

# A Message from Chief Luther Standing Bear

The following is said to be a quote from Chief Luther Standing Bear, speaking of the (Sioux) Lakota tribe of the Western plains, now known as the Sioux:

The Lakota was a true naturalist—a lover of nature. He loved the Earth and all things of the Earth, the attachment growing with age. The old people came literally to love the soil and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the Earth [and the old people] liked to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred Earth. Their tipis were built upon the Earth and their altars were made of Earth. The birds that flew in the air came to rest upon the Earth and it was the final abiding place of all things that lived and grew. The soil was soothing, strengthening, cleansing, and healing.

That is why the Indian still sits upon the Earth instead of propping himself up and away from its life-giving forces. For him, to sit or lie upon the ground is to be able to think more deeply and to feel more keenly; he can see more clearly into the mysteries of life and come closer in kinship to other lives about him. Kinship with all creatures of the Earth, sky and water was a real and active principle. For the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them and so close did some of the Lakotas come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common language.

The old Lakota was wise. He knows that man's heart away from nature becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too. So he kept his youth close to its softening influence.

## Questions

1. What is the message of this speech?
2. What happens to Lakota people's feelings for the Earth as they grow older?
3. What kind of relationship does Chief Luther Standing Bear say we should have with animals?
4. What kinds of feelings and thoughts did being in touch with the Earth provide the Lakota people?
5. What did the Lakota think happened to a person's heart if he or she was out of touch with nature?
6. How did the Lakota teach their young to respect other people?