

## The Words Before All Else

Over a thousand years ago in America, a prophet called the Peacemaker brought unity to a group of warring tribes in upstate *New York* through the "Great Law of Peace." These five Native American tribes—the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca—joined together to become the Iroquois Confederacy, in a brilliant structure of democratic rule that later influenced the Founding Fathers in their creation of the Constitution of the United States. The Peacemaker also imparted spiritual teachings on respectful action through his "Good Words," as they are known. The following greeting and thanksgiving honors our unity with one another and with all creation.

These sacred and powerful Good Words, also known as "The Words Before All Else," are still spoken today before every gathering and ceremony of the Iroquois. A speaker is chosen. He follows a certain format and, inspired in the moment, shares his own feelings about each part of creation mentioned. Hearing their names and good words spoken about them, they are encouraged to perform their duties. The hearts and minds of all who hear the greeting are united, and are in turn inspired with gratitude for the whole of creation.

The Great Peacemaker instructed the Iroquois to share The Words Before All Else with all people. As you read you may be inspired to offer your own giving of thanks and praise between the beginning and ending of each verse—your own heart's Good Words.

*We give thanks and greetings to the People, and we think of the people that have been, the ones that are and the ones that will be. We ask for protection for all of the people that carry forth our traditions. We thank all of the people for performing their duties to the best of their abilities.  
And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to Mother Earth. It is she who is the life-giver. The earth has given us all the food, clothing, and shelter that we need. We know all of creation comes from her and someday shall return to her. We thank the Mother Earth for performing her duties to the best of her ability.  
And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Plant Life. Among the plants are the plants that bring us beauty, that encourage our minds and make us think well of all of our surroundings. It is the plant life that sustains our bodies and spirits. We thank all of the plant life for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Medicine Plants. There are the roots and the barks, the berries and leaves and the small plants; all of these medicine plants serve all life. We care for them and we remember them and we thank them for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Foods. Each time we mention them, we remember the story of the time they were going to leave the earth because no one cared for them. We asked them to stay and told them if they would stay we would remember them and say Good Words about them in our ceremonies. We thank the foods for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Bodies of Water, the bodies of water on the land where the fish and water plants live. And we thank the bodies of wafer that are up in the air that as they fall to earth sustain life everywhere. We thank the bodies of water for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Animals. We thank the animals of our clans, the bear; the turtle, and the wolf. And we thank the other animals: the four-legged, the two-legged, the winged ones, the finned ones, the crawling ones, and the ones that live in our homes as our friends. We thank the animals for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Trees. Among these trees are the maple tree, the tree that brings us sweet syrup as medicine.*

*And next to the maple tree is the great pine tree which is our symbol of the Great Peace that the Peacemaker gave us. We thank the trees for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Birds. Among these birds is the eagle, the one who can fly the highest and see the furthest. And we thank all the other birds that provide us with beauty and songs that please our eyes and calm our minds. We thank all the birds for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Four Winds, the winds that bring us warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer, the winds that take our words and carry them far, all across the land. We thank the winds for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to our Grandfathers, the Thunders. We thank the thunders for coming to earth with their loud voices, which always remind us that they are the carriers of the water to sustain life. And we thank the thunders for bringing the fire from the sky into the rocks and we thank them for giving us the ability to know how to take the fire from the rocks. And we thank our Grandfathers, the Thunders, for performing their duties to the best of their ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Sun, our Eldest Brother, the one who brings us the day and the warmth, the one that also tells us that to have balance on the earth there is night and there is day and there is good and there is evil. We thank our Brother Sun for coming to earth to make everything grow. And we thank him for performing his duties to the best of his ability.*

*And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Grandmother Moon.  
It is she who controls all of the times of birth of all living things.  
When her face is fully seen she makes the bodies of water  
on the earth move. We thank the Grandmother Moon  
for performing her duties to the best of her ability.  
And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Stars. These are the ones  
who are the helpers of the Grandmother Moon. The stars tell us  
of things that have been and will be. We thank the stars for  
performing their duties to the best of their ability.  
And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and a greeting to the Four Messengers.  
These come from the four directions in times of need and  
in times of joy and whisper to our minds Good Words  
to encourage us. We thank the Four Messengers for  
performing their duties to the best of their ability.  
And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to all of the Teachers from everywhere.  
They told us that we are to keep their Good Words  
to guide us to Good Ways to live a Good Life. We thank  
these teachers for bringing their message and  
performing their duties to the best of their ability.  
And now our minds are one.*

*We give thanks and greetings to the Creator. It is at this  
time that we use our best words. We thank the Creator for  
bringing the original duties and responsibilities to each  
of us in His creation and for giving us the knowledge that on  
earth good and bad things happen, as it is supposed to be.  
And we thank the Creator for all He has given us.  
And now our minds are one.*

*If there are things we have forgotten, we ask people  
to make their own words in their own time.  
Donetah. "So it is."*