

Today's talk is the first in our November talk series, *Gratitude Across Spiritual Traditions*. This series explores how gratitude is woven into various spiritual paths, such as Indigenous traditions, Buddhism, Christianity, and Eastern philosophies. Gratitude isn't just a fleeting feeling; it's a transformative practice that helps us find balance, joy, and peace, especially during challenging times. Drawing wisdom from these traditions teaches us how to turn gratitude into daily practice.

Today's talk, *The Healing Power of Gratitude*, focuses on an Indigenous perspective. For many Indigenous cultures, gratitude is more than a feeling; it's a way of living. By honoring the Earth, her elements, and all beings, gratitude connects us deeply with nature, our community, and ourselves, nurturing harmony and resilience.

Chief Dan George

We start with a story from Chief Dan George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. Facing hardship, he taught his community to focus on gratitude for what remained: the land, the water, and the sky. Instead of dwelling on losses, he encouraged them to honor the abundance surrounding them. His wisdom reminds us that true healing begins when we shift our focus to the blessings we often overlook, even in challenging times.

Indigenous traditions honor the Earth and its elements—water, air, fire, and Earth- as resources and as sacred, living beings. Imagine if you thanked it every time you drank water for nourishing you. This practice acknowledges our interconnectedness and reminds us that we are part of a greater whole.

The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks

Gratitude transforms how we see the world. Instead of seeing life as a series of struggles, gratitude allows us to see the gifts present in each connection. It's a shift from scarcity to abundance, from isolation to connection. We heal ourselves and our relationship with the planet by giving thanks to nature's elements.

Introduction to Indigenous Gratitude Prayers

The prayers and quotes we will explore come from Indigenous wisdom, where gratitude is a daily, sacred practice, especially in times of hardship. These prayers help us embrace every part of our journey, including the challenges. They are potent reminders that every moment offers something to be thankful for.

- Black Elk (Oglala Lakota): *"Let every step you take be a prayer, and may your life be filled with gratitude for all that the Creator has given you."*
- Chippewa Teaching: *"We give thanks to the four winds for bringing messages from all directions, guiding us, and teaching us with each breath."*

- Cherokee Nation: *"Our gratitude for each moment we are present is what brings us peace. May we live in harmony with one another, and may our hearts be full of thanks."*
- Chief Seattle (Duwamish): *"The Earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the Earth. Let us always remember our connection and give thanks for the sacred ground beneath our feet."*
- Native American Prayer: *"Let us be grateful for the blessing of the sunrise and for the beauty it reveals. Every day is a gift, and every dawn brings a new beginning."*
- Hawaiian Prayer: "Mahalo ke Akua" - *"Thanks be to the divine."* This reminds us to give thanks for the blessings received from the higher power that sustains us.
- Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi Nation): *"Creator, I give thanks for this moment of difficulty. Let me learn from it without bitterness and transform this pain into understanding. May I always find gratitude for the lessons hidden in my struggles."*

Call to Action: A Week of Gratitude Prayers

Today, I am giving you a set of seven Indigenous gratitude prayers. The challenge is simple: Pray with one of these Gratitude Prayers each day for the next week. By embracing these prayers daily, you'll cultivate a shift in perspective—from focusing on what is wrong to appreciating what is right. This practice can ground us, deepen our connection to the sacred, and foster greater resilience and peace.

Wilma Mankiller's Story and Ours

We are living in a challenging time in our country and the world, and it is during such times that the spiritual truths we practice can offer profound guidance. Wilma Mankiller's name is an inherited Cherokee military title that signifies strength and bravery. Wilma, the first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, faced immense challenges—from displacement due to government policies to health struggles. Despite these obstacles, Wilma chose gratitude as her tool for healing. She focused on what remained: her culture, her community, and her resilience. Gratitude empowered her to rise above her circumstances and serve her people, becoming a bridge to hope.

Wilma's story teaches us that spiritual wisdom and gratitude are more than just feeling thankful. They are a source of strength and resilience. When facing personal, local, or global challenges, gratitude helps us shift our perspective and find meaning in difficulty. Through her example through spiritual practices, we learn that having gratitude can transform our greatest challenges into opportunities for growth and healing.

Wilma Mankiller's story teaches us that gratitude is more than a comforting feeling; it's a powerful source of strength. In times of hardship, like today, gratitude can help us find meaning and turn challenges into opportunities for growth and healing.

Affirmation: Shawnee Nation

Today, I am grateful for the courage in my heart. I face each moment with strength, knowing that I walk in the beauty of life, even when it is difficult.