

Walking According to Treaty

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All who come to Turtle Island enter into a Treaty relationship that encompasses four distinct aspects: Newcomers, the First Nations, the land, and the Creator. So if you feel welcome here, it's because that's the way the First Nations want it to be. It's because that's the way we Nêhiyawak and other Indigenous peoples, believe this land *is*. We believe that it is in the nature of the Creator, and of this land, to welcome people, because it welcomed us, and our ancestors. When we stand on the land, we feel it welcome us.

But you have to live in a good way. Pimâcihowin. Living in a good way calls for proper relatedness, wâhkôhtowin, and proper partnership. There are several kinds of alliances that have developed in Canada, some better than others. The “Two-Row Wampum” that historically the Iroquoian people signed or committed to enter into with some of the Europeans, is a partnership shared on a task. Two groups journey alongside each other. But these two canoes never come together. That's okay. That's one kind of partnership.

Unfortunately, there is another partnership (if one can call it that) that we've been in for much too long. It's a paternalistic partnership. Part of it goes back to the residential schools, and to the kinds of generational damage Canadians heard about in the testimonies before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and have seen in the recovery of Indigenous children's bodies from thousands of unmarked graves. These show how we haven't achieved reconciliation. Beginning with the British North America Act (now called the Constitution Act) in 1867 and followed by the Indian Act and residential school provisions—repressive laws still in effect in Canada—First Nations were no

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longer treated as sovereign nations with whom Canada has Treaty, but rather as wards of the government.¹⁶² Sometime around Confederation, things changed and instead of sovereign peoples with whom to take Treaty, we were considered as children. It was a paternalistic partnership that continues to damage Indigenous people and Canadians both. Within that kind of oppressive, paternalistic relationship, some things can happen. But it's hardly the best kind of relationship.

What I think would be helpful is if, to the extent that it undergirds our common relationship, we together would make Indigenous values our common values.¹⁶³ Then we would be partnering, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous in this country. Settler descendants and Newcomers would embrace their place by embracing our common Creation Story, responsible for the place we now find ourselves in. If you are a Canadian, then Treaty *is* your creation story. Canada exists because of the good will of First Nations peoples. The Europeans came here desiring to make a home. They said they wanted to share this land and the First Nations gave the traditional answer, which is "Yes, you can share this land; it's a good land. You will make Treaty." And the Europeans answered, "Okay." That's how Canada exists. That's the true basis for the relationships we have. And that's what Treaty is about.

When we journey on this land, the heart of Cree spirituality and knowledge tells us that we were created for this land. That on it, we are all related, either by being original peoples, or by Treaty, if such Treaties are respected and honoured. It tells us that we belong here.

The Treaty-making process between the historic Newcomers and the First Nations provides the necessary resources for the flourishing of Turtle Island people. Treaty can function as a shared memory, which can provide the resources to continue to write a new, home-grown narrative. This narrative has enough room for Indigenous people as well as Newcomers, and at the heart of this narrative is the reconciliation inherent in Treaty making. Eva Mackey writes, "The collective past of relationships must be recognized and dealt with in order to imagine

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and build ongoing relationships. Treaty means that participants should meet at appropriate intervals to assess, discuss, and “polish” the ongoing relationship to make sure it is still strong. Thus the Treaty is a vibrant, supple, responsive, ongoing interactional process.”¹⁶⁴

First Nations spiritualities show the importance of making a holistic connection to the land. This is a spirituality rooted in the real, material world, and so provides new tools to critique and inform the ongoing development of resources in Canada. Finally, as we share this land, an historic pluralism that acknowledges the identity of each group of people allows us to move together as partners on the land. As we move toward proper relatedness, we will find an affirming freedom in equality for all people.

¹⁶² Joseph, *21 Things*, 83.

¹⁶³ There is a map for this in Archer Pechawis, “Indigenism: Aboriginal Worldview as Global Protocol,” *Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art*, ed. Steven Loft and Kerry Swanson (University of Calgary, 2014), 31–48.

¹⁶⁴ Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 140.