

The Gifts of Mitakuye Oyasin - Jace DeCory - Professional Development

Many of our people have plants that are gifts that are given to them from the Creator. And so those plants, I think it's important for our young people to know which plants might help them and which can be used even in our daily life to make teas and so forth. So plants are medicine and plants are gifts. Now I mentioned before that we talk about nations, the Oyate nation. The plants are a nation as well, the plant nation. The plant that I use a lot, and a lot of the plants that we use in our ceremonies are all available in the Black Hills.

They're all around us. And Grandpa Fools Crow back in 1980, he asked me if I would, he knows that, well, he knew lots of things, but he knew that one of the things that I have, I love plants and I'm still learning about them, but he asked me if I would pick up elk medicine for him, Pejuta Haka. I can only think of a lot of other words. A bergamot, bee balm. It's wild bergamot. It's like a purple flower on the top and it grows all over the Black Hills area. Well, Grandpa Fools Crow asked me back in 1980 to pick that plant.

Would you bring me some Takoja, grandchild? And I said, sure, I'll get you some grandpa. And so when it comes out, then it usually comes, blossoms in June, July, around that time, depending on the water, how much water we've had, rainfall. Anyway, the first time that I got it for him was in 1980 and I brought it to him and, and I took it to him and to his house in Kyle. And I said, Grandpa, I brought you, I was all happy I brought his, his elk medicine. He called it elk medicine. That's how he used it.

But I brought that to him and he was really thrilled. And so he said, this is going to be your job now, Takoja. You bring that every year to Sundance. You're going to bring that. I said, okay, I will. And then he said, this first year, what I want you to do is I want you to make tea for the singers at Sundance. You make them tea and you make it out of that. And he showed me how to do it. Took me in the kitchen and he said, this is how much you use. And he prayed with me on that. So I said, okay, I'll do that.

So I did the first Sundance in Kyle there. And he said, every Sundance that you can every year, cause I know that you, this is your way. This is your belief that you do that. You make this medicine for the singers. So I've been making this tea, bergamot tea every year since 1980 for whatever Sundance I happen to go to that year. Grandpa taught us also that just to, we pick one Sundance to pray at, and that's the one that we go to every year. So I went to see him while he was still alive.

And then when he passed away in the late 1980s, I went to one that my uncle, Jimmy DeBray ran for a while. And then I went to another one that his son, Steve DeBray ran for a while after his dad died, my uncle died. And then for some reason, my husband

said, JC, we have to go back to your relatives at Standing Rock. He said, I feel that we have to go back there and pray with your relatives there. And so we did. We went to one of my uncles who has, it's referred to as a Sitting Bull Sundance. And so we went back to be with my Sitting Bull relatives.

And we've been there since the early 90s. We've gone back to that Sundance. But I continue to make, and I told my uncles and my relatives what grandpa had me do with the Sundance. He said, you continue doing that here. So I've been making tea for the singers up there since I moved back there.

But, you know, I take that as a big responsibility, but I also understand that, you know, the singers have to have strong voices and they have to, you know, so when you're making it, you're not just making tea, you know, you're praying about it and you're acknowledging that if they sing strong, then the dancers will sing, they'll dance strong. So everything is interconnected. Everything that we do is interconnected. From getting the plants in the Black Hills to taking them up to Standing Rock, you know, that's to that ceremony.

Coming back after that ceremony and going to Bear Butte, giving thanks for a good Sundance. And later on, a month later, going up to acknowledge where we had our first Sundances at Mato Tpilala, Bear Lodge. That's where our great nation used to have one huge Sundance at Bear Lodge. Now there's Sundances at Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Rosebud, all over. But the idea is still there that we pray so that the people may live. The plants give their lives so that the people may live. Yeah, it is all interconnected and we are all related.

You know, we use a term, *miitakuyé oyasi*. We are all related. We're all relatives. We are at one with one another because we're relatives, our two-leggeds and all those around us. Well, those two words are so powerful because they really embody the philosophy of the Lakota people, that we are all related.