

Seven Ancestors' Teachings by Elder Duke Redbird

00:17 --> 00:41

There are many languages in the Indigenous world and I always like to cover a few of them that are common to the territory of Toronto and Ani and Bhoozoo come from the Anishinaabe language and Segeo is from the Haudenosaunee language and Tanze is from the Cree language.

00:41 --> 01:40

I want to say good evening, and I am Duke Redbird. In my Anishnabee language my name is Magwam Misquabenashe, and I'm an elder of the Turtle Clan, member of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation. So I'm very pleased to be here with you tonight. I want to thank the members of Myseum Connects for inviting me and for the kind words of introduction from Jeremy Diamond and Josh Dyer. It's a pleasure and an honor to share with you the traditions of the Indigenous community and to acknowledge and remember that we were all children of our mother the Earth. Traditionally, our communities believe that the earth is as live and as sentient as any human being.

01:41 --> 02:16

We believe that she has all of the characteristics that we ourselves possess as her children, and in our beliefs, the hierarchy of creation starts with Mother Earth. The plants come next and are assigned with the task of feeding us, healing us and inspiring us with visions. The creatures who already have achieved their ultimate evolution, our teachers to guide us on our journey down the river of life.

02:17 --> 02:43

Our Indigenous ancestors believed that we, humans, are given the opportunity to learn the meaning of life through experience, so that when we arrive at our final destination in the spirit world, we will be able to share creation with the Manitou or Great Mystery described by the Elders as the ultimate rapture of unconditional love.

02:44 --> 03:57

Now, the indigenous world acquired wisdom and enlightenment and formed a symbiotic relationship with nature that did not require a written language, books, libraries, schools, universities, or civil and religious institutions. Neither kings, armies, police forces, magistrates, judges or prisons, coins, currency or banks, factories, guilds, or poor houses, and most important of all, concepts of deeded land ownership.

The land was acknowledged as the Mother of all Creation.

In Canada, the indigenous peoples made friends with the English and the French, and helped the early settlers to secure colonies and trading posts on the territories occupied for thousands of years by Indigenous people.

In Toronto, these people included the Wendat, the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples.

03:57 --> 04:30

We invited the settlers to live amongst us and share the land and resources with a Dish with One Spoon.

We did not sell the land.

It was never conquered, and we never agreed to give up our traditional rights to self-determination and governance.

We were never invited to participate in Confederation and the treaty negotiations have never been concluded.

Now, traditionally, when Indigenous visitors

04:31 --> 05:32

arrive from a neighbouring territory to an unfamiliar community, they would bring a pipe and tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, and cedar as gifts, and would identify their Home Nation.

They would describe the path that they took and the challenges that they encountered on their travels.

They would reveal their names and nations, and thank the community for receiving them with hospitality.

They would promptly acknowledge that the host community were superb stewards, and that they honoured the Mother Earth.

In this acknowledgement they also expressed

what today we would refer to as

the Grandmother Grandfather Teachings:

Love, Humility, Courage, Respect, Honesty, Truth and Wisdom.

05:32 --> 06:46

That was our tradition and the reason that we continue it today is that the settlers who arrived here 400 years ago did not have that same tradition.

They bought and sold land, used money and power in their desire to acquire our lands, and then do not have the same relationship with the Mother Earth.

So we are grateful that in 2020 many institutions and government agencies have begun to offer land acknowledgments.

A land acknowledgment does not preclude the need to have a resolution to land

claims that have been outstanding since Confederation.
So it is incumbent upon us
to continue to remind the dominant culture
that they will not have
legitimate occupation and control of
two-thirds of Canada
until there is an agreement with Indigenous Peoples.

06:46 --> 08:10

Our Mother Earth has
inspired great art and great ideas,
and wrapped them in wisdom that has been shared with the world in so many incredible ways.
In this era of multivarious platforms of information,
let us not forget that the origin of all
knowledge and wisdom comes from a
a platform called Mother Earth.
Our reality is governed in a large part by what we pay attention to.
If we pay more attention to technology than to nature,
we will have a world that is not balanced.
It will be a world that is logical, sequential, linear,
mathematical and engineered.
It will be great for robots.
But we are humans, and we need
imagination, intuition, creativity, emotion
and art in our environment.
Seeing the bigger picture that surrounds us rather
than the details that are offered to us
on our cell phones and devices.
Our cities of the future need to be well
balanced between the technologies we use as tools,
and nature that we use as inspiration.

08:11 --> 08:50

The Indigenous people who have lived on these lands since time immemorial
in a symbiotic relationship with nature
have a lot of experience to share with a modern world
that is experiencing a crisis of sustainability.
Mother Earth taught us, among other lessons,
that there are seven principles of good conduct.
They are called the Seven Ancestor Teachings,
and were imparted to us from the seven canopies
of food that are found in the food forest.

08:51 --> 09:31

The first canopy are the oldest trees
that grow the tallest in the forest and
protect all the other plants.
Among these trees, the tall ones, are the walnut,

the chestnut, the beech nut, and the maple trees.
From them, we learn Wisdom.
For example, the meat of the walnut is shaped like the human brain,
and modern science tells us
what our ancestors already knew,
that walnuts provide nutrition for the mind,
along with the sap from the maple tree.
Therefore, we call the tallest trees in the food forests
the Canopy of Wisdom.

09:31 --> 10:29

The second canopy of food that is available
in the food forest are the fruit trees,
represented amongst many others
by the plum, the cherry, the apple, and the pear tree.
Fruit trees are challenged by harsh winter storms
challenged by harsh winters storms
hurricanes and droughts and still as
fragile as they appear to be give their
fruit which represents courage to us.
The third canopy of food available in
the food forest are all of the berry bushes:
the raspberry, blueberry, thimbleberry, gooseberry, bearberry.
The berry bushes are self-fertilizing and
self-propagating
and grow together amongst each other.
They come in different colours, and shapes, and tastes, and textures
yet they exist and thrive in harmony with one another.
We learn respect from these berry bushes.

10:29 --> 10:58

The next canopy of food that lives in the food forests
is the food that grows right above the ground, such as the squash,
the pumpkins, the cucumbers, the cabbages and lettuce.
There's an honesty about these foods.
The fact that they are trusted and
are evidently good for you, shows in
their very existence, they are never
counterfeit and they teach us Honesty.

11:01 --> 12:03

The fifth canopy in the food forest is
the food found on the surface of the ground.
Here we find our medicines.
We sort the Poison Ivies from the good Ivies,
the poison oaks from the good oaks, the
mushrooms from the toadstools.
Truth is always in accord with fact and reality,

and it is up to us to separate fact from fiction.
That is what we learn from this canopy, which also includes the strawberry, which represents the earth itself. Unlike every other fruit, the seeds of the strawberries are on the surface of the fruit, just as we, the humans, occupy the surface of the earth. The strawberry is also shaped like a heart, and strawberries are good for your heart. In fact, the Anishnaabe word Dewouin is synonymous with both truth and heartbeat.

12:03 --> 12:26

Beneath the canopy of truth in the food forest, we find potatoes, carrots, turnips and other vegetables, which are buried under the ground. They're not necessarily evident on the surface. We must dig and search for them, often on our knees. In this process we learn about Humility from these foods.

00:12:26 --> 12:46

And the seventh canopy are the creepers and vines that go through the woods and embrace each other from plants, and from them we learn about Love. Wisdom, Courage, Respect, Honesty, Truth, Humility and Love.

12:46 --> 13:26

These Seven Ancestor Teachings have been guiding and been practiced by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. This evening I'd like to share with you an event that took place on January 31, 2020, just two weeks ago. My home territory, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation overwhelmingly voted down the proposed deep geological repository for storage of low and intermediate level radioactive nuclear waste next to Lake Ontario.

13:27 --> 15:00

This vote was a historic milestone, a momentous victory for our people. The Ontario provincial government and Bruce Power mistakenly believed that if offered enough money, the members of the Saugeen Band would vote 'yes' to the proposed dumping of nuclear wastes on our lands. The amount that was offered was a 150 million dollars for a 'yes' vote,

which amounted to approximately 150 thousand dollars per voting member. Out of 1282 total votes, 1058 were 'No', indicating that 85% of those casting ballots said 'No' to the deep ground repository for nuclear waste. The Ontario government's expectation was based upon the fact that the non-native municipalities of Brockton and Kincardine adjacent to the Bruce nuclear power plant, were willing hosts and had accepted ten and a half million dollars before the vote was even taken. I think my home territory and the Indigenous people deserve a vote of applause for that decision. [Applause]

15:01 --> 16:11

This event is an example of how one community, namely the Saugeen Ojibway Nation applied the Ancestor Teachings to lead them to making a decision that benefited not only future generations, but the preservation of Mother Earth herself. Our values and who we are as a people and our connection to the lands and the waters are far more important than money. As former chief Randall Cogee said in an interview, this is a forever project. It requires our people to think beyond 7 generations, which is typically how we plan and think about these things. I'm proud that here in Ontario, my home community, a modest town with limited resources, stood by the principles of Respect, Trust, Honesty, Humility, Love, Courage and Wisdom, and reminded us that these principles can be incorporated into the decisions each one of us makes in our everyday life.

16:15 --> 17:28

Unfortunately, another Indigenous community, the Wet'suwet'en people in British Columbia are not given the opportunity to choose between the invasive expansion of a 670km Pacific Coast pipeline right through the middle of their territory. The Nation's hereditary Chiefs have repeatedly said they do not want a pipeline. They continue to resist colonial and gendered violence against their people and are fighting to protect Wet'suwet'en lands for future generations. But unlike Ontario, the British Columbia government has chosen to arrest, harass and threaten the protesters with violence, even to the point of placing RCMP snipers around the territories of the people, as reported by the CBC News.

It is possible to practice these principles and introduce them into your everyday life by broadening your understanding of your definitions of each one.

17:29 --> 18:19

For example, Wisdom can be expressed as foresight and discernment.

Respect can be expressed as appreciation and recognition.

Courage can be expressed as imagination and curiosity.

Honesty can be expressed as choice.

Love can be expressed as devotion and actualization.

Humility can be expressed as modesty and evaluation.

And Truth can be expressed as validity that is repeatable

If you treat these Teachings as threads

as you create the tapestry of your own life,

you will be able to make yourself a

blanket as expressed in this closing prayer

that I'd like to share with you.

18:23 --> 18:10

Oh, my Mother the Earth, oh my Father the Sky,

your children are we, and we bring to you the gifts that you love:

tobacco, cedar, sweetgrass and sage.

Then weave for us a government of brightness

using the threads of the Ancestral

Teachings, may the warp be the red light

of evening, may the weft be the white

light of morning and may the border be

the standing rainbow and may the fringe

be the falling rain then weave for us a

garment of brightness that we may

fittingly walk where birds sing that we

may fit lean walk where grass is green.

Oh my Mother the Earth, Oh my Father the Sky

Meegwetch.