

# INDIGENOUS WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE CONSTITUENT ASPECTS

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING DAY 2021  
HUMAN RESOURCES AND THE PATH FORWARD  
FIRST NATIONS PUBLIC SERVICE SECRETARIAT

*LEROY LITTLE BEAR AND AMETHYST FIRST RIDER*

# WELLNESS IS BASED ON CULTURE

- ALL SOCIETIES, AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, LAY CLAIM TO A TERRITORY. WITHIN THAT TERRITORY A CULTURE ARISES FROM THE MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ECO-SPHERE INCLUDING THE LAND, ANIMALS, PLANTS, AND THE COSMOS.
- A CULTURE CONSISTS OF PARADIGMATIC CONCEPTS, CUSTOMS AND VALUES.
- PARADIGMS ARE THOSE CONCEPTS AND IDEAS FOR INTERPRETING REALITY AND INCLUDE BELIEF SYSTEMS

# WELLNESS IS BASED ON CULTURE

- CUSTOMS ARE THOSE PARTS OF CULTURE THAT SPEAK TO “ACCEPTED WAYS OF DOING THINGS” OR “ACCEPTED SOCIAL PRACTICES”. THESE MAY INCLUDE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, GOVERNANCE, MARRIAGE, UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN, FOOD SOURCING, AND SO ON.
- VALUES ARE THOSE ASPECTS BUILT INTO THE CULTURE THAT SERVE AS INCENTIVES FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY FOR REWARD AND RECOGNITION SO THAT THEY ADHERE TO THE CULTURE. VALUES ALSO SERVE AS STANDARDS AND GOALS TO ASPIRE TO.

# INDIGENOUS CULTURE AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- ALL HUMANS HAVE SOME BASIC NEEDS TO REMAIN ‘HUMAN’ AND TO SURVIVE AS ‘HUMANS’.
- ALL HUMANS NEED AN “INTERPRETIVE TOOL” TO MAKE SENSE OF THEIR SENSORY INTAKE. THAT “INTERPRETIVE TOOL” IS SHAPED BY THE TOTALITY OF THE CULTURE ONE GROWS UP IN, WHICH, IN TURN, IS SHAPED BY THE TOTALITY OF THE ECO-SYSTEM INCLUDING THE LAND, ANIMALS, PLANTS, AND COSMOS.

# INDIGENOUS CULTURE AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- THIS NEED FOR AN “INTERPRETIVE TOOL” IS WHAT IS MEANT BY ‘PARADIGMS’ OF A CULTURE AND THAT MEMBERS OF THAT CULTURE USE ON AN EVERYDAY BASIS. PARADIGMS ARE EMBODIED AND LARGELY UNSPOKEN ASPECTS OF A CULTURE. “THIS IS THE WAY IT IS” ...”NATURAL LAW” ... ARE USUALLY THE QUICK GENERAL EXPLANATIONS OF THIS NEED FOR AN ‘INTERPRETIVE TOOL’ FOR WHAT A SOCIETY CALLS ‘REALITY’. IN OTHER WORDS, ALL HUMANS HAVE A NEED TO SEARCH FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE AND EXISTENCE.

# BLACKFOOT PARADIGMS AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- ***CONSTANT FLUX***: EVERYTHING IS ALWAYS IN A STATE OF MOTION.
- ***EXISTENCE CONSISTS OF SPIRITS/ENERGY WAVES.***
- ***EVERYTHING IS ANIMATE AND IS EMBUED WITH SPIRIT.***
- ***EVERYTHING IS INTERRELATED***: 'ALL MY RELATIONS'.

# BLACKFOOT PARADIGMS AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- ***RENEWAL OF CREATION:*** RENEWAL OF FACTORS AND CONDITIONS FOR CONTINUING EXISTENCE.
- ***LAND/TERRITORY AS A MAJOR PSYCHOLOGICAL REFERENCE POINT FOR IDENTITY AND A SOURCE FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF PHYSICAL NEEDS.***
- ***BLACKFOOT LANGUAGE AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION.***

# BLACKFOOT CUSTOMS AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- [THE FOLLOWING ARE KNOWN AS THE “HEIRARCHY OF NEEDS” BY MASLOW. THESE NEEDS WERE TAUGHT TO HIM BY BLACKFOOT INDIANS. HE LEFT OUT SPIRITUALITY AND THE HUMAN NEED TO SEARCH FOR MEANING OF LIFE AND EXISTENCE.]
- ***PHYSICAL NEEDS***: EVERYTHING REQUIRED FOR PHYSICAL EXISTENCE INCLUDING FOOD, SHELTER, CLOTHING. THIS WOULD INCLUDE CUSTOMS THAT REVOLVE AROUND FOOD SOURCING, HARVESTING, PLANTING, MEDICAL AND MEDICINAL PRACTICES, CONSERVATION PRACTICES, ARCHITECTURE OF SHELTERS, STYLES OF CLOTHING, AND SO ON.



# BLACKFOOT CUSTOMS AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- ***SECURITY NEEDS***: THESE NEEDS WOULD INCLUDE CUSTOMS ON HOW WE PROTECT OURSELVES FROM ENEMIES, ANIMALS, NATURAL DISASTERS, SPIRITS, WEATHER, AND SO ON.
- ***NEED TO BELONG***: THIS WOULD INCLUDE CUSTOMS REVOLVING AROUND BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION SUCH AS EXTENDED FAMILY, RELATIVES, FRIENDS, GENDER ROLES, GOVERNANCE, CLANS, SOCIETIES, TRIBES, CONFEDERACY, AND SO ON.

# BLACKFOOT CUSTOMS AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- ***PERSONAL VALUE NEEDS***: THESE WOULD INCLUDE CUSTOMS RELVOLVING AROUND THE RECOGNITION OF THE VALUE, WORTH, AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS, THE RECOGNITION OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE OF INDIVIDUALS, PRACTICES IN THE UPBRINGING OF CHIDREN TO MAKE THEM ASPIRE TO HIGH CULTURAL GOALS AND TO HIGH STANDARDS.
- ***SPIRITUALITY***: THESE WOULD INCLUDE CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES RECOGNIZING THAT ALL OF CREATION IS A SPIRITUAL GIFT.

# BLACKFOOT CUSTOMS AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- ***SELF-ACTUALIZING***: WHEN A BLACKFOOT IS BROUGHT UP IN A 'SEA' FREE FROM STRESS, HAS FEELINGS OF SECURITY, BELONGING, PERSONAL WORTH, AND IS STEEPED IN SPIRITUALITY, THAT BLACKFOOT PERSON BECOMES 'COMPLETE'. THAT PERSON IS SELF-ACTUALIZING AND HEALTHY.
- WHEN THE MEMBERS OF THE TRIBE ARE SELF-ACTUALIZING, THE WHOLE TRIBE IS HEALTHY.

# INDIGENOUS CUSTOMS AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- ***SELF-ACTUALIZING***: AMETHYST FIRST RIDER OUTLINED SELF-ACTUALIZATION AS FOLLOWS: 'GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY, A CULTURE ATTEMPTS TO MOLD ITS MEMBERS INTO IDEAL PERSONALITY TYPES. THE CULTURES OF THE PLAINS INDIANS ARE NO EXCEPTION TO THIS RULE. FOR BLACKFOOT, THE IDEAL PERSONALITY IS ONE THAT SHOWS STRENGTH BOTH PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY. HE OR SHE IS A PERSON WHO IS GENEROUS AND SHOWS KINDNESS TO ALL. HE OR SHE IS A PERSON WHO PUTS THE GROUP'S NEEDS AHEAD OF INDIVIDUAL WANTS AND DESIRES. HE OR SHE IS A PERSON THAT GROWS IN WISDOM. HE OR SHE IS A PERSON THAT STEEPED IN SPIRITUAL AND RITUAL KNOWLEDGE.

# INDIGENOUS CUSTOMS AS A SOURCES OF WELLNESS

- HE OR SHE IS A PERSON, WHO, IN VIEW OF ALL THESE EXPECTATIONS, GOES ABOUT HIS OR HER LIFE AND APPROACHES “ALL MY RELATIONS” IN A SEA OF FRIENDSHIP, AN EASYGOING MANNER, HUMOUR AND GOOD FEELINGS. HE OR SHE IS A PERSON WHO ATTEMPTS TO SUPPRESS INNER FEELINGS, ANGER, AND DISAGREEMENT WITH THE GROUP. HE OR SHE IS A PERSON WHO IS EXPECTED TO DISPLAY BRAVERY, HARDINESS, AND STRENGTH AGAINST ENEMIES AND OUTSIDERS. HE OR SHE IS A PERSON WHO IS ADAPTABLE AND TAKES THE WORLD AS IT COMES WITHOUT COMPLAINT.”

# INDIGENOUS VALUES AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- ***SOCIAL VALUES*** ARE THOSE ASPECTS THAT ARE BUILT INTO THE CULTURE THAT ARE USED BY THE SOCIETY AS STANDARDS TO JUDGE SPECIFIC ACTS, OR GOALS TO STRIVE FOR, AND AS INCENTIVES FOR REWARDS AND RECOGNITION FOR MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY.
- BLACKFOOT HAVE MANY SOCIAL VALUES. WE WILL GIVE, AS EXAMPLES, FIVE(5) SOCIAL VALUES.
- ***WHOLENESS***: FIRST RIDER STATES, “THE VALUE OF WHOLENESS SPEAKS TO THE TOTALITY OF CREATION, THE GROUP AS OPPOSED TO THE INDIVIDUAL.....”

# INDIGENOUS VALUES AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- **WHOLENESS**, cont'd. “THE WHOLENESS VALUE TELLS THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP, IF ALL DID THEIR PART, SOCIAL ORDER WOULD RESULT. IF THE ‘WHOLE’ IS MAINTAINED, BEAUTY, HARMONY, AND BALANCE RESULTS.”
- **KINDNESS** MEANS HARMONY IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS JOINED TO THE CAPACITY FOR CARING; THE RESULTING BEHAVIOUR IS FRIENDSHIP, CARING, AMIABILITY, MILDNESS, AND ACQUIESCENCE.  
(DUMONT)

# INDIGENOUS VALUES AS A SOURCE OF WELLNESS

- **HONESTY** MEANS TRUTHFULNESS AND INTEGRITY CONDITIONED BY RESPECT. IT RESULTS IN TOLERANCE AND EQUANIMITY, RESPECT FOR OTHERS, AND A HIGHLY INTERNALIZED CONSCIENCE AND SENSE OF TRUSTWORTHINESS, HONOUR, AND LOYALTY. (DUMONT)
- **SHARING** MEANS GENEROSITY, COOPERATIVENESS AND COLLECTIVE WELLBEING. (DUMONT)
- **STRENGTH** MEANS STRENGTH OF CHARACTER, SELF-MASTERY, FORTITUDE, PEACE, HARMONY AND WELL-BEING IN ONE'S SELF AND OTHERS. (DUMONT)



# INDIGENOUS WELLNESS

- IF A PERSON WAS BROUGHT UP IN OR LIVED IN A 'CULTURAL SEA' OF BLACKFOOT PARADIGMS TO UTILIZE IN THEIR SEARCH FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE AND EXISTENCE; IF A PERSON LIVED BY BLACKFOOT CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES TO FULFILL HIS OR HER NEEDS; IF A PERSON LIVED UP TO AND ASPIRED TO THE STANDARDS SET BY BLACKFOOT SOCIAL VALUES, THAT PERSON WOULD BE COMPLETE AND A REAL BLACKFOOT.
- BEING REAL BLACKFOOT BRINGS ABOUT WELLNESS.

# DIVERSITY AS STRENGTH

- WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF SPECIALIZATION. THE UPSIDE IS YOU CAN GET TO KNOW EVERYTHING WITHIN THE SPECIALTY. THE DOWNSIDE IS OUTSIDE OF THE SPECIALTY ONE DOES NOT KNOW MUCH. ONE HAS TO DEPEND ON OTHER SPECIALISTS. KNOWLEDGE IS NARROWED DOWN TO THE SPECIALTY. CREATIVITY FALLS BY THE WAYSIDE. THERE IS NO EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE OF THE SPECIALTY TO DRAW ON.

# DIVERSITY AS STRENGTH

- WISDOM ARISES FROM A MULTIPLICITY OF EXPERIENCES AND IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTUAL SETTINGS. 'JACK OF OF ALL TRADES, MASTER OF NONE'. THE 'GENERALIST' CONTEXT OF OUR HOMO SAPIEN EXISTENCE IS WHAT ALLOWS US TO SEEMINGLY RULE THE WORLD. I CAN RUN BUT NOWHERE NEAR AS FAST AS A JAGUAR. I CAN SWIM BUT NOT AS GOOD AS A FISH. I CAN CLIMB TREES BUT NO NEAR AS GOOD AS AN ORANGUTAN.

# DIVERSITY AS STRENGTH

- IN OUR MODERN SOCIETY, GUESS WHO IS THE SPECIALIST AND THE GENERALIST. INDIGENOUS RESILIENCY EXISTS BECAUSE WE ARE GENERALISTS. OUR CULTURES REFLECT THE 'GENERALIST' NOTION. SO DOES OUR LANGUAGE. GUESS WHY OUR ELDERS EMPHASIZE EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE.

# THE LAND AS STRENGTH

- IF WE COME BACK TO THE METAPHYSICS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, WE RELATE TO THE LAND AS PART OF 'ALL MY RELATIONS. IT IS REAL. IT IS TANGIBLE AND SOMETHING WE CAN ACTUALLY EXPERIENCE. WHEREAS IN WESTERN THOUGHT, THE MAIN REFERENT IS TIME, AN ABSTRACT NOTION. IT IS NOT TANGIBLE. IN REALITY, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS TIME. THE ONLY TIME IS 'NOW'.

# RESILIENCE?

- FROM AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE, OUR RESILIENCE ARISES OUT OF OUR APPROACH TO LIFE AS 'GENERALISTS' AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAND.
- GENERALLY SPEAKING, HUMANS ARE WALKING DOWN THE SPECIALIST ROAD. DO WE REALLY WANT TO CONTINUE DOWN THAT PATH? INDIGENOUS LIFE-WAYS WILL SLOW DOWN OUR TRIP TO EXTINCTION. SO, HANG ON TO YOUR INDIGENOUS CULTURES. SING THE SONGS. TELL THE STORIES. DO THE CEREMONIES.