

Onjikiing: From the Earth

"Plants have many purposes, all of them good. Some sustain men in their growth and existence; some heal; others give beauty and inner strength."

"Plants can exist alone; but neither animals nor men can exist without plants. Without plants, or when their balance is disturbed, the quality of life and existence declines."

Basil Johnston, Ojibwe Heritage

As Basil Johnston, Ojibwe author and lecturer, observes in his book, Ojibwe Heritage, the Ojibwe people have always highly respected plants, which they believe were placed on Akii (Earth) prior to men and animals. They approach plants humbly, realizing that, while plants can survive independently of man, neither man nor animal can survive without plants for nourishment.

Historically, Ojibwe people have not only relied on numerous plant species for food, medicines, and utility items, but also have incorporated them into their spiritual lives and ceremonies. Johnston says that Ojibwe view plants as each possessing their own "soul-spirit." The character and tone of places, such as valleys, meadows, bays or hills, reflect a mood intrinsic to the plant life that grows there. "Whatever the mood, happy, peaceful, turbulent, or melancholy, it is the tone of that soul-spirit," Johnston states.

For the Ojibwe the taking of plants was, and is, often accompanied with the offering of asemaa (tobacco) and a prayer of thanks. Below is a contemporary prayer offered by GiiWeGiizhigokwe, Betty Martin, from the Lac Vieux Desert Indian Community in Michigan.

Prayer for Gathering

By GiiWeGiizhigokwe

Oo Oo Manidoo

Odaapinow Asemaa,

I come before you and offer my asemaa,

With my tobacco in my left hand,
I place it on the earth from where your life comes
to ask your permission
to gather.

I ask you to forgive me; I ask you for health, strength and life.
I humbly take from only your strongest parts,
Never to deplete you for those who will follow,
I only take that which I need to sustain me or heal me.

I will explain to you why I am taking you and
I will leave you as untouched as possible,
Trying to let you grow even stronger for those who
Come to you later in need.

With all of my strength, with all of my heart, with all of my mind,
I will walk gently upon you knowing that all things are connected.
Everything that has been placed here on Akii (Mother Earth) is a Gift.
All of these living things should be respected and are "Sacred."

Love our Mother Earth as we love our own Mothers
Protect her at all costs
To save her...We save ourselves.