to community. Like the seasons themselves, these movements are natural. They are part of being human.

As you come to the end of this book, I invite you to return to the Medicine Wheel once again.

Not because you should be different than when you began, but because I suspect you are.

Perhaps not in dramatic ways. Healing rarely announces itself with fanfare. More often it reveals itself quietly. You may notice that a conversation no longer affects you as deeply as it once did. You may discover that you have become a little more patient with yourself, or a little more willing to ask for help. Perhaps you have found the courage to let go of something you have carried for many years, or perhaps you have simply begun asking different questions than the ones you brought to these pages. Those quiet shifts matter. In many ways, they are what integration looks like.

Return to your original Medicine Wheel assessment and compare it with where you find yourself today. Don't look for evidence that you have somehow "completed" your healing. There is no finish line waiting for any of us. Instead, notice what has changed. Notice what has remained the same. Notice which direction of the wheel seems to be inviting your attention now.

The Medicine Wheel has always reminded me that balance is not a place we arrive and remain forever. It is something we continue tending throughout our lives. Just as we cannot hold summer in place or ask winter never to return, we cannot expect ourselves to remain unchanged. There will be seasons of grief and seasons of celebration, seasons of uncertainty and seasons of clarity. There will be times when our bodies ask us to slow down, times when our relationships require more care, and times when Spirit seems very close and others when it feels difficult to hear. None of these seasons are failures. They are simply invitations to keep returning to relationship.

Perhaps that has been the greatest teaching for me.

When I first began writing, I believed this book would be about integration. Somewhere along the way I realized that integration is only one part of a much larger journey. Integration helps us carry the

teachings forward, but what we are really carrying them toward is a different way of living. Every chapter has, in one way or another, been asking the same question: *How do we live in right relationship?* How do we become more present with ourselves? How do we care more deeply for our families and communities? How do we remember that the Earth is not simply where we live but one of our oldest teachers? How do we allow ceremony to shape the ordinary moments of our lives rather than keeping it separate from them?

I don't believe there is a single answer to those questions. They are questions we live into over a lifetime. Sometimes we answer them well. Sometimes we lose our way. The important thing, I have learned, is not that we never stumble. The important thing is that we know how to return.

If this book has offered you anything of value, I hope it is not simply information or another framework for understanding healing. I hope it has encouraged you to become more curious about your own life, more compassionate toward your own journey, and more attentive to the relationships that sustain you. I hope it has reminded you that healing does not belong only to ceremony, retreats, or extraordinary moments. It is found in the ordinary choices we make every day, in the way we greet another person, in the way we care for the land beneath our feet, in the way we forgive ourselves when we fall short, and in the way we continue choosing love, even when fear would be easier.

As you complete the Medicine Wheel one final time, remember that this is not the end of the journey. It is simply another place to pause, reflect, and notice where life is inviting you next. The circle has no beginning and no end. Long before this book was written, people understood that wisdom moves in cycles rather than straight lines. We return to the same teachings again and again, discovering that they have something new to offer each time we encounter them.

Perhaps that is what healing has always been.

Not becoming someone new.

Not leaving parts of ourselves behind.

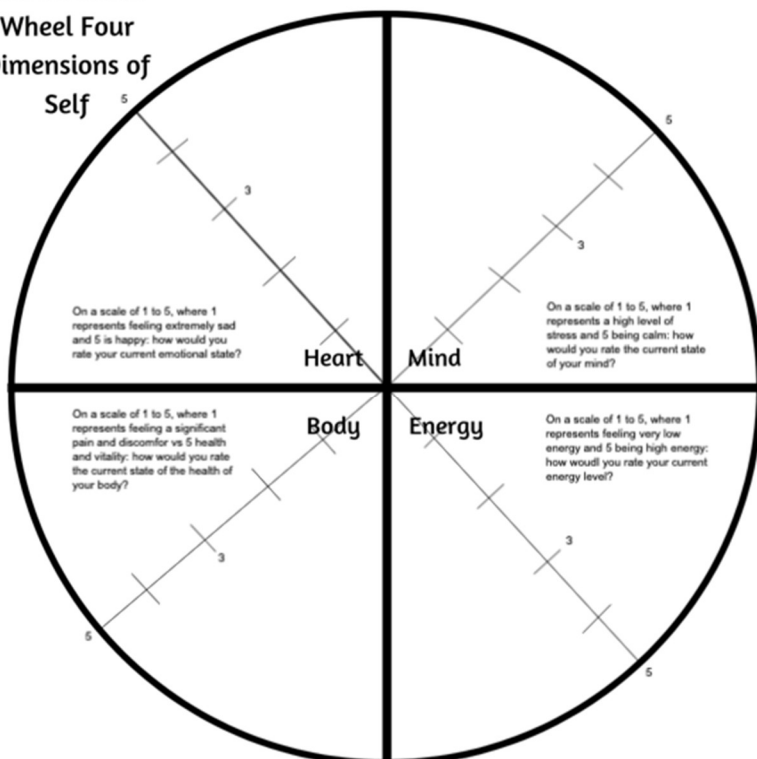
But remembering, little by little, how to walk through the world in right relationship with ourselves, with one another, with Mother Earth, with Spirit, and with the generations who came before us and those who will one day follow.

When you close this book, my hope is not that you remember every chapter or every reflection question. My hope is that, somewhere in the days and years ahead, you find yourself pausing before a difficult conversation, standing quietly beside a river, sitting in ceremony, or watching the seasons change, and that you remember, even for a moment, that healing is less about reaching a destination than about the way we choose to walk the path.

Medicine Wheel Closing Reflection

- On a scale of 1–5, where do I find myself today in Mind, Body, Emotion, and Spirit?
- What has changed since my first Medicine Wheel assessment?
- What direction of the Wheel is asking for my attention now?
- What is one intentional action I will carry into the coming week?

The Medicine Wheel Four Dimensions of Self



Adapted for Heart-Mind Online from <https://opentextbc.ca/obeolf4/medicine-wheel/>

Closing Ceremony

Return to the River

Every journey returns us to where it began.

Not because we have gone in a circle, but because we have been changed by the path.

When you have finished this book, I invite you to find a place that feels sacred to you. It may be a river, an ocean, a lake, a mountain, a forest, or simply a quiet place beneath an old tree. Go there without hurry. Leave your phone behind. Walk slowly. Notice the wind, the birds, the smell of the Earth, and the sound of the water.

If it is part of your practice, offer a small pinch of tobacco with gratitude. Thank the land for carrying you. Thank the waters for sustaining life. Thank the ancestors, the seen and unseen helpers, and every teacher who has walked beside you along the way.

Stand quietly.

Breathe.

Listen.

Perhaps nothing happens.

Perhaps everything happens.

Trust that both are enough.

Imagine yourself standing beside the river. Behind you stand every version of yourself that has brought you to this moment. The frightened child. The grieving one. The seeker. The one who doubted. The one who forgave. The one who learned to begin again.

Beside them stand those who walked before you. Your ancestors. Your teachers. Your relations. They do not ask you to be perfect.

They simply ask you to keep walking.

If Wolf has been one of your teachers, perhaps you sense Wolf nearby. If another guide has walked with you, allow them to come in whatever way feels true for you. There is nothing to force. Nothing to imagine. Simply remain open to the relationships that have accompanied you throughout your life.

When you are ready, speak these words aloud.

I remember.

I return.

I rise.

Remain there for a little while longer.

Notice the water continuing on its journey.

Notice the wind moving through the trees.

Notice your own breath joining the rhythm of the living world.

The ceremony is complete.

Your life is not.

Carry these teachings gently.

Walk with humility.

Walk with courage.

Walk in gratitude.

Walk in beauty.

Remember your relations.

And whenever you forget the way, return to the river.

Stay Connected

Thank you for allowing me to walk beside you on this part of your journey. I hope these teachings continue to meet you in the ordinary moments of life, long after this book has found its place on your shelf.

Visit www.cherylmatthew.ca for free downloads, and join my Intentional Living Newsletter for reflections, new writing, practical resources, and updates on future books and offerings.

Follow me on Instagram: @drcherylmatthew

If this book has been meaningful to you, please consider leaving an honest review on Amazon and Goodreads. Reviews help other readers discover the book and are one of the most meaningful ways you can support an independent author.

If these teachings resonated with you, please share this book with someone who may benefit from it.

Integration Journal & Ceremony Workbook

You are invited to photocopy these, buy the workbook or download printable PDFs from my website at www.cherylmatthew.ca

Ceremony Log

A simple record of ceremonies and intentional practices.

Date	Time	Ceremony / Practice	Location	Facilitator / Elder	Intention	Notes

Ceremony Record

Date	Time	Ceremony / Practice	Location	Facilitator / Elder	Intention	Page

Date:

Location:

Type of Ceremony

Who facilitated or held the ceremony?

Who was present?

Before Ceremony

My Intention

My Prayer

What am I hoping to understand?

What am I ready to release?

During Ceremony

What did I experience?

Animals

People

Ancestors

Colours

Symbols

Teachings

Messages

Write them exactly as they came.

My Body

Where did I feel things?

What emotions arose?

Immediately After

What surprised me?

What challenged me?

What brought me peace?

Dreams

Night One

Night Two

Night Three

Integration

One Week Later

What has changed?

One Month Later

Three Months Later

Six Months Later

One Year Later

Looking back...

What do I understand now that I couldn't see then?

What teachings are still unfolding?

Living the Teaching

How am I embodying this teaching?

What action has this ceremony asked me to take?

Relationship Reflection

This fits beautifully with your forgiveness chapter.

Who came into ceremony?

Living?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Ancestor?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Relationship

What remains unfinished?

Forgiveness needed?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Did I complete the Forgiveness Ceremony?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Date

Then another.

Dream Record

Date

Moon Phase

Dream

Animals

Colours

Messages

Questions

Later Meaning

Then another.

Synchronicity Log

Date

What happened?

Why did it stand out?

Could it connect to an earlier ceremony?

Action I'm taking

Then another.

Ancestor Messages

Who appeared?

What did they communicate?

What emotions arose?

Does this connect to family healing?

Ceremony Record

Ceremony Information

Date: _____

Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Location: _____

Ceremony Facilitator / Ceremony Leader: _____

Support Person(s): _____

Others Present (optional): _____

Weather / Season / Moon (optional) _____

Before Ceremony

My Intention

What prayer or intention did I bring into this ceremony?

My Heart Today

How am I arriving?

What emotions, thoughts, or challenges am I carrying?

Questions I Am Carrying

During Ceremony

What I Experienced

Describe the ceremony in as much detail as possible while it is still fresh.

Do not worry about making sense of it.

Simply record what happened.

Teachings, Symbols & Messages

Record any teachings exactly as they came.

Words, phrases, songs, prayers, symbols, colours, landscapes, people, animals, or sensations.

People Who Appeared

Ancestors or Loved Ones

Animals

Colours

Places

Songs, Words or Teachings

AFTER CEREMONY

My Immediate Reflections

What stayed with me most strongly?

What surprised me?

What challenged me?

What brought me peace?

Dreams Following Ceremony

Night One

Night Two

Night Three

INTEGRATION

One Week Later

What has changed?

One Month Later

What am I beginning to understand?

Three Months Later

How has this ceremony influenced my life?

Six Months Later

What teachings continue to unfold?

One Year Later

Looking back now...

What do I understand today that I could not have understood then?

What teachings am I still living?

Living the Teaching

How am I bringing this ceremony into everyday life?

Reflection Journal

REFLECTION 1



What intention is quietly calling me at this season of my life?

REFLECTION 2



Where in my life am I living in right relationship? Where am I being invited to restore it?

REFLECTION 3



What patterns of Shadow Resonance continue to shape my thoughts, emotions, or relationships?

REFLECTION 4



What would it look like to respond from Heart Resonance instead?

REFLECTION 5



What parts of myself have I rejected, hidden, or forgotten that are ready to be welcomed home?

REFLECTION 6



What am I carrying that no longer belongs to me?

REFLECTION 7



Who or what am I ready to forgive, including myself?

REFLECTION 8



What lessons has grief brought into my life?

REFLECTION 9



What dreams, visions, or moments continue to return to me?
What might they still be teaching?

REFLECTION 10



How has ceremony changed the way I see myself, others, or the world?

REFLECTION 11



What daily practice helps me feel most connected to Spirit?

REFLECTION 12



When do I feel most connected to Mother Earth?

REFLECTION 13



How can I offer more reciprocity to the land that sustains me?

REFLECTION 14



What relationships in my life nourish me? Which ones ask me to grow?

REFLECTION 15



How do I know when my heart is open? How do I know when it has closed?

REFLECTION 16



What does courage look like for me today?

REFLECTION 17



Where am I being invited to trust life more deeply?

REFLECTION 18



What gifts have emerged from experiences I once considered wounds?

REFLECTION 19



How have my ancestors shaped the person I am becoming?

REFLECTION 20



What legacy do I hope to leave for future generations?

REFLECTION 21



How has my understanding of ceremony changed since beginning this journey?

REFLECTION 22



If every day were a ceremony, what would I do differently tomorrow?

REFLECTION 23



What does living with intention mean to me now?

REFLECTION 24



How has my relationship with myself changed through this work?

REFLECTION 25



As I close this book, what promise am I making to myself, to the Earth, and to the path that lies ahead?

