

The Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address

Instructions

This is a responsive reading. A Reader presents the main text aloud with reverence and joy, pausing between paragraphs for everyone to repeat "Now our minds are one" in unison. Following the final response, the Words close with "A'ho," usually shared by everyone present.

(As edited and read by Bill Protzmann. You may use these Words as you wish; replace or omit the <optional> bits.)

Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of the book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, was repeatedly told by Haudenosaunee people that the words of the Thanksgiving Address are their gift to the world and are meant to be shared. This address is also known as *The Words That Come Before All Else*, as it is traditionally spoken to greet the day, start a meeting, or before starting negotiations with other nations. Why? Because the Haudenosaunee people make big decisions *only when everyone is in agreement*.

The Onondaga "Hill Place" people are one of the original five constituent nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in Northeast North America. When Kimmerer asked the Onondaga faithkeeper Oren Lyons about sharing the Thanksgiving address in her book he said "Of course you should write about it. It's supposed to be shared. Otherwise, how can it work? We've been waiting for 500 years people to listen. If they'd understood the Thanksgiving then, we wouldn't be in this mess."

So, as we read it together, feel the gratitude in your heart for all of the life around us that gives us so much and allows us to live, and that when we repeat "now our minds are one" this includes mind, heart, body and soul.

<optional> My name is Bill Protzmann. My ancestors came to the Virginia colony more than 300 years ago.

The Words That Come Before All Else

Today we have gathered, and when we look upon the faces around us, we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living beings, so now we bring our minds together as one as we give our greetings and our thanks to each other as people.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of Time. To our Mother, we send thanksgiving, love and respect.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

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We give thanks to all the Waters of the world for quenching our thirst, providing us with strength, and nurturing life for all beings. Water is life. We know its power in many forms — waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans, snow and ice. We are grateful that the waters are here and meeting their responsibility to bring life to all of Creation. With one mind we send our greetings and our thanks to the spirit of the Water.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We now turn our minds to all of the Fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. We are grateful that they continue to do their duties, and that we can find pure water, so we send to the Fish our greetings and our thanks.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

Now, we turn toward the vast fields of Plants. As far as the eye can see, the Plants grow, working many wonders. They sustain many life forms. With our minds gathered together we give our thanks and look forward to seeing Plant life continue for many generations to come.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

When we look about us, we see that the berries are here, providing us with delicious foods. The leader of the berries is the Strawberry, the first to ripen in the spring. Can we agree that we are grateful that the berries are with us in the world, and send our Thanksgiving, love and respect to the berries?

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

With one mind, we turn to honor and thank all the Food Plants we harvest from the garden, who feed us with such abundance. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans and fruit have helped the people survive. Many other living beings draw strength from them as well. We gather together in our minds all the Plant Foods and send them our greetings and our thanks.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

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Now, we turn to all the Medicine Plants of the world. From the beginning, they were instructed to take away sickness. They are always waiting and ready to heal us. We are happy that among us are those special few who remember how to use these plants for healing. With one mind, we send thanksgiving, love, and respect to the Medicines and to the Keepers of the Medicines.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We gather our minds together to send our greetings and our thanks to all the Animal life in the world, who walk about with us. They have many things to teach us as people. We are grateful that they continue to share their lives with us and pray that it will always be so. Let us put our minds together as one and send our thanks to the Animals.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We now turn our thoughts to the Trees. The Earth has many families of Trees, who have their own instructions and uses. Some provide us with shelter and shade, others with fruit, beauty, and other useful things. The Maple is the leader of the trees, to recognize its gift of Sugar to the people when they need it most. Many people of the world use a tree is a symbol of peace and strength. With one mind, we send our greetings and our thanks to the Tree life.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We put our minds together as one and thank all the Birds who move and fly about over our heads. The Creator gave them the gift of beautiful songs. Each day they remind us to enjoy and appreciate life. The Eagle was chosen to be their leader, and to watch over the world. To all the Birds — from the smallest to largest — we send our joyful greetings and our thanks.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We are thankful to the powers we know as the Four Winds. We hear their voices in the moving air as they refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help us to bring the change of seasons. From the four directions they come, bringing us messages and giving us strength. With one mind, we send our greetings in our thanks to the Four Winds.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

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Now we turn to the west, where our grandfathers, the Thunder Beings live. With lightning and thundering voices, they bring with them the water that renews life. We bring our minds together as one to send our greetings and our thanks to our grandfathers, the Thunderers.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We now send our greetings and our thanks to our eldest Brother, the Sun. Each day without fail he travels the sky from east to west, bringing the light of a new day. He is the source of all the fires of life. With one mind, we send our greetings and our thanks to our Brother, the Sun.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We put our minds together to give thanks to our oldest Grandmother, the Moon, who lights the nighttime sky. She is the leader of women all over the world, and she governs the movement of the ocean tides. By her changing face, we measure time, and it is the Moon who watches over the arrival of children here on Earth. With one mind, we send our greetings and our thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We give our thanks to the Stars, who are spread across the sky like jewels. We see them at night, helping the Moon to light the darkness, and bringing dew to the gardens and growing beings. When we travel at night, they guide us home. With our minds gathered together as one, we send our greetings and our thanks for the Stars.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We gather our minds together to greet and thank the enlightened Teachers who have come to help us throughout the ages. When we forget how to live in harmony, they remind us of the way we were instructed to live as people. With one mind, we send our greetings and our thanks to these caring Teachers.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

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Now we turn our thoughts to the Creator, the Great Spirit, and send our greetings and our thanks for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on Mother Earth. Let us pile up our thanks like a heap of flowers on a blanket. We will each take a corner and toss it high into the sky. So our thanks should be as rich as the gifts of the world that shower down upon us. For all the love that is around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named, it is not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send their greetings and their thanks in their own way.

Everyone: Now our minds are one.

<optional: AHO>

THE END

Note: The Thanksgiving Address is told in many ways by many people. This version is a mashup between the one printed in Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and the one found at <https://danceforallpeople.com/haudenosaunee-thanksgiving-address/> with a sprinkle of Elder Tom Porter's flair.