



# ACCSS Associated Chaplains in California State Service

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Driving along a dusty road on the Rez on my way to join family and friends at our summer ceremonies, I was reminded of all the different places I've been in my life and those that have shared my life with in some way. Today, I can say that my life is one that I am proud of. I am happy and content with my life today. But you see, as a Native American man life hasn't always been easy. I grew up in dusty, isolated, rocky places with little good except for the love of family, the beauty of the trees, fresh air and clean water. By the time I was young boy of six or seven I was well aware of the effect hundreds of years of historical trauma has had on my people. Alcoholism, addiction, hate, depression, broken families surrounded me. As a young man, I struggled with finding my place between Native and non-Native worlds that often felt violent and confusing.

In Native culture, we are brought up understanding our connection with everybody and everything. We live with a long history of the people and places that surround us. There is a phrase and central concept that describes this idea of living with this history and sense of belonging. In Shoshone we say "*Oyondusuk Nia Nanewe nuk*", or "All My Relations" as a way of speaking about this way of living with our history, with our cultural and spiritual traditions, with the generations past, present and future, with the hard and difficult as well as with all that is strong, healthy and happy.

This healing journey of making relations with life starts with making peace with our past. Our collective past and our personal past. As I said, not much has come easy for me, and maybe it's not supposed to be easy. Our past drives us. For some, the past can drive them to destructive ways of living, to shame and guilt, drive them into isolation and towards Death. For others, the past can lead them to wellness, to valuing themselves and their families, their communities. It can drive them towards Life. Maybe having to work hard in life helps us to understand what is most important. Maybe those difficult and rocky places are meant to shape us for the work that we are called to do in life.

In my mind, I remember all of those who helped guide me. Those who took the lessons life offered them and made wisdom from them and then made the time to share that understanding with me. I think about where would I be without those spiritual teachers who helped me understand a direction for my life and turn my past into something positive and taught me how to be of help to my people and others in need. A big part of the wisdom my elders shared with me came in the way of my Shoshone language, culture, ceremonies, and spirituality. I did not understand as I was learning that as those elders took time to share with me, a part of me was healing and while another part of me was learning to share our spiritual ways.

Native elders say that in the beginning of time, all of the animals, the birds, the trees, the water and human beings were given instructions by the Creator on how to live and how to live together so that there would be peace and harmony, health and happiness between all of our relations. These instructions were placed inside of each of us and inside of our language, culture, and spiritual traditions. We refer to these as our "original instructions". Somewhere along the way, human beings were the only

ones that forgot these original instructions. Some say it's because of the trauma all people experienced long ago. Elders say that we have forgotten who we are and our place within the sacred circle. But the memory lives inside us and when we speak our language and sing our songs to one another, we remember. All of creation remembers and can be restored to live in good health and happiness once again.

I thank all of those that have come into my life and helped me understand my place in the sacred circle and in life. As a Native man, my culture and spirituality gives me purpose and direction. It is by remembering my relationship with our earth, our plants, our sacred medicines, our healing waters, our families, our women and children -- All of Our Relations -- that I have found health and happiness. On this Red Road, through ceremony, culture, and song I remind myself daily to stay humble with all things, to remember those original instructions.

As I finish this writing, I think of all of the things that I would like to do this fall and winter; write my language books, travel to see family and friends, attend ceremonies in other places. I think of the people I will see there, those that I've known and those that I have never met and the conversations we will share together. It is a good way of making relations with ourselves and each other. And then I laugh to myself as I am reminded of a conversation with one of my teachers, an old Lakota man. We were sitting under the shade of a tree, just off a dusty road, drinking some water and just trying to keep the summer heat off of us when he turned to me and said, "You know how to make God laugh?" I answered that I didn't know and looked at him. With a grin as bright and wide as his white cowboy hat he said, "Just tell him your plans!". Then we laughed hard together. It was just a few years after that he went on to the spirit world. I treasure that moment with him and that oh-so-simple but important life lesson.

With humble prayers and in service, I wish you and yours many blessed memories and a safe journey,

*Oyondusuk Nia Nanewe nuk " All My Relations"*

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