

Teachings of the 7 Grandfathers

We have to take care of the earth or we will not have a home. We all share in this responsibility. The key word here is “responsibility”. We need to make sure that the earth and everything the Creator put on the earth will always be here for future generations. Each morning let us remember to greet our grandmothers and grandfathers, whose spirits are in the many glories that surround us. They taught us, as they had been taught by their elders, how to take care of the earth.

We are straying away from the teachings given to us. Our young people do not pray and give thanksgiving. Our priorities are all messed up. We need to know the teachings of our grandmothers and grandfathers to give us direction and balance. Our leaders are young; they also need to listen and learn. We need their participation.

To take care of the earth and the community of life we need to remember the teachings of the First Elder, who has handed on the gifts of knowledge that he received from the Seven Grandfathers when he was just a boy. Each grandfather gave him a great gift. One gave him the gift of Wisdom, and he learned to use that wisdom for his people. Another gave the gift of Love so that he would love his brother and sister and share with them. The third offered the gift of Respect, so that the First Elder would respect everyone, all human persons and all the things that are created. Bravery was the next gift, bravery to do things even in the most difficult times. One grandfather gave the boy Honesty so that he would be honest in every action and provide good feelings in his heart. One grandfather gave the boy Humility, to teach the boy to know that he was equal to everyone else, no better or no less, just the same as anybody else. The last gift that he received was Truth. The Grandfathers told him, “Be true in everything that you do. Be true to yourself and true to your fellow man. Always speak the truth.”

They told him, “Each of these teachings must be used with the rest; you cannot have wisdom without love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility and truth. You cannot be honest if you use only one or two of these, or if you leave out one. And to leave out one is to embrace the opposite of what that teaching is.”

If each one of the seven gifts is not used together with the others, we cannot function. Today we should live by these seven teachings even though we need to work hard to embrace them. Sometimes it is hard to respect someone who has hurt you. If we don't practice honesty, we cheat. If we don't practice truth, we will lie. We must go back to the knowledge that the Seven Grandfathers taught the First Elder, who passed the teachings on to other generations.

And we must teach our children when they are young to value the medicines and healing practices of their grandmothers and grandfathers, and to appreciate the role of the medicine people and the ceremonies that were held at various times of the year. All these teachings will give us direction and balance.

The teachings of the Medicine Wheel are important, too. The circle of the Medicine Wheel represents harmony with nature and with all of our relatives. The earth turns in a circle, and the birds make their nests in circles; the Anishnabe dance in a circle, and the four seasons of life, childhood, youth, middle age and elderhood form the circle of life. The circle of the Wheel stands for the sun and the moon, and for all round things in Creation. It should remind us that we may do nothing that may harm the children, for they are the ones who must care for Mother Earth tomorrow, and for the generations to come. Each of us is responsible for taking care of the children and of Mother Earth; each of us is responsible for teaching others to do the same.

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