

Gathering In

"Indigenous Perspectives" - Monthly Broadcast on HealthyLife.Net

38-April 25, 2024

For audio podcast: <http://www.ecologia.org/news/38.Gathering.mp3> (57 mins.)



Gathering Community¹

Background to this podcast:

In November 2023, we (Randy Kritkausky and Carolyn Schmidt) invited four people from different Christian religious traditions to our house. We hoped that sharing a meal might provide an opportunity to further explore a range of interests that had previously been shared only over electronic media.

Our wildest expectations were exceeded as life changing encounters unfolded before our eyes. Strangers who arrived at a dinner table left feeling that they had found soul mates. Or to use the phrase we heard many times over dinner and in numerous follow-up emails, we all became a band of travelers on a shared journey of discovery. This podcast is a snapshot in time of where we are now individually and collectively in that journey. It is our hope that capturing this moment in time, a virtual electronic re-gathering, may help others to find common ground so that we may all make progress toward healing our society and planet together.

¹Community PNG Image - [Creative Commons 4.0 BY-NC](https://www.pngall.com/community-png/download/24450) Community PNG Image

Segment One

Randy Kritkausky: Greetings, or may I say Bozho in Potawatomi to those joining us for today's Indigenous Perspectives show. I'm Randy Kritkausk, an enrolled Potawatomi tribal member and the co-host of Indigenous Perspectives.

Carolyn Schmidt: And I'm Carolyn Schmidt, the other co-host. For our land acknowledgement, we recognize Vermont, where we are, as part of N'dakinna, the unceded traditional territory of the Abenaki people who for centuries have lived on the lands now included in present day northern New England and southeastern Canada.

Randy: We also acknowledge that this is the unceded land of our other-than-human kin, the winged ones, the rooted ones, the four legged ones and the mountains and rivers who have been present on Turtle Island and have been partners and caretakers for countless millennia. They were here before any of the two-legged arrived - before the Indigenous peoples who came over the Beringian Land bridge from Asia about 15,000 years ago, and before the European two-legged arrived more recently.

Carolyn: For today's show, titled "Gathering In," we welcome four guests who will join Randy and me to explore our shared sense that we are at a time of awakening - a cultural awakening that includes the growing confidence and power of Indigenous peoples' world-views, today represented by Randy. And creating new paths along with people from diverse backgrounds who are deeply committed to a broad and inclusive vision of Christianity.

Rameen Zahed is the pastor of the Old Meeting House in East Montpelier Vermont. The Old Meeting House is an open and affirming community church with strong denominational ties to the United Church of Christ. Rameen values his Iranian-American roots, which give him insights into the difficulties of pushing against established boundaries of race and ethnicity as well as of creed. Rameen, welcome to the show.

Rameen: Pleasure to be here among friends.

Carolyn: We also welcome Bill Wiser and Grace Anna Wiser, who are both members of the Bruderhof, a group of intentional Christian communities whose members share their possessions and organize their lives around the teachings of Jesus'

Sermon on the Mount. The Bruderhof is an Anabaptist Christian movement that started in Germany in the early 20th century. Bill and Grace Anna are speaking with us today from the Spring Valley Bruderhof in the southwest corner of Pennsylvania. They have both also lived and worked in Bruderhof communities in Australia and South Korea. Welcome, Bill and Grace Anna.

Bill Wiser: Thank you. We're very happy to be on the program once again.

Grace Anna Wiser: Thank you so much. It's great to be here today.

Carolyn: And finally, Damian Costello is a Catholic theologian who is director of post-graduate studies at NAIITS, an Indigenous Learning Community. He's known for his work on Black Elk and specializes in the intersection of Indigenous and Catholic spirituality in North America. Damian lives in Montpelier Vermont, where he met Rameen. Damian, good to have you back on the show.

Damian: Wonderful to be back. Thank you.

Randy: I'm going to try to frame this program today by referring to a dinner we had at our house with all of those on today's program present. And something extraordinary happened at that dinner that I think each of the program participants today will reflect back on. But even more interestingly since that dinner, a kind of magical momentum has just grown and grown and grown. And each of us in our own ways have expressed how we feel it invigorating and inspiring us as individuals, but also how we feel it coming from sources other than just those of us gathered on the podcast.

I think one of the ideas, themes we'll investigate is where is it coming from, and why is what we're articulating today apparently getting traction in the broader society? So with that idea, would one of you like to start the discussion maybe by referring back to the dinner?

Bill Wiser: Well, perhaps I will jump in. This is Bill. I felt the dinner [*in November 2023*] was what Henry Nowin, a Catholic writer, refers to as a *kairos* moment. So *kairos* is a New Testament Greek word that has to do with opportunity, with moments that seem ripe for their intended purpose. And what is so thrilling is that none of us had that intended purpose when we gathered together and yet something happened that was truly transcendent and outside any of our expectations.

Randy: Damian, Rameen, you want to run with that idea for a moment? Give your reflections on Bill's beginning?

Damian: Yes, thanks Randy. Just to pick up on Bill's, this idea of *kairos* time, you asked where is this coming from? Where's the spirit moving? And I really believe the spirit is moving through the land, that we're opening our ears and our hearts up once again to feel, embrace and listen to the land that teaches us. Indigenous peoples are always the first to say these aren't our ways; they were given to us and taught to us by the earth and the beings that inhabit it. And *kairos* time is very much the time of the land. We're used to chronological time. We've chopped it up in the tiny pieces. When you go back to the land, it opens you up to those kinds of *kairos* moments that Bill articulated so beautifully.

Rameen: I had several takeaways from the dinner. I think one of the bigger ones was learning how to be still and sit with your thoughts, using silence as a form of resistance to the outside world and all the pressures. And I think the second one, the second thing I took away from that was from Bill and Grace, which was the idea of focusing on the actions of Jesus and doing what Jesus did as opposed to the proclamation of your faith. I thought that was really a transformative learning experience for me. The third, and it's evolved since then in various meetings with Randy and Damian, is learning how to live and thrive within the in-between places in our lives. Existing in a world of contradictions but not being overcome by it. And I think that's where I'm kind of at today and it ties back to my first point about silence, learning how to be silent in the in-between places.

Randy: So Rameen - Randy picking up on that - as the Indigenous person in the room today. I just want to say that it's kind of ironic, I'm actually feeling less Indigenous in my comments and more in sync with your religious backgrounds. Because I feel that what happened that day, and what has happened since, isn't just about an Indigenous kind of engagement with Mother Earth and nature, but Mother Earth and nature, as you all have said very eloquently in the emails we've shared, as a manifestation of Creator, God, whatever we want to call this force.

In my tradition, it's Gitche Manitou, the Great Spirit. And I have learned and been absolutely excited by realizing that the term Gitche Manitou in Algonquin language, although it is translated by Christian missionaries in the 17th century as the Great Spirit, actually means in our language, the Great Mystery - that there are things

about the Creator and creation and engaging it that reason alone does not adequately capture.

And one of the reasons I wanted to have us re-gather today is we're all struggling to find vocabulary to explain what that experience is. And I think we're all trying to wrestle with what is essentially an ineffable experience, experience almost impossible to put into simple language. So what is that experience when we stand before Creator, Gitche Manitou, God, the creation - what is it and how is it animating what all of us are sharing and doing?

Carolyn: Grace Anna?

Grace Anna Wisner: I think that for me an important part of it is sensitivity and also intentionality. And when we got together for that mealtime and we always pray a prayer that "may each encounter be blessed and be used for thy purpose." And if we come - it also has to do with the silence that remain spoke of, because it puts you into in mind in tune with the creation around you and you respond to that, and then with the people that you're interacting with and it heightens your hearing, your ear to catch those *kairos* moments.

Carolyn: Rameen?

Rameen: I think in christological² language I look at Christ's incantatory love and what forms it can take and where it will lead. And part of that in our dialogues that we've had with each other is into a better understanding and a more organic awareness of what the living planet needs for us as well. And the forms that spirituality can take.

I would say also emerging out of that is this understanding that what lies beyond the empirical and rational realm is the mystery world, and the mysteries in the universe are not always revealed in the empirical world. And it's been kind of an eye-opening experience for me to have witnessed it personally. So I think that has come out of it and definitely out of our conference in Montréal that we went to and certainly after the dinner we shared,

Randy: Bill, you had something to add.

² Christology is the study of Jesus, from the Christian belief that Jesus the historical figure combined divine and human natures

Bill: I just love that idea, Randy, of the Great Mystery. I really couldn't think of a better description of the God I worship. And centuries have gone by trying to encapsulate the understanding and meaning. And I think the Great Mystery is just a beautiful way to sum that up. I would only say I actually think our conversation that evening began in the woods in front of the house when I did this into the surrounding area [*here Bill gives a very authentic "koo-koo-o-koo" owl call*] and a barred owl responded from the woods welcoming me to liminal³ space, to that place at the edge where as Rameen said, we are at the threshold. So I think we actually entered that threshold as we entered the woods before we even entered your house.

Randy: I remember that moment vividly. It was miraculous and humbling at the same time.

Carolyn: If we're looking at a situation where people are stepping into and consciously creating a liminal space, how does that work to change your attitudes when you come out of the other side?

Randy: Damian?

Damian: Well, one thing I'd like to draw us to is that liminal space itself is the presence of God, of Creator. We in our Western way have turned God into this being that stands outside of the world and outside of the quote unquote "systems" that were created and operate without the Creator's operation. And that's totally false. The Creator lives in and infuses and makes everything live and is full of mystery. And there's this great quote by John Paul II, Saint John Paul II, that prayer is the response to the mystery that the world holds within itself. And I love that because it bridges the mystery of Creator and the mystery of the world seamlessly.

That owl, that call and that response that was received is at once the beings around us and the being that infuses everything. And so coming back from that liminal space, that's a great question. I'm going to pass that along because that liminal space is what we were in and prayer keeps us there. I think part of the journey and what Indigenous people are so good at is extending and magnifying and cultivating and helping us to realize that our best selves are found within that mystery and that liminal space.

³ The word *liminal* derives from the Latin limen, meaning threshold; the concept as used here includes a place of transition between areas, which can include belief systems and other intangibles.

Randy: I think one of the ideas, one of the commonalities we've been sharing is this notion which is not only an Indigenous notion but which is perhaps more accessible because it's more religiously neutral, is this idea that indeed we can engage something greater, an animate world if you wish. But as each of you have been saying, we need to learn how to listen to it.

That's a profoundly Indigenous message and it's wonderful hearing it from people who are not Indigenous and also recognizing that each of us is reporting that we're working with people in the mainstream who are wrestling with trying to come to terms with and understand their first steps in that direction. Do you want to talk about how other people are engaging you on this level, perhaps just beginning that kind of journey?

Rameen: This is Rameen. I think the goal is really not to get beyond the liminal space or push through it, but to accept the invitation and see who meets you there and invite others as well. And I would ask back to Randy and Carolyn, do you see yourself beyond the liminal space or are you in it? Do I want to look at this as a function of linear time or do I want to look at it as sacred time?

Randy: Well, I'm going to quickly answer because I've mentioned this a few times on the show, but I think it's really hard for listeners to understand. In the opening pages of my book, I have a picture of Alice looking through the looking glass and she's literally trapped halfway through this piece of plexiglass as a bronze statue. And part of her, her consciousness, if you wish, is on one side and part of her is on the other. And for years that was my mindset. As a university trained secular empiricist, I felt, gee, my Indigenous brain is pulling me through, but I can't make it all the way through. I'm trapped in liminal space between those two. And I felt it was a conflict.

And what I'm hearing you all say very eloquently is what I couldn't put into words for a long time, which is it's actually in a way a glorious place to be to understand that you occupy both spaces, you needn't occupy one exclusively. You can move back and forth and each can inform and enrich the other. So that's my answer. I don't feel that I've moved through, I don't want to move through it. I'm just delighted to inhabit that sometimes tension that keeps me on edge and keeps me reflecting on myself.

Carolyn: This is Carolyn. And I say for myself, I've had a lifelong struggle with the idea of how do I become a better person? How do I hold onto those aspects of myself

and ditch or lessen the problematic ones? And when working with other people, how do I work to bring out the best in them? And this is another version of liminality - trying to reach out together, look for the best in each other and connect. And it's exhilarating but it's also tremendously demanding. And there are times when I know I want to sort of slide back to a safe, predictable non-liminal space and need to do it to recharge or whatever it happens to be. So I see this as a tension - not in the sort of deep way that Randy does with his identity issues, but still.

And then Randy's introduced me to the idea of spiral time. So you try not to think of your life as, or the life around you as, lock stepping on a linear path but doing a lot of circling and reconnecting and all these different things going on. And that's part of, obviously, the great mystery.

Randy: Bill, I saw a nod from you. Please.

Bill: What I've been thinking about in terms of inviting others in: Western Christianity has done a disservice in painting Christ as an "either/ or" - Western, not simply idea, but putting that context around him. Actually he was very Eastern in the sense of "both/and." I think that's what we're talking about. And Carolyn, that's the tension that you're talking about. It's a matter of both/and, not either/or. And I've been taught that type of spirituality beautifully from some of my Indigenous friends, Aboriginal friends in Australia, as well as some lovely Catholic authors that seem to get that part better than some of the Protestants I know

Grace Anna: And this is Grace. I think that in that place we actually find our real selves and the reality of our existence is much more clear and that's why it's a place where we actually want to be and want to remain.

Carolyn: Okay, well that's a fantastic note, Grace for us to close out Segment One of Indigenous perspectives. Stay tuned for the next segment coming in just a minute.

Segment Two

Carolyn: Welcome back to the second segment of Indigenous Perspectives, the concept of "Gathering In". So Rameen is going to start us off.

Rameen: Yes, I want to reflect on that issue of liminal space. And the irony was not lost on me that we are gathering over Zoom, which is liminal space, to talk about liminal space. And yet within that environment and this ecosystem, we are connected by our hearts. There's a genuine love for one another that we see in this

midst, and that's what I would call Christ's incantatory love. But whatever form it takes for anyone else, I'm happy to participate with them.

Bill: This is Bill, it's truly a gathering in and so I love the title, Randy and Carolyn, of this podcast. I noted a couple of Catholic authors that have helped me become less Western in my thought. Richard Rohr⁴ says that much of the work of the biblical god and human destiny itself is to get people into liminal space and to keep them there long enough to learn something essentially new and genuine. And that's exactly what I feel in terms of our conversation. We are being led into something genuinely new. That's why you can sense the excitement in our voices. I wish you could have all been there at the dinner to see it in action.

And I would add too that the teachable space has to do with the edge. It has to do with that being the space where we are taught.



*Water's Edge*⁵

⁴ For more on Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan priest, writer, and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Rohr

⁵ Photo credit: Doug Zwick, July 3, 2015 CC BY-NC 2.0 Deed Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic <https://www.flickr.com/photos/42468795@N05/23775075245>

And ecologically it is at the edge where all the exciting things happen. That's where the natural growth is. As a bird watcher, that's where I see the birds. And that's also where I see the Indigenous spirituality reflected in my connection with the natural world. I've been in that sort of liminal space, more hours than I can even mention.

Damian: Damian here to pick up on that. We talked about gathering in and sort of creating spaces for multiplicity and diversity and authentic encounter. But I've been finding in my own journey lately that it's the vulnerability to allow yourself to be gathered in where some of the deepest edge and greatest encounter is found. I met Rameen by not reaching him out to him as a peer, but walking into his church and going to a service. Allowing myself to be gathered in by what they do. Well, every community thrives and has something beautiful to offer and to allow yourself to experience that on its own terms and not think that, well, it's only through meeting through who I am and what I do well, that kind of growth and relationship forms and I think that's what has brought me to each one of you.

Carolyn: Grace Anna?

Grace Anna: This is Grace. Another thing that happens in this liminal space is change. And when two spheres come together, something new is created. And besides the reality that you experience there, it's the change and the excitement for the change and for something new, which is what is so inspiring about it.

Carolyn: I think also something new - I think we're also sharing a sense that the kind of new that we're seeking for is also better in some deep way. More connecting, more fulfilling, more humane, more inclusive. And to me that's part of the idea of gathering in - it's the idea of being inclusive and reaching out across boundaries that otherwise might separate you from connecting with the other people or with our kin - the rooted ones, the winged ones, the four-legged.

And there's a great quotation from the African-American academic and feminist and activist Loretta Ross⁶. She has a book about the importance of calling people in as opposed to calling them out, like a snarky criticism culture. And she says, "When you ask people to give up hate, you have to be there for them when they do." In other words, this liminal space you want to draw other people into to join with them, you've got to be providing something that is going to connect with them more

⁶ For more on Loretta Ross, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loretta_Ross Her book, *Calling In the Call-Out Culture*, is scheduled for publication in 2024.

deeply than the default to hatred. So to me that's a very challenging, very exciting, very challenging concept.

Bill: And then I would add - this is Bill - that after the gathering in there must be a going out. And so stemming from this gathering we are now in, I think our role is to invite others into that liminal space. What you referred to, Carolyn, is really about societal flourishing after personal healing. So we also heal in liminal space, but then there's a going out to say, look, we don't have to be fighting each other, we don't have to be hating each other. We don't have to be destroying the planet. We can invite others into this space where we can find a new way of being and living together as humans, but also with the rest of the kin around us.

Randy: This is a really big challenge and a big issue for Native Americans who are deeply ambivalent about inviting people from non-Indigenous world into their space for fear of it being cultural appropriation. We did a whole program on it. I am an advocate of Indigenous people inviting more people into our space to join us, to understand and to respectfully take what they can from our worldview and apply it in their own world. But then also to bring back those insights into our space and maybe sometimes even challenge us a bit, as Damian has written about Black Elk who tried to straddle these two worlds and reconcile them. It's not easy, but it's where change happens.

Carolyn: I've got a question though. You invite the non-Indigenous people in and that's terrific, but how do you deal with the fact that they may want to stay in, they may want to encroach on your land either physically or else metaphorically. How do you grapple with that kind of tension?

Randy: Well, they've already taken our land. That's kind of water over the dam. To not be flippantly humorous for a moment, what we as Indigenous people have left is our culture. And I'm not really deeply concerned that that's going to be taken away from us. Quite the opposite. After 500 years of trying to erase us, the mainstream all of a sudden seems really interested in helping us to revive and strengthen what we had as we recreate it, and they want to participate in it. And I think each of you in your own religious traditions are discovering the same thing. New people coming to your church, new people bringing in questions, wanting to join in something greater than what they currently know. So they are back in that liminal space and we have to welcome them in and be very sensitive to the fact that they may not get it right. They may ask questions which might make us cringe for a

moment, but they're doing it in the spirit of trying to cross through a boundary that existed and we have to be forgiving. Grace Anna?

Grace Anna: And everyone ends up being enriched by it.

Carolyn: Ah, another great note to end this segment on. Thank you and stay tuned.

Segment Three

Carolyn: Welcome back to Indigenous Perspectives, our Segment Three on "Gathering In" with our four guests. So Bill, start us off.

Bill: We've been speaking about liminal space, and as someone who's spent a great deal of time in the natural world, we're really talking about the edge and that's the place where two distinct ecosystems meet - a very fruitful place, a place full of life, a place of tension. And the idea that nothing creative happens inside comfort zones, but rather everything good takes place in those intersections of two systems. And it's talking about ecological systems in the natural world. But as we're speaking here today, it might be theological systems, it might be ethical systems, all the things that can potentially divide us actually are places that can bring us closer together.

Damian: This is Damien to pick up on that. The edge is often created in times of crisis in ways that we don't predict and we don't necessarily want. But even in those opportunities and especially because of those opportunities, you need to lean into the diversity of those edges. And I think back to Nicholas Black Elk, who we've talked about on this program a number of times. That he of course was facing a situation that was not of his choosing, and not of his people's choosing, and found himself in two traditions, three actually: in his traditional Lakota tradition, the Ghost Dance tradition and then Catholicism.

And it didn't become some sort of bland amalgamation of all three watered down into something sort of that fit the needs of that situation. Rather he fully inhabited and tested and embraced as much as he could of each tradition. And they cross fertilized each other. And it became the ingredient for an incredibly beautiful life that bridged all of these different communities that straddled these issues and gave a vision to live and flourish beautifully in that context. And I think that's what we are looking for, what young people are looking for today - to find that ability to inhabit all of those edges in the current situation

Grace Anna: And in so doing, we shouldn't worry that we are going to have to completely give up our own selves when we come out of our comfort zones. It doesn't mean that we're going to be something completely different. We should each one of us be authentically who we are, be true to who we are, but then it opens us up to who other people are. And in that way that is when you find something new, something enriching, something different and something beautiful.

Rameen: This is Rameen, I think - I'm not really comfortable speaking on behalf of all Christians - but I think there is something about Jesus as a liminal figure that appeals to me. And my biblical point of departure for this is him in the wilderness resisting the forces around him. He's half - fully human, fully God - he is outside the city but not fully in the desert. He's being surrounded by angels and wild beasts. And I also think, and this is something that came out of our conversation from Bill and Grace Anne, and Damian and I have talked about this a lot, is to be a follower of Jesus, to be a Christian, also means to go into those liminal spaces and find and let it lead you where it does. It doesn't have to have an end point. It is sort of like the journey is the destination in this for Christians. And I think that's one of the things I've really come to appreciate about my faith, but also seeing its overlap with Indigenous practices of spirituality and existence, right?

Bill: Precisely, because the temptations you're speaking of unfortunately became what the Western Christian world imposed on the Indigenous peoples, the idea of power, of wealth, all those types of things that destroyed so much were actually yielding to the very temptations that Jesus was pushing back against. So we have something tremendously important to learn from what you said.

Going out into the wilderness is what I do in the natural world and it's an automatic place of prayer and of listening and absorbing. The Great Mystery that Randy was referring to, and that's a deep connection with my Aboriginal and Indigenous friends, is this idea of going out into nature naked in the sense of not bringing anything of yourself but being open to what the Great Mystery might teach you at that very particular moment.

Randy: For Indigenous people in your youth, your adolescence, you typically go out into the wilderness alone on a spirit quest looking for your name. And you may spend days fasting and it can be a very rigorous, very demanding experience. But when you come back, as we mentioned on one of our programs about masks and the

Kwakwaka'wakw⁷, [you] are reintegrated into the community, but you're reintegrated as a different person. You're now an adult and you typically receive your name, which Carolyn and I know from going through a naming ceremony, is meant to be the name that Creator recognizes you by. In other words, you've become someone new, you've become a spiritual person and you can now relate in a different way to Creator and creation. So this is just profoundly Indigenous, even though we're talking about very non-Indigenous issues.

Carolyn: And also I think the whole idea of the reconnecting at a deeper level is that you shed some of your isolation by connecting with things that are larger than you and that can be profoundly comforting as long as the things that are larger than you are benign, are inclusive - that's different from following the fascist leader because you feel good in a group. This is a much more challenging, demanding and very humane way of connecting with other beings.

Rameen: I think this whole concept of liminal space as it lends itself to our earlier conversations is that we realize there's a very porous border between mystery and reality. And we're sitting there.

Randy: You've written about that recently and I'm looking forward to exploring that because I think probably each of us in our private and sometimes most deeply spiritual moments, have that kind of experience of encountering something in nature or something in our ancestors or something in the scriptures or the presence of God or Giche Manitou, and we're struck dumb with awe, we don't know exactly what's happening and we may not know at the time how to respond. It may take days, weeks, months, maybe years to process it. I know my own journey, which I wrote about, I'm still processing things that happened.

Carolyn: So trying to carry forward those ideas and those beauties that you get in liminal space will be part of our discussion in Segment Four. Stay tuned.

Segment Four

Carolyn: Welcome back to the fourth segment of Indigenous Perspectives. And Randy is going to start us off with a question on everyone's mind.

⁷ "Transformation and Survivai: Achievements of the Kwakwaka'wakw"
<https://www.ecologia.org/news/36.TransformSurvive.pdf>

Randy: So in our final segment, we want to leave listeners [*and*] readers of our transcript with some very practical steps they might take to move through liminal space to re-understanding, reinventing and re-engaging with the world. Each of us gathered around this podcast, as we're gathered around our table, comes from traditions which historically have not always been in harmonious relations with one another, to put it mildly. So the question is how do we work through that and arrive at what we're describing happened at our dinner?

Bill: This is Bill, I'll jump in. Quite personally, the Anabaptist tradition and the Catholic tradition 500 years ago was anything but a peaceful place. Heads rolled, people were burned at the stake - and yet here we are together. So twofold. First of all, each of us needs to better understand who we are, what our faith traditions or spirituality is based on, and then reach out to the other. And that can be done very practically in terms of having meals together. I find table fellowship to be a fabulous place for that and I would invite everyone listening to give it a try.

Rameen: This is Rameen. I think that question's a really important one and it kind of points back to something Carolyn brought up in I think the end of the first segment. In that you don't want to be platformed or used as a premise by chaos agents inside that liminal space, that we found a lot of hope among each other and within that space. Paul Conti is a pretty famous psychiatrist out of Stanford University Medical School, and he talks about the only thing that can overcome a climate of fear is a climate of compassion.⁸



So what do you put back into the world to create a climate of compassion, when chaos agents rule?

⁸ Paul Conti is a psychiatrist, speaker, consultant, and author of *Trauma: The Invisible Epidemic: How Trauma Works and How We Can Heal From It*,

And he offers very simple concrete steps. One is just do kind things. Work in a soup kitchen. Distribute clothing to the poor and needy. Just say thank you to somebody or smile. We don't have to make gigantic stops to have inroads into people who have been stimulated in the wrong way. We just have to be kind.

Grace Anna: And this is Grace. And start conversations. Look around to the people that you are passing on the street or who you meet at different times and just begin conversations and you would be very, very surprised how you will be led on as you interact with others.

Rameen: Yes, I would add to that with integrity and authenticity.

Grace Anna: Yes.

Rameen: Not for your own public benefit or gain.

Grace Anna: Yes.

Damian: I think I'd encourage - this is Damian here - this is a lesson that I've taken from Indigenous context: the importance of discipline and training to enter into liminal spaces. Liminal spaces challenge you. They take a lot out of you and they give you a lot. But you are prepared for that in a community by the elders and asked to do very difficult things. You are going into the sweat lodge all the time and suffering in there. You are training in a spiritual way. And that allows you to be more resilient when encountered with these kinds of experiences of dark liminal spaces.

Can you handle everything? No, but you can handle more. You can build capacity to practice the kind of kindness that Rameen talked about, and start the conversations that Grace Anna mentioned by working on yourself first. And at the same time, I think that's one of the biggest challenges that Western Christianity faces is that we don't believe in the importance of prayer. We envision it as talking to the Creator or using words, asking for things.

Prayer is really about reformulating who you are, allowing yourself to be transformed. And Bill and Grace Anne, I could immediately sense when I walked into the room and started talking to you that you are people of deep prayer, intentional, formative, structured prayer. And I think that's incredibly important for us moving forward and to create the kind of spaces that we're talking about.

Bill: And with prayer comes the expectation that something will happen. When I got out of the car and I stood in those woods, I was prepared for something to happen and so I gave the hoot of an owl. So expectation that something will happen, that a *kairos* moment will take place, is a really important part of the steps forward.

Grace Anna: In that prayer you are connecting yourself to in the liminal space, to your place in the whole of creation and where you fit in. And that is the connection which then you can use to reach out to others.

Bill: Your connection to the Great Mystery.

Grace Anna: Yes.

Carolyn: And I guess one of the things is you feel these strong connections and that gives you the confidence to do your own difficult reaching out as you go forward.

Rameen: I think it helps to have us, who we are today in this group, to engage chaos agents outside us.

Carolyn: For sure.

Randy: One of the most beautiful things about the relationship that we've formed since that dinner and for each of us as subgroups we've sometimes had for a decade or more, is that I think we're coming to rely on one another as a support network and a method of affirmation. And the emails we exchange, I can see how deeply important that is, but also how vulnerable we make ourselves when we expose anxiety, uncertainty we have. And we hope for, but we don't know if we're going to receive affirmation.

I just wanted to say, as an Indigenous person, the affirmation and the comfort I've gotten back from that kind of relationship with you all is just - to use the word that Rameen uses in practically every email message - it is been transformative. I think it's been transformative for all of us, and I would encourage our listeners to try to create that kind of space and trusting relationship where the liminal space is this enormous spiritual growth opportunity.

So we're going to have to conclude this. It seems premature! I wish you could all join us around dinner, but maybe you can do it in your own liminal space in your house.

I hope this broadcast has given you time and space to reconnect with your roots and Mother Earth and possibly with your ancestral roots. Before your busy day distracts you from this moment, we encourage you to reach out and feel the presence of living flora and fauna, our animate kin, and perhaps even that of your ancestors and others who have walked on. Allow yourself to touch their presence, capture that moment and hold onto it.

Carolyn: Again, we thank our guests on the show today: Rameen Zahed, Bill Wiser, Grace Anna Wiser, and Damian Costello. And listeners, readers, if you wish, write to Randy. Let him know about your experiences or your reflections on any topic raised on our show. And Randy can be reached with his email address, randykritkausky@hushmail.com or through his author's website, which is www.randykritkausky.com

Thank you all very, very much. Miigwetch.

Randy: Thank you for being on our show, friends.

+++++

"Indigenous Perspectives" monthly podcast is hosted by Randy Kritkausky and Carolyn Schmidt, and broadcast on the fourth Thursday of each month, 12 noon Eastern Time (US & Canada), on HealthyLife.net.



Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike CC BY-NC-SA

Creative Commons License Others may remix, adapt, and build upon this work non-commercially, as long as they credit "Indigenous Perspectives – Randy Kritkausky and Carolyn Schmidt" and license their new creations under the identical terms (i.e. non-commercial; share with attribution.)

+++++