

Ancestors

1 We are the ancestors of our grandchildren's children. We look after them, just as our ancestors look after us. We aren't here for ourselves. We are here for each other and for the children of our grandchildren. **Roy Sesana**

2 Some people are your relatives but others are your ancestors, and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors. You create yourself out of those values. **Ralph Ellison**

3 The proper time to influence the character of a child is about a hundred years before he is born.

William Ralph Inge

4 "Ancestry" in our culture implies chromosomal connection; ancestors are those humans from whom I have inherited my body tissues. Biogenetics replaces the spirit world.

In other societies an ancestor could be a tree, a bear, a salmon, a member of the dead, a spirit in a dream, a special spooky place. These may be addressed as "Ancestor" and an altar home built for them, away from the home you inhabit. Ancestors are not bound to human bodies and certainly not confined to physical antecedents whose descent into your sphere allowed only via your natural family.

— **James Hillman, The Soul's Code**

5 I try to practice in a way that allows me to touch my blood ancestors and my spiritual ancestors every day. Whenever I feel sad or a little fragile, I invoke their presence for support, and they never fail to be there.

— **Thich Nhat Hanh, Living Buddha, Living Christ**

6 Our ancestors do not dwell in the past, they dwell inside our brains as well as in every cell of our bodies. By giving our predecessors a place of honor in our hearts, we are acknowledging the gifts that have been given to us by them. No matter what definition you choose to identify your ancestors, finding ways to honor them can empower that place in yourself where your spirit dwells.

— **Denise Linn, Sacred Legacies**

7 The Five Awarenesses

These verses can be used by anyone at anytime as a practice to help safeguard our relationships. Many people have used them in weddings and commitment ceremonies and some couples like to recite them together weekly. If you have a bell, you can invite it to sound after you recite each verse. Breathe in and out a few times in silence before going on to the next one.

1. We are aware that all generations of our ancestors and all future generations are present in us.
2. We are aware of the expectations that our ancestors, our children, and their children have of us.
3. We are aware that our joy, peace, freedom, and harmony are the joy, peace, freedom, and harmony of our ancestors, our children, and their children.
4. We are aware that understanding is the very foundation of love.
5. We are aware that blaming and arguing can never help us and only create a wider gap between us; that only understanding, trust, and love can help us change and grow."

--Thich Nhat Hanh

8 I think any black woman is a queen. It's just, do you know it? Do you see it in yourself? Do you recognize it, do you abide by that, do you define yourself as that? Based on who we are and what we've been through and how we survive and where we stand, we are on kind of sacred ground. We stand on the backs of our ancestors. **Ana DuVernay**

9 Someone accompanies every soul from the other side when it enters this place. Usually it is an ancestor with whom that child shares traits and gifts. **Joy Harjo**

10 What I call my 'self' now is hardly a person at all. It's mainly a meeting place for various natural forces, desires, and fears, etcetera, some of which come from my ancestors, and some from my education, some perhaps from devils. The self you were really intended to be is something that lives not from nature but from God. **C. S. Lewis**

11 There were times, especially when I was traveling for 'Eat, Pray, Love,' when, I swear to God, I would feel this weight of my female ancestors, all those Swedish farmwives from beyond the grave who were like, 'Go! Go to Naples! Eat more pizza! Go to India, ride an elephant! Do it! Swim in the Indian Ocean. Read those books. Learn a language.' **Elizabeth Gilbert**

12 Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to that arrogant oligarchy who merely happen to be walking around. **G.K. Chesterton**

13 I went to Cork, Ireland, and stood on the dock some of my ancestors had left from. I felt their ghosts gather round me, and I cried to imagine what it must have felt like - leaving that beautiful land and those beloved people, knowing it was forever. **Luanne Rice**

14 **Remember**

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
origin of this universe.
Remember you are all people and all people
are you.
Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.
Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

Joy Harjo from her collection, *She Had Some Horses* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.)

For Reflection and Discussion

1 Read the poem, "Remember" out loud--either by yourself or as a group taking turns reading the verses. Reflect and or discuss what the poem brought up for you.

2 Who do you claim as ancestors? How important are they in your life?

3 Are you and any of your ancestors "in relationship"? How does it work?

4 How does your experience at All Souls relate to your understanding of ancestors and how they show up in your life?

---Mary Beth Hatem, for covenant groups at All Souls, Unitarian