

Published April 4, 2013 on *Turning Wheel Media*, website of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship: <http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/qallunology-101-a-lesson-plan-for-the-non-indigenous/>

**Qallunology 101: A lesson plan for the non-Indigenous:
Cease to do evil, *then* learn to do good**

By Derek Rasmussen (thanks to Dru Oja Jay for editing help)

Indigenous people are at the front lines of some of the largest environmental battles of the current era, from tar sands in Alberta to rainforests in the Amazon. Naturally, some non-Indigenous people want to help out. The well-intentioned and progressive point of view seems often to be, "we need to understand Indigenous cultures better, and help them in their struggle."

But before we set out to help Indigenous people, maybe we should stop hurting them in the first place? "First, cease to do evil," said the Buddha, "then learn to do good, and then purify the mind." The order is important. Hippocrates reiterated it 100 years later with his oath: "First, do no harm."

The first step—"ceasing to do evil"—is understanding what one is currently doing. This is our 'Pedagogy for the Oppressor.' Before the non-Indigenous can act in a way that values Indigenous peoples and cultures, we need to better understand how Euro-Americans became non-Indigenous, and how we seem hell-bent on making everyone else do likewise. I lived for more than a decade in Nunavut, the Inuit territory that makes up one-fifth of the land claimed by Canada. Nunavut is a good place to learn about white folks—my people.

The Inuit word for Euro-Americans is Qallunaat. Over the last century, Inuit have observed the strange and peculiar behaviour of these visitors, and it was only a matter of time before someone like Nunavik CBC commentator Zebedee Nungak coined the term "Qallunology," shorthand for "the study of white folks."

That said, Inuit see behaviour rather than skin colour as the main indicator of Qallunaat status. That's why Inuit might refer to a Chinese-Canadian businessman in Iqaluit as a Qallunaaq—he might get upset and say "I'm not white—look at my skin!"—but they are talking about his attitude and behaviour, not his facial features. The opposite also carries: non-Inuit who strongly embody Inuit culture, values and language are also occasionally described as Inuit (this doesn't happen very often).

One thing Inuit have noticed is that Qallunaat are obsessed with "rescuing" people. This rescuing almost always consists of making those being rescued more like the Qallunaat. The "rescued" usually do not concur with this definition. As a First Nations' Elder once put it, "Every time the white man comes and offers us something, the Aboriginal people lose something.... Now when I see a white man doing something for our good, I worry about what we will lose."

What do they stand to lose? Scholars of Qallunology can point to the answer without looking at Inuit culture or history. One of the main characteristics of Qallunaat culture is homelessness. Most people of European descent living in North America are here because they left Europe. Why did they leave?

The short answer—longer answers are available in the Qallunology department of your local university—is that Europe was an incredibly violent place. The “commons”—the shared land of the people—was being swiped by Europe’s elites. Displaced millions were crowding into the continent’s massive cities: stinking and disease-ridden places of despair and some the most exploitative labour conditions ever known.

England was one of the worst: in the early 19th century, England’s ruling class ‘enclosed’ ten million acres of the commons—almost half of England’s arable land—and converted it into their own, privately-held, land.

50 million Indigenous Europeans left—not just their countries, but their continent. All in 111 years. From 1821-1932, 34 million went to the USA, and a further 16 million to Canada, South America, and Australia. Hundreds of papers have been written on the supposed movement of First Peoples into the Americas across the Bering Strait, yet I am not aware of a single major treatise describing the impacts of the exodus of the 50 million—the largest concentrated movement of human beings in the earth's history.

More dangerous than the viruses they carried, these migrants carried the economic plague known as possessive individualism (C.B. Macpherson’s apt term: in bulk you might call it ‘capitalism’). And before long they were turning around and reproducing the same anti-social arrangements in their new homelands as had existed in the Europe that had evicted them. Thus, the enclosure of Europe led to the enclosure of the Americas.

French philosopher and activist Simone Weil once warned that what had undermined Europe was “the disease of uprootedness.” Once uprooted, one “uproots others,” but “whoever is rooted in himself doesn’t uproot others.” “The white man carries this disease with him wherever he goes,” everywhere this new Non-Indigenous civilization goes, it ostracizes folks from the land.

A Qallunologist would note that her subjects like to take an abundance, make it scarce, and charge people money to get access to it.

The 20 per cent of the world's population which consume 80 per cent of the world's resources are almost all Qallunaat. Having exhausted those resources in the areas they populate, Qallunaat have come to extract them from lands inhabited by people who live lightly and sustainably upon it. To this end, Qallunaat have been treating the Indigenous peoples of the world to the experience of their ancestors. “Indigenous people,” says Dutch writer Theo Kloppenburg, “have in effect been engaged in a massive program of foreign aid to the urban populations of the industrialized North” for the past four hundred years.

How can Qallunaat shift their attention from bandaging the wounded to not wounding in the first place? First, we have to cease doing evil—that's gonna take some doing—then we can try and do some good.

Qallunologist would say that Qallunaat wouldn't have to rescue folks if we didn't uproot and trash their cultures and homelands as we did our own. And if we didn't force them to adopt the same sad bureaucratic life-support systems (education-health-justice-social services) that we've invented to replace organic embedded community relations.

I once represented the Baffin Region (Nunavut) Chamber of Commerce before a Parliamentary Committee studying chemicals in the environment. The Committee chair asked: Why are you the only Chamber demanding tighter restrictions? To summarize our answer: other Chambers have chemical producers as their membership; we have chemical products *in* our membership. Dioxin plumes rise with warm air and moisture and fall with cold temperatures, "grasshoppering" their way toward northern latitudes, where it is too cold for them to evaporate and instead they settle: absorbed into lichen, eaten by caribou, which in turn are consumed by Inuit.

Groundbreaking 'source-to-receptor' research showing that for the eight hundred Inuit of Coral Harbour, in the middle of Hudson Bay, over half of the annual dioxin burden for 1997 came from just three smokestacks: Ash Grove's cement kiln in Louisville, Nebraska, Lafarge's cement kiln in Alpena, Michigan, and Chemetco's copper smelter in Hartford Illinois. This is an example of what Qallunology can teach us: first we gotta cease to do evil. Stay home. Go on a field trip to Alpena, Michigan, or Hartford, Illinois. Figure out how to clean it up, slow it down, stop it.

There is nothing inherently wrong with acting to support Indigenous peoples fighting for their land, except this. Without a background in Qallunology, the pull toward "rescuing" instead of addressing our own role can be irresistible. A Qallunologist would say the first question before rescuing should always be: did we cause this problem in the first place? And if so, 'ceasing to do evil' always oughta come before anything else. And since a lot of the evil done is land and resource theft to fuel the uprooted Qallunaat economy, we are going to have to start turning our attention to the uprootedness of those we currently consider to be the richest and most successful people in the world.

>>>>>>

Acknowledgements: The ideas in this story were originally inspired by conversations with Zebedee Nungak, Tommy Akulukjuk, David Kunuk and Kowesa Etitiq.

>>>>>>

Derek Rasmussen is a social and eco-justice activist and an advisor to Inuit organizations in Canada. He is also a meditation teacher trained in the Burmese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. He teaches regularly in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and at the Morin Heights Dharma House in Quebec, as part of the sangha network inspired by his root teacher, Namgyal Rinpoche (including communities

like [Clear Sky](#), Crystal Mountain, [Ati Marga](#), and [the Sunshine Coast Retreat House](#) in BC; [Awaken in Toronto](#), [the Dharma Centre of Canada](#), and Crystal Staff in Ontario; and [Dharma Japan](#), [Wangapeka](#) (NZ), and the [Origins Centre](#)-Australia, overseas). He can be reached at [dharma_eh\[at\]yahoo.ca](mailto:dharma_eh[at]yahoo.ca), and you can read his blog at <http://dereksdharma.wordpress.com/>.

>>>>>>

For citations and references see

<http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/voices/derek-rasmussen/cease-do-evil-then-learn-do>; and
www.yale.edu/agrarianstudies/colloqpapers/10rasmussen.pdf