

The Seven Traditional Teachings

The traditional concepts of respect, honesty and sharing form the foundation of the First Nation way of life are built around the Seven Traditional Teachings. These teachings were given to us by our Creator to live in harmony with Mother Earth. Each teaching honors one of the basic virtues essential to a full and healthy life: **Love-Eagle, Respect-Buffalo, Courage-Bear, Honesty-Dog, Wisdom-Beaver, Humility-Wolf, and Truth-White Buffalo and The Sun.** Each Traditional Teaching is embodied by an animal which offers a special gift and understanding on how we as people should live our lives on Mother Earth. The idea is "the animal world taught man how to live in unity with the earth. As well as the connection which has been established between the animal world and that of man, it inspires a respect for all life in those who follow the Traditional Teachings. Besides the environment being an important aspect of our lives, the Astrology Sun, Moon, Stars, and Milky Way.... are also an important aspect of our life. We continue to learn from our Environment and Astrology as well as the community around us.

The Seven Traditional Teachings provide practical and positive life strategies for our everyday life. The more we learn and apply them to our life, the more natural they become in all areas of our life. The teachings carry different levels of significance for different people. Each individual determines how to apply these teachings to their life and how it will influence them personally.

There are different variations of the Seven Traditional Teachings among First Nations Tribes. Although the teachings carry a similar message which is to live in harmony with Mother Earth. They become a visualization of what we want to accomplish and instill within our own lives.

Love-Eagle

The Eagle was chosen by the Creator to represent this law, as the Eagle can reach the highest out of all the creatures in bringing pure vision to the seeker.

Therefore, it is expressed that one's love is to be with our Creator. He is considered the father of all children, and the giver of human life. Love is the most concrete lesson of all the teachings, as it depends upon loving our Creator, Mother Earth, your family, your fellow human being and most importantly yourself. To feel true love is to know who we are as a person.

Respect-Buffalo

The Buffalo, through giving its life and sharing every part of its being, showed the deep respect it had for our people. No animal was more important to the existence of the First Nation people than this animal. The buffalo was a gift from the Creator to provide us all with our survival and spiritual needs. First Nation people developed a sustainable relationship with the Buffalo resulting in a relationship that was a true expression of respect.

One of the most significant spiritual items for the Blackfoot is a Buffalo Stone which they call In-is-kim. This stone is an essential piece of item in certain ceremonies. The Buffalo Stone – In-is-kim was used to call the Buffalo, to bring the people their main source of food and sustain their way of life.

Courage --Bear

The bear provides many lessons in the way it lives, but courage is the most important teaching it offers. Through gentle by nature, the ferociousness of the mother Bear when one of her cubs is approached is the true definition of courage. To have the mental and moral strength to overcome fears that prevents us from living our true spirit as a human being is a great challenge that must be met with the same strength and intensity as a mother bear protecting her cubs. Living of the heart and living of the spirit is difficult, but the Bear's example shows us how to face any danger to achieve these goals. Courage permits one to face extreme dangers and difficulties without fear. Listen to your heart it takes courage to do what is right.

During time of war a certain selected Blackfoot warriors were bestowed with the spirit of the Bear. These warriors wore Bear claws and carried knives and spears which were concealed with the spirit of the Bear. It was done to give the warriors the power and courage of the Bear.

Honesty-Dog

In the time before the horse it was commonly known as the "Dog Days". Our ancestors depended on the dog for their loyalty and honesty to man. The dog not only assisted our ancestors by moving the campsite it served as protector of the campsite. The dog was a respected member of the family. Our ancestors had a Society respectability known as the Brave Dog Society, which was also known as Crazy Dog Society. Among the Blackfoot tribes this Society were known for their integrity due to their loyalty and honesty. They too acted as protectors of the campsite and over saw all duties of the camp. Similar to other Blackfoot societies the Brave Dog Society practice their ceremonies. This Society is still a very active and important Society among the Blackfoot tribes today.

Wisdom – Beaver

The building of a community is entirely dependent on everyone's special gift. When used properly however, these gifts contribute to the development of a peaceful and healthy community. For example the Beaver's special gift of using his sharp teeth for cutting trees and branches to build his dams and lodges express this teaching. If he did not use his teeth, the teeth would continue to grow until they became useless, ultimately making it impossible for him to sustain his life.

The Beavers build the inside of their lodges similar to the Blackfoot sweat lodges. For every day of the year the Beaver places a small stick in their lodge to count each day of the year. The Blackfoot people have a Beaver Bundle Society. It is said keepers of the Beaver Bundles were the "original Blackfoot Environmentalists" because of their understanding and faith in all aspects of Nature.

Humility – Wolf

Acceptance of all beings are equal is to capture the spirit of humility. The expression of this humility is manifested through the consideration of others before ourselves. In this way, the Wolf becomes the teacher of this lesson. He bows his head in the presence of others out of respect, and once hunted, will not take of the food until it is shared with the pack. His lack of arrogance and respect for his community is a hard lesson, essential to the First Nation way of life.

The Blackfoot associate the Milky Way as the Wolf Trail. The Wolf has a very spiritual significance to the Blackfoot people. Within their sweat lodges they symbolize the Wolf Trail.

Truth – White Buffalo and the Sun

Always seek truth, living the truth is living the Seven Traditional Teachings as given by the Creator and to remain faithful to them. It is said that in the beginning when Creator brought the White Buffalo Woman carrying the Pipe, the Sun as the witness to this event. As she walked into the Sun set she told the people she would return someday. It is believe that the coming of the White Buffalo today symbolizes the coming together of humanity into oneness of heart, mind and spirit.

The Blackfoot People used the Pipe when they made an oath and “swore on the pipe” to speak the truth. The Pipe is used in our Traditional Ceremonies. The Sun is known to be the giver of all life to the Blackfoot people, without it there would be no life. The Blackfoot spiritual and ceremonial practices are based on life in harmony with Mother Nature.