

YOUR NAME AND COLOURS

Why Having a Spirit Name is Important

Everything in Creation has a name. The trees, animals, plants, fish, water and air all have names. When we receive our spirit name, we know who we are in Creation. We are able to identify ourselves when we communicate with the spirit of each thing in Creation.

A spirit name is important for a good beginning, strong prayers and the good life. A spirit name is important for personal protection against sickness and disease.

When you have your spirit name, which may be referred to as your Indian name or simply as your name, your communication with the spirit world is strengthened. When the spirits that we talk to and have been given to us hear our name, they see everything about us. They see our life, our future and who we are, and when we offer tobacco to them, they can guide us.

Elders and Healers say that when your spirit comes to this world, your name and your colours follow you to the spirit door. It is said that our spirit name is the name we had before we came to this world.

Spirit names are said to be ancient and some of these names are the names of our ancestors.

Your spirit name is said to be fifty percent of your healing and balance because, with it, you know who you are, you know where you belong, you know where you are going and you know where you came from.

Receiving Your Spirit Name

Before the arrival of the newcomers, Native people had a way of getting their name. This varied from Nation to Nation. Today, there are communities where the traditional ceremonies for the naming of babies are still held as they were for thousands of years.

In some communities, babies are given their spirit names when they are two, three or four weeks old. An Elder who has the ability and honour to give spirit names talks to the baby in their Native language and the baby's spirit listens. The Elder explains to the baby what his or her name is and what it means to have that name. The baby hears and understands.

In some Longhouse traditions, a clan name is given to a baby. A Clan Woman who takes care of the names of her clan chooses a name that suits the character of a baby.

It is never too late to get your spirit name and colours. The spirits wait for you to come to them for a name. The Traditional people recognize that because of what has happened in our communities historically, many of us don't know the teachings and they will wait for us to come to them.

Today, we can offer tobacco to a Traditional Healer, Elder or Medicine Person who has the ability to call names and colours through the spirit door. We can also seek our name through the shaking tent ceremony. The person we ask to give us our name may use special songs to call on our name and colours.

Naming Ceremonies

Naming Ceremonies are held in some communities to announce a person's name. For example, in some Longhouse traditions, children born during the year are brought to the Mid-Winter or to the Harvest Festival to receive their names. A circle dance is

performed, the father introduces the baby to the community, and the name is given.

In some Anishnawbe communities, the Naming Ceremony would be held before sundown. Food would be placed on a blanket on the floor. The child would be held by the parents facing the person who is going to name the infant. Then, taking the child, this person tells the child his or her name, colours, spirit helpers and what offerings to make.

Many Traditional people say that when you receive your name, you should announce it to the community and the Four Directions of the universe. Those attending the ceremony come up to you, shake your hand and call you by your name. Your family gives out gifts to the people and everyone enjoys the feast you have prepared.

Often you will have three or four sponsors. Sponsors are like grandparents to you. When they accept responsibility for being your sponsor, they know it is for life, both yours and theirs. Your sponsors can be your relatives or others whom you respect.

Those Who Give Names

A person who gives names has earned that right. He or she should know the spirit, ceremonies and the power that your name carries.

This person will be able to give you instructions on how to take care of your name and what your name means.

People who give names say that the spirits give the name through them.

We can express our gratitude to the person who gives us our name by our offering of tobacco and gifts.

Colours

Everything in Creation has a colour that represents a certain type of power. For example, a spirit name such as “Bringer of the First Light” has to do with the morning, with the colours purple and yellow which are the first colours that appear in the morning. This is the time that this person would do ceremonies because at this time she will gain strength and gifts.

When you wear your colours, (i.e. ribbons) it is considered the Good Life which keeps you straight and walking in a good way.

Colours are as important as your name. It is said that your colours should come with your name. They represent your powers, you receive guidance from them and they help you focus.

You can hang your colours in your room if you are on a healing journey. You can make your dancing regalia with your colours in beads and material.

Honouring your Name and Colours

You need to find a path to honour your spirit name. You can honour it through different ceremonies. You can make food offerings during the year for your name. These can be monthly with the moon cycle or four times a year, at the changing of the seasons, or once a year.

Your colours are associated with your name and when you feast your name you are also including your colours.

As our awareness and knowledge of our traditions and culture increases, so does our honour and respect for these ways. This has not always been the case in our communities. There are always those who present themselves as Healers, Elders or Medicine People who have not earned that title and may use the teachings and medicines in the wrong way. It is important for everyone, especially young people, to be aware of this and to exercise caution when they seek healing, teachings or advice. It is advisable to consult with people whom you trust to get referrals to respected and recognized Traditional Elders, Healers or Medicine People.

Other pamphlets in this series include:

- C Approaching Healers, Elders and Medicine People
- C Fasting
- C Clans
- C Feasts and GiveAways
- C Sweat Lodge
- C Moontime
- C Traditional Healing
- C Four Sacred Medicines
- C Sacred Items and Bundles

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“Native Teachings are about
a Way of Life”

The information in this pamphlet is only a small portion of the many and extensive Native Teachings that exist. Teachings vary from First Nation to First Nation and even from one geographic region to another. For more information, please consult with a Traditional Elder, Healer or Medicine Person.

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