

When You Help Someone, and That Someone Feels Better—You Have Given Medicine

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When first asked to speak to this group, my reaction was: what do I have to offer and share with this group? I am an educator and researcher of Native education. But I thought about it for some time and decided that I do have something to share. After all, the educational success of a student depends on balanced mental health.

It is wonderful to have sight, to be able to see the beauty of a sunrise, the moon, the rosehip, and ripples on a calm lake. But, there is something that is greater than sight, and that is insight. The old people gained this by meditation while waiting for a seal to come up to the breathe hole, while ice fishing, and just plain fasting to cleanse body and soul. This meditative state allowed the person to not be aware of the things going on around them, but to become aware of what is within the person. This is done through communication with oneself. This insight is acquiring an understanding of his/her life and the living that he/she are practicing. Are they complementary to one another, or are you doing things that are not in tune with insights of yourself? Are you in a job that makes you feel good? If you are living a life that feels just right then you are living a balanced life! Your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements are on an even plane, they are balanced. You see this meditative state allows one to be in charge of one's life, to function as one in body, mind and spirit. The whole is always greater than its parts and this means a healthy person. This means that when something is wrong with the physical being, not only must the practitioner be concerned with the physical symptoms or etiology of the disease, but also with all other aspects of the self.

You, as a leader in mental health, must seek to look at the world from a high place. In my area, a high hill, in this place a mountain peak, a place that is quiet and gives you a vantage point that is higher than the place you live. Looking from a higher altitude gives you a better perspective, you see more of your place. Getting to a higher place allows you to broaden your perspective, and in so doing raise your attitude to life because you have broadened your surroundings visually and broadened your understandings of your inner ecology, your identity. You, as leaders and policy makers, must ask for guidance from the *Ellam Yua*, the Spirit of the Universe. Meditate and fast at times you feel it is just right because if you are going to get an idea or a message of what needs to be done, you need to empty your mind to receive that message. The answer and cure lies within you. In the Yupiat world of acknowledging the Great Spirit are many masks used in the ceremonies. Some of these masks are of human beings. A few of these masks may have an eye painted on the human forehead. This represents the *Ellam Ina*, the Eye of the Universe, the Eye of Consciousness. It says to me that the Great Consciousness resides in my consciousness and that my consciousness resides in the Great Consciousness. Again, the answer and cure lies within each person.

You see, we as human beings think that the answers to mental problems lie within our ability to reason things out that is problem-solving. We think we can find the answers in our rational ability, and through textbooks and journals. These are very small segments of learning and doing, much lies outside their purview. There are some scientists that have come to study and write about "ecopsychology", learning from the models of Nature because of the mind in Nature. If we, as a Native people and a few Eurocentric scientists agree on this, then our surroundings, our outer ecology has much to do with our mind conditions. I may be oversimplifying it, but it seems reasonable in my mind. As you and I recognize, we live in disjointed ecological systems, I mean that there are many things, plants, animals, man-made technological techniques and methods, technological tools and gadgets that have been introduced that make for a jumbled-up place. If we have these new disjointed communities, does it not follow that there will be more disjointed/confused people? If their surroundings are trashed, then many of their minds are trashed also. One pervasive variable is that of advertising in the media. If these mind-benders determine what you should have to determine who you are, then where does the "me" begin, where does it end and where does the "other" start? These advertisements work against environmental and individual sanity. One begins to think that one needs this and that in order to become a complete person, to come to a satisfaction with one's life and living. What happens when their expectations of reaching the "American Dream" is found to be beyond their reach? A troubled psyche, I would presume. So, perhaps, we should help those that have mental problems to try to understand their environment to

relieve or mend their inability to cope with it, and to understand that to have little and need little is not bad at all. And, that it is not bad to be who they are with their own language, culture and ways of making sense of this world. Perhaps, we try to help these troubled people to "simply be". They have to be taught to be accountable for themselves.

Maybe, we do this by making the "home" much more simple and routine-driven. Again, simple because these people living in homes or institutions have to be disassociated from their family, language, culture and place. A double whamy, coming from an already disjointed environment to one that is more in disarray because of the technological design of the home and everything within and without it premised on standardization, linearity, efficiency and fragmentation. You would think that we no longer used technology, but that we are a part of it. Being objectified and separated from our own subsistence ways of survival and realities experienced by family, and community, the troubled become more dulled, impervious to things around them, and slow in thought and doing.

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. George Eliot in *Middlemarch*.

Talk about presenting a better possibility of posttraumatic stress syndrome in this strange and alien place. "I, alone, and a stranger, in a place of I never made" personified. Indeed, sad!

The leaders and workers must get away from the "I" to "we" and work for the good of the patients as human beings and provide a caring home. Perhaps, we do this by exploring the place and psychological worlds of the patient. We do this by taking into consideration the seasonal growing changes and cycles of the moon. This can be done by asking the ethnic group or community about traditional ways of treating people with emotional and psychological problems. What kinds of rituals and ceremonies were done and why, and ways to communicate with them, a practice of spiritual karate. Kicking out the evil spirits that have invaded the mind. This is getting the grassroots involvement in treatment of patients. How can we meld the modern pharmaceutical drugs and treatment with traditional love, care and communication with the troubled one. We must recognize that most of our psychopathological unbalances begin in early childhood. Our ontogeny, our coming into being, especially as a Native person, carries with it many hurts, fears and disassociations that are transmitted to us through our ancestors, language, stories, culture and our physical heritage. A lot of hurtful garbage leading to a spiritual depression.

Prehistoric man was, on the whole, a more peaceful, cooperative, unwarlike, unaggressive creature than we are, and we of the civilized world have gradually become more and more disoperative, more aggressive and hostile, and less and less cooperative where it matters, that is, human relations. The meaning we have put into the term “savage” is more correctly applicable to ourselves. Ashley Montagu, *The Direction of Human Development*.

For the board members and leaders, I, as a non-mental health worker, would recommend a few guidelines, I am sure that most have been already addressed:

- a. establish a place- and cultural-based format of organization for mental health
- b. establish a process of grassroots involvement
- c. establish clear goals
- d. establish a process for pooling ideas and strategies for treatment
- e. establish a process of facilitating methods that work
- f. establish a process for highlighting best practices
- g. diversify board representation
- h. establish life skills training for leaders from communities including students

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" becomes the dictum. We have become so proud of the inventiveness and productivity of knowledge of this century that we have forgotten where we belong in this world. We must strive to regain humility to recognize that we still have much to learn to protect and restore nature and restore ourselves to living in harmony with Mother Earth. We cannot restore our health as human beings unless we restore the health of Mother Earth. Thank you.