

# Doing Everything Wrong

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I dreamed we were hosting a sweat. Many people were there, and I was doing everything wrong.

To begin with, I was going around shushing the elders. By elders, I don't mean the older people who walk among us. No, these elders were those who have moved on to the West, but who come back to pray with us and to help us learn. Even before the sweat, they were gathering in, visiting among themselves and among the people, but I shushed them, telling them to be quiet. So, of course, they stopped talking; they got quiet.

Just before we were to enter the Osi for the sweat, I filled a plate and sat down to eat. I thought to myself, "This isn't right," but I kept on eating.

Finally, I prepared a record player. That's right, a record player. For those who can't remember, a record player is sort of like a CD player from the Neolithic era. I had this record player all waterproofed, so humidity would have no effect on it. I was going to take it into the Osi and play a recording of drum and piano music blended together.

That was enough; I awoke and was relieved that it was a dream.

We all have to watch ourselves. We are broken and hurting people trying to crawl out from under 500+ years of colonization. Sometimes we don't know how to behave in a good way. That's why, when we gather together, there are guidelines. From ceremony to ceremony the guidelines may be different. Rules aren't just for the sake of rules. The greater issue is respect. If we could remember to always act in respectful ways, there would be no need for rules or guidelines of any sort. If we could always remember those timeless principles of respect, reciprocity, reconciliation and relationship, we would behave appropriately, in every situation. No matter how young or how old we are, no matter how experienced or inexperienced we may be, we have to begin by watching ourselves.

The very next night, I was visited in a dream by the spirit of a certain man who is still walking physically among the people. This is a man I know and respect. He is an Indian but of another tribe and from another part of the country. In the dream, the spirit was visible and didn't look much like the man as he would ordinarily be seen; even so, I knew who it was. I suppose the ideal would be for a person's physical body and spirit to be an exact match, but that's not always the case. A person's physical body may be very strong, but the spirit may be too weak to get up and walk. Another person's physical body may be very weak, even bed-fast, but the spirit may be very strong. In the case of this man, his physical body is strong but out of shape. His spirit, on the other hand, appeared to me as much stronger and much more in shape than the physical body.

The spirit asked me, "Where do your people come from? Where do you originate?"

"We come from Blue Mountain," I said.

With a knowing smile and nod of his head, the spirit answered, "Yes, it is on Blue Mountain, in *this* land, that you originate."

"But," I added, "Before we were a people, we came from \_\_\_\_\_." (I spoke then, of a place or a land, the name of which I cannot now remember. I can't remember the name, because it is the name of a place that may have never really existed, and even if it did exist, this place is not important outside the context of another people's, a foreign people's stories of origin.) But I said, "Before we were a people, we came from this place across the ocean, and some came from other places in various parts of the world. Some got here through this route; some got here through that route."

"Before you were a people?" The spirit shook his head and with a look of disbelief repeated the question

quietly, as to himself. “*Before* you were a people?” Then looking at me, the spirit said with a firm and resolute tone, “Before you were a *people*, you were nothing. Before you were a *people*, you were *not*. You are of *this* land. *You* were created on Blue Mountain. I have to run now.”

What does it mean to be indigenous?