

# Forgiveness allows self to blossom, let go of "old, buried pain"

by Dulce Terumi Oikawa

**F**or the first 23 years of life I called myself a Japanese Canadian. It was when I lived abroad and custom officers kept crossing out "Japanese" that I began to seriously consider myself as simply Canadian. With the recent surge of interest in all things Asian, I've felt lucky that over the years, I got to choose from a smorgasboard of Western and/or Eastern values, lifestyles, behaviour and attitudes — take and digest the best of two worlds.

More recently, however, I have begun to seriously review some old, old conditioning and patterning which feels as though they have been buried deep in my subconscious, silently dictating the reality of my outer world. 1942-43, gestation period in my mother's womb — what was she feeling and what was happening in the environment that embedded itself into my psyche which formed my belief system? Internment, wartime, upheaval, violence, anger, fear, guilt, rage, shame. Throughout childhood I was conditioned to "always be good, prove myself, never bring shame to the Japanese race." How much of my life has been lived shadowed under an umbrella of collective shame.

What I inherited from the Issei was their fear, that it was not safe to be seen. It was not okay to be visible in a western society with Asian features, speaking a language other than English. Life therefore became a constant proving: living a life that was responsible, law-abiding, hard working, being a model citizen. Most honourable and most respectable. But what about creative energy, exuberance, risk-taking, leadership,



Photo: Roy Kumano

authenticity, intimacy, passion!!

At age 45 I'm just discovering that perhaps it's safe to come out from hiding now. I'm starting to be able to hear the whispers of my true self so long buried under the years of duty, roles, rules, obligation. Last year after my 85-year-old father died, mother and I went through his memoirs. Why, he was a mere youngster at age 19 immigrating to Canada, filled with pioneer hopes. And mother coming over as a picture bride to a raw, uncultivated wilderness. I honour their brave,

brave spirit. I honor the budo spirit our Issei parents brought with them, across the seas, willing to face all those unknown fears, armed with such faith and courage. We the Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei have also inherited that awesome spirit of adventure and quest for discovery!!

In all the religions there is the concept of atonement, "reparation for wrong or injury, reconciliation of God and man." Through the act of redress, the Canadian government has offered to us a national apology. For atonement to occur, there also needs to be forgiveness. Forgiveness is the final cleansing and letting go of all that old, old, buried pain.

It feels like for most of my life, I lived unknowingly, under the shadow of a collective shame and guilt that perhaps, somehow, we deserved to be punished for daring to be different from the homogenized white, for daring to boldly claim a place for ourselves in Canadian society. I've wondered how much I've allowed of my full self to blossom and how much more I've held back in resentment against a society who "did that to us." I'm now ready to stop living like an apology. I'm ready to forgive. I'm ready to give forth from the essence of my true nature for my true nature is pure and *I am innocent*. My true nature is "ai," coming together, at-one-ment, LOVE.

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