

Working with Elders:

A traditional Cree teaching

June 2011

Traditional teaching #2

All kinds of Elders

Spiritual Elders provide guidance and leads traditional healing circles and ceremonies based on holistic teachings.

Cultural Elders have knowledge of the sweat lodge, sacred circles, feasts, pipe, tea ceremonies and so on.

Ceremonial Elders have knowledge of ceremonial objects such as medicine bundles, sweetgrass, sacred waters, sweat lodge, drums, eagle feather.

Teaching Elders have oral skills to impart traditional knowledge in the areas of culture and language to a wide variety audiences.

Community Elders use their gifts to advocate for better communities through social or political action. They may be active in the areas of justice, health, lands, resources and so forth.

Usually Elders are approached with a request for services with an offering of ritual tobacco. The person requesting is in fact saying to Elder,

I am giving you a smoke so that you can ritually commit to agreeing to this request in the name of the Creator. I am asking you in a humble manner. By accepting this tobacco, you will burn this tobacco and the smoke will be a symbol of the prayers of the requestor and whomever is included in the request.



Elders are senior people who have training and status in the community based on their specialized knowledge. They have permission or sanction from the larger community to share this knowledge. Elders reflect the teachings in the way they live their own lives.

It is essential that the requestor know the Elder. For services such as cooking, sewing crafts etc. the person is not a spiritual advisor so it may be questionable whether tobacco will be needed.