

Dr. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel (00:00):

We have a word in Cherokee, wane'ado - walking in a place with feeling. I think of that as mindfulness. That's the ultimate mindfulness. I'm walking with feeling. Even if it's not on my territory, I'm walking with feeling, I'm walking with awareness. I'm walking with a consciousness about what's happening in that territory or some of the struggles that are happening. These are important ways to shake us out of in some ways our lack of being present.

Dr. Peter Andrée (00:36):

Hello! Kwe! Shé:kon! Goedendag! That's hello in my native Dutch, as well as English, and Anishinaabemowin, and Mohawk, which are two indigenous languages very common around here, where I'm based on unceded Algonquin Territory. Oh, and let me add Osiyo for Jeff, who's joining us today, and who's Cherokee. Welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, Season 4: The Politics of the Anthropocene. This is a podcast for students and researchers tackling key questions and challenges in the field of environmental politics today. I'm Peter Andrée from Carleton University, and my cohost for this podcast is Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa. Though Ryan won't be joining us in today's episode.

(01:24):

Mindful Approaches to Ecopolitics is the name of today's episode. Now, let me start by giving some context here. I've been teaching courses in environmental politics and policy for over 20 years, and over those years, I've noticed a growing level of anxiety in my students about the state of the world. This should come as no surprise, of course, as the state of the natural environment does continue to decline in many ways, even as the many ways we're developing to address these issues as societies also grow and multiply. As a prof of environmental politics, I've come to see that my role is shifting. In addition to helping students develop the intellectual capacities to understand and respond to environmental challenges, I have a responsibility to help them strengthen their personal resilience and to support their ability to respond to these immense challenges with compassion, confidence, and courage. Last year, I started introducing short segments of mindfulness meditation in some of my Ecopolitics courses. This helped set a grounded tone and helped build community in the classroom. Some students thought it was a bit odd, not what they would've expected in a political science course, but the reaction was generally positive.

(02:42):

So, today's discussion is about why cultivating mindful attention and the insights this can generate could be important in the context of ecopolitics. What does it mean to approach ecopolitics mindfully? I have two guests joining me today for this conversation, both from the University of Victoria. First, let me introduce Jeff Corntassel. Jeff is a member of the Cherokee Nation and a professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of Victoria (UVic). His research and teaching focus on everyday acts of resurgence and the intersection between indigenous internationalism, community resurgence, climate change, gender and community wellbeing. So, Jeff, how would you like to introduce yourself to podcast listeners today in the context of a show focused on mindful approaches to ecopolitics?

Dr. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel (03:30):

Yeah, so I'll start by introducing myself in the language and then we'll kind of go from there. So, O'siyo Nigada, hello everyone. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel dagwado'a. Tsalagi ayetli agwenasv'i. Echota galsgisgo'i. So, it's great to be here today. I'm coming to you from unceded Tongva territory in Southern

California. My name is Jeff Corntassel. My Cherokee name is Ganohalidoh, which means “hunter”. It also means to, has a connotation of an eagle flying high above. So, I'm supposed to have the big picture. So I'm still growing into my name in some ways. I am from the Cherokee Nation, I'm a citizen, and I also belong to the Echota stompgrounds. We call it Tribal Town or Stomp Grounds. It's one of three ceremonial grounds that are active in the Cherokee Nation. So, it's great to be here. And yeah, this is such an important topic and such a topic that's near and dear to my heart. Wado.

Dr. Peter Andrée (04:30):

Thank you, Jeff. Thanks for being here with us, and I'll circle back to you in a couple of minutes. But next, I'll introduce James Rowe, a professor in the School of Environmental Studies at UVic, and the author of a book recently released called Radical Mindfulness. So, James, welcome to the podcast. How would you position yourself in relation to this topic today?

Dr. James K. Rowe (04:53):

Thanks, Peter. Yeah, excellent to be with you both. Yeah, I'm beaming in from Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ lands on Southern Vancouver Island. And for the last 15 years or so, I've been exploring the intersections between contemplative practices and political change, personal transformation, and socio-structural transformation, both in teaching and in research. And so, really excited for this conversation.

Dr. Peter Andrée (05:21):

Great. Why don't we start with some basics? So, James, you have a book with the word in its title. So, what's your working definition of mindfulness?

Dr. James K. Rowe (05:30):

Yeah, it's funny in some respects, the simplest questions are the most difficult ones, but generally speaking, in the secular mindfulness world, mindfulness is understood to be a form of nonjudgmental awareness, and it's sort of a secular version of meditation. I would say, though, in the book, use mindfulness more capaciously to include sort of all mindbody practices that help us cultivate inner awareness and also inner appreciation, which I think is especially important. So, this would include everything from yoga to meditation to ritual to ceremony. I think mindfulness has many different incarnations, not just the sort of seated and lotus position that we often associate with it. And so, that's how I use it in the book. And many other thinkers, whether Buddhist or not, also kind of use it in that more capacious sense.

Dr. Peter Andrée (06:26):

Yeah, great. Thanks. I'm picking up some words: contemplative practice, inner awareness, inner appreciation. Before we go on to Jeff, I'd just love you to unpack either inner awareness and inner appreciation or both. What do they mean for you?

Dr. James K. Rowe (06:41):

Yeah, yeah. So, you've probably seen the bumper sticker that sometimes people have on their car of: “You don't need to believe everything you think.” And so, part of what we're doing with inner awareness is we're gaining some familiarity with the different narratives and scripts that are moving through our mind. Some of them are just coming out of nowhere seemingly, but others are a product of the culture that we're in. And then giving us a little bit of agency in terms of how we respond to those different

scripts or narratives that are moving through our head and such that do we agree with that narrative? Is that a narrative that's good for us? Is that a narrative that's good for the people around us if we start to embody and act on that narrative? And then in terms of appreciation, for me, I do think that so many of our problems do arise from a significant amount of existential fear and resentment in the face of this very mysterious world that we find ourselves in that will one day gobble us up, which could be quite unsettling for people. And so, beginning to come to some deeper appreciation of our bodies that will one day feed the earth in the way that the earth feeds us is important. And so, again, inner appreciation kind of sounds like a bit of a cliched, saccharine self-love or affirmation, but it's actually pretty badass to come to love a body and self that will one day die. That takes work and yet is really important, I think, because if we can genuinely appreciate and feel generosity towards ourselves, including our fleeting, fragile selves, we'll be much more likely and able to extend generosity to others and be less caught up in resentments that might lead to bad human behaviour.

Dr. Peter Andrée (08:20):

Wow. Thanks James. Jeff, I'll turn it over to you now. Where do you see the practices and rituals associated with what we call mindfulness today, fitting in with what you've called land-centred literacies and the role of such land-based practices in indigenous community resurgence?

Dr. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel (08:38):

Yeah, thanks, James, for that powerful description that's really getting me thinking about some of the ways that we have inner awareness and the ways that we practice it. For me, it starts with a ceremony, and a ceremony doesn't have to be formal. That's why I'm so focused on everyday actions, the things that we do every day and sometimes these spaces that are hidden from public view. Conversation can be part of this mindfulness. It's heart-centred thinking in my view, it's kind of in a way rejecting that mind-body compartmentalization. You know, the Cartesian notion of knowledge and really focused on the ways in which we experience things, the way in which we feel things.

(09:24):

So, we have a word in Cherokee, wane'ado, walking in a place with feeling. And I think of that as mindfulness. That's the ultimate mindfulness. I'm walking with feeling, even if it's not on my territory, I'm walking with feeling, I'm walking with awareness. I'm walking with a consciousness about maybe what's happening in that territory or some of the struggles that are happening. So, these are important ways to shake us out of, in some ways, our lack of being present. We have all sorts of distractions. And so, the ceremonial spaces similar to – we're coming up on green corn for Cherokees, which is kind of our big annual ceremony. These are places where the ego is minimized, for lack of a better term. We're focused on this notion of gadugi. That means that we help each other out. It's a community camaraderie. So, if you see someone in trouble, you help them out. It's that simple. And so, having that awareness, but also having that notion that we're part of a larger community. And so, for everyone to come together at that stomp dance during green corn means that we take medicine together, we struggle together, we go to water together. We do all these things in order to perpetuate this practice. And it's not just for me, it's for my daughter, from subsequent generations so that they're going to be able to thrive and have this mindfulness around nationhood and the things that might matter to us in the future. So, yeah. Wado

Dr. Peter Andrée (11:09):

Wow. There's a lot in what both of you have already shared in an episode way back in season 1 on eco-feminism, we really talked about this mind-body dualism in Western thought, and it's reverberations

through the ages, and it has implications for so much, including settler colonialism and how European cultures, the mindsets that came onto Turtle Island with. And then we have spoken to quite a few indigenous guests who've talked about indigenous ways of knowing. I'm curious for you, Jeff, when you talk about heart-centred thinking, what I'm hearing in you is this isn't just perhaps what your people and your culture come from, but this is something that you think has broader implications for society today. Is that right?

Dr. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel (11:53):

For sure. Yeah. I think we're in so many instances, we're rewarded for just our minds. And I think of the university as a classic place, and so, we're not encouraged to seek out maybe the emotional side of things or seek out the passionate side of things. And that to me is in some ways symptomatic of ongoing colonization, where we're deprived of those experiences. That's an attempt to calculated – in a calculated way, deprive us of those experiences. So, yeah, I think other people have said it, and other cultures have practiced it; it's a way of bringing the full embodiment of who you are to the table, rather than in compartmentalized ways or in ways that are fragmented. And that's part of our struggle. Our struggle is to reclaim the totality of who we are throughout the course of a lifetime. And I think the tools that we have to do that are languages, our ceremonies, our stories, all of these things are there to help us bring that into being.

Dr. Peter Andréé (13:12):

Yeah. Yeah. It's a part of the decolonizing of the mind that those of us who are, well, that all of us have to go through, but differently may be positioned as separate and the indigenous peoples of these lands. James, love of body and self is what you talked about and how you described mindfulness. Maybe tell me a bit more about that, and then I want to hear a bit about how it fits in with where you went with your book.

Dr. James K. Rowe (13:38):

Yeah. Maybe just to riff off of what we were just speaking about there in terms of the mind-body split, I do think in this culture, part of why there is so much priority around cognition is that there's profound discomfort with the body. With a body that leaks, and that sweats, and that hungers, and that, again, will one day ultimately feed the earth. And so, there's I think, a strong current of existential resentment in this culture through processes of colonization, both in Europe first and then exported here, settler people have been disconnected from their ancestral practices that would've historically helped relate to some of these anxieties and provide cultural practices for metabolizing the existential fear that is easy for all of us humans to feel in these bodies that are ours and that we don't have control over. They have their own desires and impulses and schedules that sort of put the lie to our sense of sovereignty or control. And so, the more that we can develop a good friendship with our body through mindbody practices, the more we're able to live in integrity and in the heart-centred way that Jeff was talking about. And it's precisely those different ceremonies that he was describing that I think play a really crucial role in helping to cultivate that good relationship with our whole self and not to be at war with ourself. And it's a simple point, but if we're at war internally, at war and feeling bad about our fleetingness, or about our body, we're likely to project that badness onto others and aggression. And so, the more that we can be friendly with ourselves, the more likely we're to radiate friendliness out to others. And mindbody practices play a crucial role in accomplishing that.

Dr. Peter Andréé (15:27):

Yeah. Jeff, do you want to add anything there?

Dr. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel (15:29):

I think James said it really well. So, other than to say it comes down to love in a lot of ways. And so, I always encourage people to learn the word for love in their language, whether it's indigenous or non-indigenous. So, I taught my daughter, *gv ge yu*, which means I love you. And even if we know very little about our language, I'm not a fluent speaker. Those are important ways to express ourselves. And I think this is all about rejecting those things that prevent us from loving ourselves and also loving other people.

Dr. Peter Andrée (16:07):

Yeah, great. And James, you used the phrase good fellowship with our body and with ourself. I want to turn to your book, James, *Radical Mindfulness*, and the subtitle is *Why Transforming Fear of Death is Politically Vital*. So first off, what does the fear of death have to do with the environmental crisis that we're dealing with now? And then, what do you see as the role of ceremony and these loving practices that we've been talking about in all of this?

Dr. James K. Rowe (16:38):

The argument I make in the book is that existential fear has played a far more significant role in shaping bad human behaviour than has been accounted for in the broader culture. Now, that said, there's a number of people throughout history from a multiplicity of traditions who have made that argument. It is just that the argument consistently gets forgotten in the death-denying culture like ours. And so what I'm trying to do in the book is bring all these different voices together to clarify the point. But the basic argument is that if we feel small in the face of death and we don't have cultural practices to transform that fear into a loving relationship, like Jeff describes, with our body and with other people, then it's very likely we're going to project some of the dis-ease or unease that we feel, or the fear that we feel, onto others, and then try to control others. Whether it's the more-than-human world or other people. As a way of gaining the sense of sovereignty or control that we feel is lacking in these fragile bodies that will one day die. And we don't have any control over those dynamics. And so, as I argue in the book, there's a kind of will to supremacy, or what Martin Luther King called the drum major instinct, the kind of will to be first, what the Buddhists simply call ego, which is shaped by fear. It's a compensatory defence mechanism to deal with some of the anxieties that we face as fragile beings. And so, the argument is that these existential fears have shaped wills to the supremacy along multiple axes of power, race, class, gender, species, feeding into narratives of human supremacy, white supremacy, male supremacy, class supremacy, and help shape the quite pained world that we inhabit now. And so, if this analysis is true, then it means that practices like ceremony, ritual, meditation that we haven't in this culture typically thought of as political, actually have incredible political salience because of their capacity to ease some of our existential fears, quell that compensatory will to supremacy and cultivate those relations of self-love that then allow us to radiate out love more easily to those around us. And recognizing that the self is just so deeply implicated with others. It's a deeply relational self. Whereas our sense of ego is often a very bounded self, where we cut ourselves off not only from our bodies, but we cut ourselves off from others as a way of trying to protect and defend our little kingdom, instead of recognizing that we're just so deeply implicated with all of our relations.

Dr. Peter Andrée (19:14):

Yeah, beautifully put as you're speaking, I can think of various world leaders right now that, I feel, are portraying very nicely this fear of death and protecting their little kingdoms. I won't go into any names, but –

Dr. James K. Rowe (19:29):

Maybe I'll just jump in and just say there's a certain way that Mr. Trump is just like the perfect embodiment of the argument I make in the book. He's a well-known germaphobe, very focused on protecting his embodied vitality through all of his work around his hair, and he's on record as thinking that hair loss is a sign of a lack of vitality and strength. And so, all of these existential anxieties definitely feed into his very clear will to supremacy that we're all unfortunately having to suffer the consequences of right now.

Dr. Peter Andrée (20:02):

Jeff, we've been talking a bit about fear, fear of death, and I know the question of grieving death and loss is something that you've been thinking and writing about from an indigenous perspective on the place of ceremonies of commemoration in that as a path to healing and health. So, what are the connections here to be made with how we understand death from your experience or how we perceive death and what it means to be a healthy and whole human being?

Dr. Jeff Ganohalidoh Cortassel (20:29):

Yeah, thank you for that. Death is something, as James pointed out, that we can embrace and we can be healthier for it. And oftentimes, this fear of death has been such an impediment to us enjoying and experiencing the fullness of life. And so, in that sense, I think of, for example, Cherokee Nation, we were removed – forcibly removed from our territory, our original territory in 1838. We lost about a third of our nation during that time. It was a really – I can't even state it enough, it was a really challenging time for our people and for my family in particular. We were moved from Lookout Point, Georgia, all the way to Westville, Oklahoma. Lost – Old Man Cortassels, as we call him, lost his first wife, lost some of his children, remarried, and we kind of regrouped. And that could be devastating as an event just in any particular nation or any particular community. What we've done in response to that is, well, one is humour. So, we respond to these challenges and these horrible situations sometimes with humour. So, I think humour is a key part of it, but we also find different ways to grieve. And that grieving can take different forms. One is your commemoration. So, we do a Remember the Removal Bike Ride, for example, to remember the Trail of Tears or the trail where people died. That 900-mile journey, people ride it on bikes now, and they train for several months. And along the way, there are elders who will share with them different parts of the trail and how that impacts our history, our community history. So, there's awareness, and there's also emotive feelings of grief as they're engaging in this practice. So, they're in touch with their bodies, they're in touch with our sacred living histories, and they're in touch with that awareness that – oftentimes we, and I think part of this is a problem of time and the way we perceive time, we say, oh, that happened way back there. The constant refrain this, why don't you just get over it? That happened so long ago, why don't you just get over it? And for Cherokees, that notion of time is not discreetly placed in the past. It's part of our convergence of who we are now. And so, the past, present, future converge, and we don't say, oh, that happened such a long time ago. It's right in front of us today just as what I had for breakfast is right in front of me. So, we can't make those differentiations in these neatly compartmentalized ways. In ways that oftentimes western thinking or even perceptions of grief take place.

(23:30):

So, I don't want to go on too long other than to say, I want to help reject those five stages of grief that kind of compartmentalize – you're at stage three or stage four. I want to help reject those in favour of looking at ceremonies and looking at ways that we embody grief, that demonstrates that deep love we have for ourselves and for our communities and for the land and for the environment. And so, those are the things that at the end of the day, show our relationality. That show our sense of self in the relational sense.

Dr. Peter Andrée (24:07):

Yeah, that's beautiful, Jeff. Thank you. And what I'm really hearing from you is not turning away from the loss, ignoring it, but really taking it, allowing it to be right in front of us and experience the emotions that come with that. I think of Joanna Macy, a lot of her work is about that kind of truly recognize the challenges of our time. Now I'm going from the loss that your people faced and continually face, which is so huge, and then this broader planetary crisis that we're in now. And I totally see how the one offers ways to look at the other. James, what would you add here?

Dr. James K. Rowe (24:48):

Yeah, I think what's surprising for me, actually, from what Jeff just said, is I just want to shout out this beautiful book by Tsleil-Waututh leader Reuben George called *It Stops Here*. It's a memoir where he talks about a similar history of apocalypse for the Tsleil-Waututh people in what is contemporary Vancouver and tells a story of grief and of healing and how despite that apocalypse, the community – of course every community has challenges – but tremendous amount of thriving that's happening now because of the healing that happened. And for Reuben, part of what has allowed them to not only survive but thrive is their ceremonies that they protected despite efforts by the Canadian government to outlaw them. And the ceremonies provided resilience to deal with the apocalypse that they related to. And then, now the renewal of those ceremonies is facilitating a level of thriving. And so, for me, as a subtler person weighted down by the eco-apocalypse or the climate apocalypse that we're talking about or experiencing right now, it was very inspiring to read this narrative of a people relating to a world ending and an apocalypse and coming out the other end doing well thanks to their commitment to the kinds of ceremony and mind-body practice that we're talking. And culture, genuinely cultivating a culture and cultural practices that facilitate good relationality with both each other and the natural world. But that does all require, as you note, Peter actually relating to and metabolizing the anguish that we feel in the face of the different challenges that we relate to. Because if we simply repress those feelings, they're going to just return at some point. And sometimes they might actually lead us to behave in not very good ways. And so, we have to face them, but we need help with cultural practices and community to do so, because we can't carry all the burden on our singular shoulders.

Dr. Peter Andrée (27:03):

Thank you. So, so far, we've talked about embodied practices, meditation ceremony. I loved your example of the bicycle ride, Jeff, as a way to kind of commemorate and keep alive that story, because a story of now as much as it was of then. So, these are all ways of connecting with the messy complexity and wonder of the world as we know it, including the world that has death coming for all of us eventually, as James reminded us. I know in various cultures around the world, including many indigenous cultures, there's been a place for medicine. I'm thinking of a peyote, psilocybin, tobacco, and cacao in ceremony as a way of shifting consciousness and allowing the participants to gain new insights and perspectives on day-to-day life. And there are modern compounds that are called psychedelics or

entheogens, like LSD and MDMA, that are playing a role in our culture of doing some of this as well. There's a lot of talk these days about medicine work and where it fits into how we relate to the ecological crisis that's going on, and this challenge of really connecting with ourselves and our heart-centred beings. We'd like to go first here, Jeff?

Dr. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel (28:26):

Wado, Peter. I've always been focused on Cherokee ceremony. We have pipe ceremonies, we draw on natural tobacco, and these ceremonies get us to a different place, a different sense of awareness. They get us to a different level of interaction with our ancestral teachings. They're important. When we're doing our stomp dance, we're going in a kind of spiral around the fire, and the focus is on that fire, the focus is on the songs. All of those things come into play. We're dancing all night, but we've been fasting. We get into a different state of mind. I can only describe it as sacred. It's set apart from the everyday in a lot of ways.

(29:08):

I reflected on the late Vine Deloria Jr., a Lakota scholar and thinker. He once said that for him, spirituality is kind of like a bus transfer pass where you take multiple buses and multiple routes, but you're all going to a very similar destination. And so, I began to think about different ways that other medicines were used. And I had this opportunity to use psilocybin. It was done in a very controlled environment. There was a counsellor there. I brought two of my Cherokee colleagues to take part and to support, and I treated it like a ceremony. I fasted, I prepared, thinking about intentionally what I wanted from this. And it was intense. It was powerful. And in a lot of ways, it released a lot of grief that I didn't realize that I had. It raised a lot of emotion. And I think back, even in my childhood, I was never encouraged to express those kinds of emotions as a man. And we often think even in society, men in general are encouraged to express rage or anger, but they're not rewarded for being kind or expressing vulnerable emotions like grief or sadness. And so, for me, it was just a powerful experience. It was a way of visiting with my ancestors. It was a way of really taking stock of where I was at. It was a humbling experience. But it was also something – it's like almost like a waking dream. You don't forget any parts of it after you're through the medicine; it stays with you. It's okay to stumble was one of the teachings. Another teaching was that life is beautiful when you allow yourself to feel it. And those kinds of things have stayed with me. And so, I've done psilocybin subsequent to that. And it's powerful. It's really hard. It's a struggle because it's not something that's recreational. It's something that's really – you're visiting with your ancestors. But I would say that it has so much potential for bringing other people into a state of, as James would put it, radical mindfulness. Bringing people into a state of relationality that they may not otherwise experience.

Dr. Peter Andrée (31:43):

Thank you for sharing those personal experiences, Jeff. I've met with a lot of people who have had similar stories, and it's amazing how this work with medicines, there's a lot of research going on right now with various sacred medicines, both the ones with long lineages and the more recently developed molecules in service of things like addressing PTSD and addictions and so on. And of course, they have a long history of being used for spiritual insight and for helping people really feel connected to the web of life. And I've also had some similar experiences. In fact, my interest in mindfulness started just over the last five years where I finally was able to meditate. And it was after I started doing some work in guided sessions with psychedelics, not too long ago, but a month ago, I had an experience on MDMA in a guided context, again, where I was exploring emotions that I just hadn't gone into before. Shame, guilt, deep

sadness, and anger. I'm not typically an angry person, but I realized that I have been suppressing that. I think my father was that way, and his father before him. And so, there's a way that I was both working on my own stuff and maybe even addressing some ancestral trauma that's sitting there in my lineage. So, there's a lot when we talk about this kind of heart-centred thinking that we've been talking about, that these medicines can offer us experiences that help connect us to that in a very visceral way.

(33:26):

I should add here before I go to James, that of course, working with psychedelics is not for everyone and needs to be done carefully and ideally in a guided session. And there are some medications we might be on, like antidepressants, that don't interact well with some psychedelics. So, do your homework, work with somebody who knows what they're doing and can guide you well. The experience can be very affected by your feeling of trust in that moment, right? So, they talk about both the intention that you bring to it and also about feeling really safe setting or container. And that's Jeff. You talked about your friends being there, and that envelope of care is so important for having a powerful journey that you can learn from. I want to bring you in, James. I know you were interested in these questions as well. What do you want to add?

Dr. James K. Rowe (34:18):

Yeah, no, I'm so excited to talk about this. And I appreciate also the context you gave, Peter, around being aware of some of the risks and the good ways of doing this. But I wrote this book on the importance of metabolizing existential fear, not only for our own personal wellbeing, but for the wellbeing of the world, and was primarily focused on meditation, other forms of ritual and ceremony, but without mind-altering, consciousness-altering substances. And it was after finishing the book that I had the occasion to do a medicine journey led by Reuben George, who's been using these medicines for relating to some of the trauma that you just mentioned, Peter, in his community. But he's also really keen to share the medicine with settlers because, in his view, both indigenous people and settlers need to heal in different ways. But healing needs to happen for a genuine, deep reconciliation or resurgence to happen for indigenous authority to be effectively upheld and honoured.

(35:19):

Anyways, that experience was just on orders of magnitude more powerful than previous spiritual experiences I've had despite 20 20-year meditation practice. And I don't want to belittle. The power of meditation has been incredibly powerful and beneficial for me. And in fact, there actually is research on how a meditation practice can actually assist with one's medicine journeys in terms of being more present when difficult things can arise and then allow for that metabolizing or processing to happen. But it was just utterly profound. It was the most intense spiritual experience of my life. I talk often about our connection with the more-than-human world and our connection with others. But for this brief period in the ceremony, I was living it. I could feel it. It was there. My tree ancestors and animal ancestors, and then my actual lineage ancestors were all there. And just like Jeff was saying, of visiting with your ancestors. And it was just such a profound experience.

(36:16):

And I guess the last thing I'll say is that it's one of the only times I can think of in my adult life where my body has been completely without fear. And in that moment of being without fear, what arose organically was just profound love and gratitude for this life and the people we get to be around and the species and the spirit beings that are here. And obviously, if you're feeling profound gratitude and love,

you're much more likely to behave in better ways than if you're feeling profound fear and resentment and potential compensatory aggression. So, anyhow, this is all to say that these substances that have been used in ceremony for years by indigenous peoples across the world are incredibly profound. And it's exciting that there's good work happening, although there is also, we can maybe get into this, but like with mindfulness, there can be some not-as-good uses. Our friend Elon Musk is a big psychedelic head. And so, just taking psychedelics isn't going to immediately make us better people. It has to be in the right context.

Dr. Peter Andrée (37:24):

Yeah. Thanks, James. We're getting close to the end of the episode now. I just wonder if you have some final thoughts, Jeff?

Dr. Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel (37:31):

Wado. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this conversation. And it's really been such a rich and fulsome talk together. And for me, it's getting back to that heart-centred thinking. It's how do we embody that on a daily basis despite all of the impediments, despite all of the ways that colonization can get in the way of our emotions, get in the way of our kindness, get in the way of our love for each other and for animal nations, the plant nations, the earth itself. And so, I think if anything, it illustrates that we're relational beings and we're spiritual beings. Henrietta Mann, who's a Cheyenne Sundance woman, once told me, she said, we're not human seeking a spiritual path, we're actually spiritual beings seeking a human path. And I believe that. I think we're spiritual beings. We need each other.

(38:28):

Cherokees, we use the word digadatseli'l, which means for us to belong to each other, to help each other out. We can't do this alone. That's the bottom line. Even people who are under the illusion that they can do it alone they've got their ancestors helping them. They've got other beings helping them, whether they recognize it or not. So, the myth of the nuclear family, the myth of individual autonomy through technology, that we can do it all by ourselves, is just that. It's a myth. And so, mindfulness, heart-centred thinking, different ways of expressing our kinship, those things all remind us that we need to be humble, and we also need to be appreciative, and we also need to be honouring those ancestral ties in different ways. So yeah. Wado, thank you for having me on this.

Dr. Peter Andrée (39:22):

Well, wado, Jeff, and thank you James. I want to thank you both. Mindful approaches to Ecopolitics, what is that about? Well, heart-centred thinking, or as James put it, a good fellowship with the body, with the self. I think these are really valuable pieces of the puzzle that we've talked about today in this episode. So, thank you both, James and Jeff, for joining us today. For the listeners out there, make sure to follow us on Twitter @ecopoliticsp and check out all the incredible artwork and additional resources like transcripts and pedagogical materials. That's all to be found at the website, ecopoliticspodcast.ca. We'd love it if you share our content, get in touch. Let us know what you think of the show.

(40:10):

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