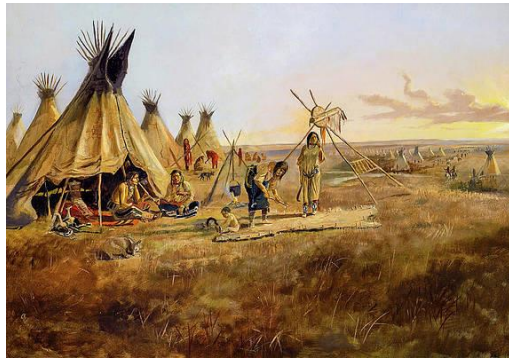


## Buffalo Teachings

“The Blackfoot had lived with the buffalo for thousands of years, and the buffalo were fully integrated into all aspects of the lives of the Blackfoot peoples. There was and continues to be a profound reverence for the buffalo”. Stories beginning in 1764 to as recent as 1924 have been illustrated on buffalo hides that depict the decimation of the buffalo on Blackfoot territory. The Blackfoot people were highly dependent on the buffalo as a way of life and survival. The buffalo fed, clothed, sheltered, and provided medicines for the Blackfoot people [1].



The Blackfoot people practiced a balanced, or holistic way of living that maintained and respected the natural forces within the environment and cosmos. Their cultural activities, beliefs, motivation, and education were spiritually based among inter-dependent relationships within the universe that were held in ceremonies and stories [2].

*From: Blackfoot Tribe Art/Fine Art America*

The land and environment each tribe lived amongst was a significant component to their livelihood as indigenous people were connected to everything; the plants, the animals, the land, and the sky. The connection was spiritual as everything was a gift from their Creator and was recognized through ceremonies [2].

The indiscriminate killing by European settlers was a significant course of events that profoundly affected the Blackfoot with a complete upheaval of their lives. “The buffalo are known to have been integral to the well-being of the land in Blackfoot regions and a re-introduction of the buffalo would rejuvenate the health and spirit of the land and the people” [1].

“Tribes around Arlene Montana saw the newcomers arrive decimating the buffalo herds. President Roosevelt declared the herd’s genetics would be preserved in Elk Island National Park in Montana to be later, transferred back into Canada. They decided to keep about 15 calves to keep the buffalo genes original. One of the buffalo to this day has maintained its original genetic code. Most bison today have mixed genetics with cattle. Very few are traditional bison. Nutritionally, bison are known to have less fat and more healthy essential fatty acids than



mixed bison or cattle. We made bone broth to develop our immune systems, especially for women expecting a child” [3].

“We didn’t have the health issues of Diabetes and other medical ailments with our traditional diet that is commonly seen today from eating too many processed foods. Everything we ate came naturally from the land.



The Blackfoot people of the Blood reserve are one of the tribes who haven’t lost traditional teachings” [3].

### Return of the Buffalo

Descendants of the original buffalo herd have been preserved for over 100 years and are now returning back to Canada to the Blackfoot reservation. “Blessings and ceremonies have been held along the route back to Canada and the buffalo have been released to roam” [4].



Blackfoot elders have placed great importance to the revitalization of the health of the buffalo and the land but also the spiritual connections of the buffalo with the Blackfoot people. “We are the buffalo, we are the **Inniwa**. We don’t just want them we need them to be strong again. Because we had our ties severed, we need to include important healing elements when they return to us”. Revitalization will include respect and harvesting of the buffalo will be again tied to songs and sweats. Every process needs to be performed correctly as it was done many years ago “based on many treaties where everyone has a role to play”. “It is the role of our young mothers to pass on the values through cultural practices to have the deep connection with the buffalo, the **Inniwa**. Their role is vital to bringing back the buffalo” [5].





After an elder says a prayer, acknowledgement is shown by taking your right hand and placing over your heart and saying, “hey” [3].



*From: Siksika knowledge program, Old Sun community college*

## References

1. The Land, the Buffalo and the Blackfoot. Retrieved online June 2022 from: <https://enlivenedlearning.com/2012/11/02/the-land-the-buffalo-and-the-blackfoot/#>
2. Bastein, B. (2004). *Blackfoot ways of knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitstapi*. Jurgen W. Kremer (Ed.) and Duane Mistaken Chief (language consultant). University of Calgary Press. Calgary, AB. [www.uofcpress.com](http://www.uofcpress.com).
3. Fox, Dan (2022). Blackfoot Teachings, Indigenous Peoples Day, Lethbridge, Alberta.
4. Blackfeet tribe make the return of the buffalo a reality. Retrieved online July 2022 from: [Blackfeet Tribe make return of buffalo a reality \(kpax.com\)](https://www.kpax.com/news/blackfeet-tribe-make-return-of-buffalo-a-reality/).
5. Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal personnel in partnership with the American Bison Society. (2014). Innii Initiative: “Blackfoot and Buffalo” – Ecosystem Restoration and Cultural Repatriation.

