

# **Are You Worthy?**

**by Robert Francis**

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In the Chickamauga Cherokee creation story, Duck, Otter and Beaver all fail in their attempts to retrieve mud from the bottom of the ocean. Do you think any of these may have felt unworthy? Although Grandma Turtle was first to offer to dive for the mud, for a long time she was prevented from doing so, as everyone thought her too old to make the attempt. Do you think Grandma Turtle may have felt unworthy? After Creator took the mud which Grandma Turtle gave her life to obtain and made a whole continent with it, Grandpa Buzzard attempted to dry the land with his great wings. Grandpa Buzzard was told to stop, since the wind of his great wings was turning everything into deep valleys and high mountains. Do you think Grandpa Buzzard may have felt unworthy? I don't know for sure, but I don't think any of these felt the least bit unworthy. I don't think anyone had come along yet with a message of unworthiness.

Many of us grew up with messages of unworthiness – perhaps at home, probably at school, most definitely in Sunday school or church.

One aspect of the dualistic thinking imported from Europe is the idea of a worthy Creator and an unworthy creation. Within this paradigm, we must always look outside ourselves for worthiness.

But wait; if we believe ourselves unworthy, will we not act on that belief? Will we not be more apt to behave unworthily? If we believe others to be unworthy, or worthy only of hell-fire, will we not act on that belief? Will we not be more apt to treat others badly?

Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). While this saying contains what may be understood as an imperfect metaphor of Creator as king, even so, we should be able to get the point. You may find that which is of great value, even relatedness with Creator, by looking within. You are worthy.

Indigenous people have always understood the essential worthiness of all that is. Everything has a purpose. There are no essentially unworthy plants, no essentially unworthy animals and no essentially unworthy human beings. Even if we speak sometimes of good and bad spirits, the same rule applies to them. Some may choose to act unworthily, but all are essentially worthy. In the indigenous way of understanding, even our enemies in a war are worthy. It is thought that if I belittle my enemy, I belittle myself. Consider the scalping practices of American Indian people. Europeans introduced the practice of scalp-taking for money or bounties to be received, but truthfully, most of us had scalping traditions before the arrival of Europeans. When a Cherokee scalped a fallen enemy, often the scalp was brought back, and an adoption ceremony was performed for it. The purpose was to bring some of the essence of that worthy enemy back to the people.

Or, consider gift giving practices among American Indian peoples. I have heard that in some tribes, there is no word for “thank you.” I don't know this for sure. In

Cherokee we say “Wa-do,” and the person who gave the gift says “Ho-wa.” But, Ho-wa doesn’t mean “You’re welcome.” Ho-wa means “OK.” This is to say, it’s OK; it’s alright; it is as it should be. You receive a gift because you are worthy to receive a gift.

You are worthy; act accordingly. Others are worthy; treat them as such. To think of yourself or others as unworthy is an insult to Creator who made all.