

Wisdom from Elders of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe

prepared by Gail Melix ~ March 22, 2021

From Elder Ramona Peters, Bear Clan member of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe (People of the First Light) and Chairwoman of the Native Land Conservancy:

We name ourselves after the land we live with. Because, not only are we breathing in, we are also drinking from the water that is flavored by that very land. Whatever is deposited in the soil is in that water is in us. So we are all one thing, and we name ourselves after the place that is our nurturing. That sustains our life.

A Message from Marlene, Clan Mother, Rabbit Clan of the Mashpee Wampanoag:

I am honored that you reached out to me regarding this very important life element that we refer to as water. It has been three years since I experienced my first water walk with five other Mashpee Wampanoag women at Rice Lake Ontario Canada as invited native women along with Ojibwa and Onondaga peoples. We started each morning with a prayer and sang the water song for our day. We took a brief break at lunch on the walk. It was a 4 day walk. We walked about 7 hours a day. The lake was about 100 miles. We relayed with cars along the way. There was a man carrying an eagle head staff who went before us and two women at a time carried a full bucket of water between them until they tired and then two more women stepped in their place while walking, no one stopped as water is constantly in motion so were we. This was how we walked throughout the day. We always carried tobacco in case we came across any puddles or water or animals we made an offering to the water spirits. Water is life, without it we do not exist. You can live without food for a while but not without water. Our rivers are the veins of mother earth. If your veins in your body are clogged or the blood cannot flow freely you become sick and erupt or die. Same with our rivers and streams. Mother earth is a living organism. Like our bodies. Mother earth and our waters must be healthy. They provide us with all that we need. If we continue to abuse, destroy, pollute and treat our waters and mother earth with the disrespect that we have been, then we do not deserve to be here. Mother nature will have her say.”

“Wherever I go and I am around water, I offer tobacco and sing the water song in honor of the water spirits asking for guidance to help keep the waters clean and be in gratitude for having clean water. We all have the responsibility to take care of our waterways. The water song is sung like a lullaby: water we love you, we thank you, we respect you.

*Prepared for “What does Water mean to us? Quakers engaging World Quaker Day,”
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