

Elder Teachings – Children are Gifts to the Community

Teaching

Speaker: Elder Blu Waters

When we speak of children, we speak about them as sacred gifts from Creator. Children are our Ancestors that have been waiting in spirit form to be born. Usually when children come to us as spiritual gifts, they come to us with their spirit name, that the oldest one in the community knows. The spirit name tells the story of who this child is and who they are to be as a gift to community. While still in spirit form, children watched us for a long time and therefore bring with them the wisdom they have accumulated in observing our actions. Children see things with minds that have not yet been clouded over with misunderstandings and misperceptions. They know what gifts we need, and they bring those to us. The children that come to us are also the future generations. They are the gifts that get carried forward into the future. We therefore honour them and take care of them. Sometimes we think we are in a one-way relationship with children, that we do all the teaching. But we know that infants in the eastern direction communicate through emotion. They therefore teach us how to respond and care for them, not because they can tell us what they need, but because they teach us to pay attention to the feelings we have when they communicate through their cries. We also take seriously community responsibility for children. It took more than one person to bring this child into the world, and it takes many people to guide and nurture children to live life in a good way. We try to expose children to all the good things in life and provide them with all the lessons they need to grow up to be strong and healthy. We want children today to be free of the understandings

that do not serve us well. We want to break the cycle of mistreatment and violence that has been passed down from the trauma of residential schools. So, when a child is born, the community gathers because we are not living life by ourselves. We are amongst all our relations. We come together to celebrate life and to acknowledge that it is going to take community to help teach a child how to walk through this life as a human being. When the community comes together to share in the responsibilities of caring for children, they do so because they are accepting this child as a gift to be honoured and cherished. They in turn take on the responsibility of sharing with this child their own gifts. In the old days, if someone was a hunter, they would teach you how to hunt, if someone was a gatherer, they would teach you how to gather, if someone knew how to sew, they would teach you how to sew, if someone knew how to cook, they would teach them how to cook. In this way, the child would have received all the information it needed to be a gift to the community.