

Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address

This Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving address, also known as “The words that come before all else”, is recited at each communal gathering and encouraged at the beginning of each person’s day. It is an invocation of gratitude which comes out of a culture in which gratitude, respect and reciprocity are at the core. The words are not set, but are intended to be said from the heart, so vary with each speaker. (It can be breathed in a 2-minute pause at the beginning of the day or can take up to 2 days recited in ceremony.)

Although the thanksgiving address comes from the Haudenosaunee tradition, it is meant to be shared - a gift of the Haudenosaunee to the world. When Onondaga Faithkeeper, Oren Lyons, was asked about sharing these words with Settler peoples, he replied with a smile, “Of course . . . It is supposed to be shared; otherwise how can it work? We’ve been waiting 500 years for people to listen. If they had understood the Thanksgiving then, we wouldn’t be in this mess.” 😊 Enjoy!

Today we have gathered and when we look upon the faces around us we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now let us bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People. Now our minds are one.

We are thankful to our **Mother the Earth**, for she gives us everything that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she still continues to care for us, just as she has from the beginning of time. To our Mother, we send thanksgiving, love and respect. Now our minds are one

We give thanks to **all the waters of the world** for quenching our thirst, for providing strength and nurturing life for all beings. We know its power in many forms – waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans, snow and ice. We are grateful that the waters are still here and meeting their responsibility to the rest of Creation. Can we agree that water is important to our lives and bring our minds together as one to send greetings and thanks to the Water? Now our minds are one.

We turn our thoughts to all of the **Fish life** in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. They also give themselves to us as food. We are grateful that they continue to do their duties and we send to the Fish our greetings and our thanks. Now our minds are one.

Now we turn toward the vast fields of **Plant life**. As far as the eye can see, the Plants grow, working many wonders. They sustain many life forms. With our minds gathered together, we give thanks and look forward to seeing Plant life for many generations to come. Now our minds are one.

When we look about us, we see that the **Berries** are still here, providing us with delicious foods. The leader of the berries is the strawberry, the first to ripen in the spring. Can we agree that we are grateful that the berries are with us in the world and send our thanksgiving, love, and respect to the berries? Now our minds are one.

With one mind, we honor and thank all the **Food Plants** we harvest from the garden, especially the Three Sisters who feed the people with such abundance. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans, and fruit have helped the people survive. Many other living things draw strength from them as well. We gather together in our minds all the plant foods and send them a greeting and thanks. Now our minds are one.

Now we turn to the **Medicine Herbs** of the world. From the beginning they were instructed to take away sickness. They are always waiting and ready to heal us. We are so happy that there are still among us those special few who remember how to use the plants for healing. With one mind, we send thanksgiving, love and respect to the Medicines and the keepers of the Medicines. Now our minds are one.

Standing around us we see all the **Trees**. The Earth has many families of Trees who each have their own instructions and uses. Some provide shelter and shade, others fruit and beauty and many useful gifts. The Maple is the leader of the trees, to recognize its gift of sugar when the People need it most. Many peoples of the world recognize a Tree as a symbol of peace and strength. With one mind we greet and thank the Tree life. Now our minds are one.

We gather our minds together to send our greetings and thanks to all the beautiful **Animal life** of the world, who walk about with us. They have many things to teach us as people. We are grateful that they continue to share their lives with us and hope that it will always be so. Let us put our minds together as one and send our thanks to the Animals. Now our minds are one.

We put our minds together as one and thank all the **Birds** who move and fly about over our heads. The Creator gave them the gift of beautiful songs. Each morning they greet the day and with their songs remind us to enjoy and appreciate life. The Eagle was chosen to be their leader and to watch over the world. To all the Birds, from the smallest to the largest, we send our joyful greetings and thanks. Now our minds are one.

We are all thankful for the powers we know as the **Four Winds**. We hear their voices in the moving air as they refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help to bring the change of season. From the four directions they come, bringing us messages and giving

us strength. With our mind we send our greetings and thanks to the Four Winds. Now our minds are one.

Now we turn to the west where our grandfather the **Thunder Beings** live. With lightning and thundering voices they bring with them the water that renews life. We bring our minds together as one to send greetings and thanks to our Grandfathers, the Thunderers.

We now send greetings and thanks to our eldest brother the **Sun**. Each day without fail he travels the sky from east to west, bringing the light of a new day. He is the source of all the fires of life. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Brother, the Sun. Now our minds are one.

We put our minds together and give thanks to our oldest **Grandmother, the Moon**, who lights the nighttime sky. She is the leader of women all over the world and she governs the movement of the ocean tides. By her changing face we measure time and it is the Moon who watches over the arrival of children here on Earth. Let us gather our thanks for Grandmother Moon together in a pile, layer upon layer of gratitude, and then joyfully fling that pile of thanks high into the night sky that she will know. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon.

We give thanks to the **Stars** who are spread across the sky like jewelry. We see them at night helpful the Moon to light the darkness and bringing dew to the gardens and growing things. When we travel at night, they guide us home. With our minds gathered as one, we send greetings and thanks to all the Stars. Now our minds are one. . . .

We now turn our thoughts to the **Creator, or Great Spirit**, and send greetings and thanks for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on Mother Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator. Now our minds are one.

These words are excerpted from a chapter from Braiding Sweetgrass, by Robin Wall Kimmerer (a book recently read by a Creation Care Faith Formation class at Stirling). Robin Wall Kimmerer cites this text as a widely publicised version of John Stokes and Kanawahientun, 1993.