

Prayers of Our Ancestors

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There is a general acceptance and understanding that prayers and spiritual connections to the Creator are important within our tribal families. It is common occurrence for many tribal people to remember hearing their Elders pray for them. Sometimes the prayer was brief and consisted of a brushing off with an Eagle wing or cedar; other times the prayers were lengthy and held the desires and promises of blessings and hope.

Prayers are typically offered to begin many tribal events; prayers are used to ask for blessings or to bless food. American Indian people have a long history of praying. There are some common elements in prayers among many tribal groups. There is the acknowledgement of a Greater Power, Creator, or Heavenly Personage, the recognition that our essence and our substance come from that Creator. There is a petition for watchful care and protection, the request for good tidings to bestow not only on the petitioner but family, friends, neighbors, community. There may be additional requests for tangible objects such as a home, good running vehicle, or a safe trip. Other kinds of concerns may be for the miracle of healing for a sick child, recovery from a disease, or when injuries occur, the strength to deal with tragic and life threatening events.

Many times prayers may start out acknowledging the Creator, Grandfather, Heavenly Father, Maheo-the Creator has many titles. The next part of the prayer is the acknowledgement that we as people are pitiful and we are only human with our human fallibility and limited understanding of the mysteries of life. We call on our Creator to help us have an understanding or an acceptance of those teachings we may not fully comprehend or may not fully practice. We tell our Creator of our desire to be better people and to be appreciative of the blessings we do have. We ask blessings upon other people, the brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, grandchildren, friends, visitors, and even those who may not always think good thoughts about us.

Prayers, songs, and offerings are all part of the ritual that seeks for the spiritual connection to the Creator, Grandfather, Maheo. Prayers bring humility to our existence as human beings.

In the prayer from our ancestors, there is the calling on the Creator that leads to the thanksgiving for Mother Earth and the bounty of Mother Earth, the substance that makes up the earth surface and those creatures and helpers that live under the first layers. Such as the creepy crawlers that turn the soil, the night eaters that deposit nutrition into the soil, and those belly crawler that take care of dead waste and help return life in other ways for renewal. There is thanksgiving for the water that bubble from deep and swollen crevices hided from human eyes, water that fills the streams, water that flows into rivers, and water that covers much of Mother Earth and helps in the recycle of moisture. And especially for the water that fills tin pails at ceremony times when one is refraining from drinking and is sacrificing. Thanksgiving is given for the fin ones, those that live in the water and provide food and even comfort. Thanksgiving is given for those large swimmers that bring food in hard times, for the seasonal catch and the fish camps where family gather, for the times when water is frozen and our families are cared for with food that has been preserved for those hard times, there are many water dwellers we give thanks for. Thanksgiving is given for plants that grow from the earth, those that grab by root and vine to let abundance feed families, especially what is called the Three Sisters, squash, beans, and corn. There are many seeds, roots, pods, fruits, and vines that offer people nutriment, clothing, and medicine. Other comforts we give thanks for include our arbors, for the willows that grow along the creeks, the trees

that give us poles and shade, that provide fire wood for our fires, and that offer us shelter, or different kinds of homes. We give thanks for all those little brothers that run on short legs, the beaver, the muskrat, the rabbit and the squirrel. Their larger brothers are helpers also, the fox, the wolf, and the coyote. There are other four legged brothers that we give thanks for, our brothers the buffalo, the elk, the moose, the deer, the antelope and the bear. There are many other animals that give us comfort and joy, such as the dog and cat. We have winged ones we give thanks for including the pesky ones that remind us we are part of the cycle of life. Especially we give thanks for those that give their lives so that we can use them in prayerful ways, such as the feathers of the eagle or the red tail hawk. We have many feathered creatures to be thankful for. We give thanks for the elements, water, wind, fire, heat, air, all those things that lets us know we are blessed to be part of this creation. We give thanks and know we must be respectful of those gifts. We would not be able to warm or breathe if we did not have the elements.

We give thanksgiving for our brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandchildren, for our children, our nephews, nieces, and aunts and uncles. We give thanks for those that march off to foreign places that wear uniforms and that offer protection from enemies. We give thanksgiving for our freedoms and our ability to travel and move amongst our kindred peoples. We give thanksgiving for the daylight and the vision to see; and for the night stars and the hope for worlds we do not see. We give thanks for the fathers that say prayers in behalf of their children and the mothers that use hands and warm hearts to bless their children in kind ways. We especially thank you for our elders and their teachings. Most importantly we thank you for the children, children who laugh, children who play, children who dream and hope, children who cry that we may comfort them as You comfort us, children who help us remember why we are here, children who are troubled and we can sit with them in troubled times, children who teach us patience and help us learn to live by gentle and listening ways. We thank you for helping us teach children about trying hard and about frustration; we thank you for letting us teach children about forgiveness and acceptance; we thank you for letting us teach children about tears and wiping of the tears; we thank you for letting us teach children who they are and the opportunity to teach our children about why they are here. We thank you for giving us children so that we can help them learn about families and relationships and grow into being human beings with strong spirits. We thank you Creator for giving us children so that we can appreciate how to love unconditionally and to love in abundance.

Grandfather, Creator of our ways and teachings, help us with those things we have forgotten to be grateful for, help us with those things we may have offended others, help us in those ways that we have hurt others, help us to forgive. Help us to remember to pick up our brothers and our husbands; help us to remember those that have given great offense and are being punished, help us to turn our hearts toward those who have been harmed and broken by hard hearts.

Grandfather, Creator, giver of life, help us to hold your creations sacred. We thank you.

When children hear their parents, grandparents, or others prayer for them, children will know they are cherished. Children have the need to be reassured by adults that they are important and that they are wanted. Children need to know that they are safe and protected. When a child hears words of gratitude, appreciation and concern about their welfare and their wellbeing especially if it is consistent or daily, a child will become grounded in that knowledge.

Many times, Native people have prayed with words of the Seventh Generation; that is, what we do, what we think, and how we behave should be in ways that benefit seven generations from today. All

this would be that good things will be done for each generation. Grandparents and elders from many generations have prayed for Seventh Generations, so when one considers this concept, each generation is the seventh generation and each generation prays for seven more generations. This is the understanding of passing on the blessings of the Seventh Generation.

Rituals are very much a part of prayer, doing something every day or doing something in the same way. Having consistency and predictability is important, for example, when people start to pray, others will remove their hats or maybe stand; that is consist and predictable. Other rituals may include a song followed by a prayer. Having a ritual can make the prayer more meaningful and more likely to occur. Parents and caregivers can do four rituals with their children including pray for them. Here are words of wisdom given by the elders to help parents and reaffirm the prayers of our ancestors. This is another way of recognizing the many words of promise that comes from the Creator and we as people are the instruments that can carry those promises toward others, especially.

1. Let your child or children hear you pray for them every day.
2. Read to your child or children every night
3. Have one sit-down meal a day with all your family together.
4. Greet each child each day by name and welcome them into the day.

This article is submitted by support from the Indian Country Child Trauma Center. Dolores Subia BigFoot, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and an enrolled member of the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma with affiliation with the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana.

