Drumming and Reconciliation

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At the core is the drum and the actual work of making music, the experience of drumming together. What gives this process its power is that the drum and the drumming are connected to the breath and the heartbeat of the person. The experience is very primal, partly inside of the body.

Drumming helps people start to move together, to breathe together, and that is where their connection begins. So any ideas or plans that emerge from that place, from that moment in time, will be accepted by all of them, not just one sub-group.

Drumming creates opportunities for people to dance and play rhythms together. That makes them feel very connected. When you are dealing with things that are difficult, when you are dealing with conflicts that challenge your relationship, drumming can restore a sense of order and harmony.

When two people are breathing differently, if they play the drum for a while, their breath will synchronize. When we bring together people from communities that have been in conflict, people from groups that have been perpetrators or oppressors and people from communities that have been victims, they will all breathe in different ways. The drums will balance their breathing.

In the drumming process, many things happen to the group. People experience their interdependence with each other. The drumming creates an embodied experience of how we are connected to each other. Even though there are some master drummers, some people who are leaders, there is something equalizing about drumming together. Each person’s contribution is valued; everyone’s role is important. There is a sense of inclusion, and barriers are broken down.

The context in which you are drumming makes a difference. In comparing drumming in the context of communities and in the context of the corporate institutional world, some aspects are the same and some are different.

In each case there is a base rhythm, the regular beat that connects all of the different rhythms. In the corporate world, it symbolizes the common mission and common purpose. But in the community world, the base rhythm is a metaphor for that web of connectedness that defines a people, those shared values and beliefs that define a community. It can also symbolize a goal that the community wants to achieve. That was probably true even when drumming was used to prepare people for battle. They had a shared mission, a purpose.

In traditional communities, if someone chooses not to participate in a song or a drumming session, it is a sign that they are having a problem with someone else in the group. In this case, one of the elders would seek out the person who refrained from singing or drumming, and help the person to resolve the problem. In this way, the
Drumming circle helps a community identify and resolve problems before they become disruptive or violent.

Drumming derives its power also from its connection with the forces beyond us, the spiritual world, the mysterious dimension of life that we can only begin to imagine, that is beyond human perception. That energy comes through the drum. In the community, this energy might come through the dancer or even through healers who can see into the future.

The drummer can pick up on the rhythm of the dancer’s feet and make it visible. An energy emerges between the drum and the dancer, an energy that is very powerful and very healing. In this way, the drum enters the spirit world.

The experience of drumming reaches deeply into the person, broadly throughout a community or organization. It links to spiritual powers in the mysterious realms of life. It offers an embodied experience of the interconnectedness of all people. It is a powerful resource for reconciliation.