

Wičáŋǰpi Iyótaŋ Wiŋ (Autumn Cavender-Wilson):

[Dakota introduction]

My name in English is Autumn Cavender-Wilson. In Dakota my name is Wičáŋǰpi Iyótaŋ Wiŋ. I'm Wahpetuwan Dakota from Pezihutazizi K'api Makoce or the land where they dig for the yellow medicine, which is a place on the Minnesota River at the junction of the Minnesota and Yellow Medicine rivers here in Southwestern Minnesota. I'm a wife, I'm a mother and I'm a midwife.

As Native people being inherently linked to land base, we can determine what the health of the population is going to be, by looking at the health of that particular location and surrounding. And so, what does it mean when the entirety of the landscape is row cropped? What does it mean when the entirety of the landscape has pesticides poured all over it? What does it mean when the water table has been completely ravaged and destroyed, when we're having to deal with massive droughts?

I was even learning recently about cornfields, and the ways in which cornfields trap humidity, in such a way that forests simply don't. Which means bigger electrical storms, because of these rising humidity levels. Which then creates, again, more violent weather patterns, that then wreak havoc, even more so than is natural, on the landscape itself.

If we look at the health of water, less as something distant from us, and instead as a symptom of our own health issue, I've hoped that that may trigger people into a slightly more empathetic response. It's something that's so deeply inherent to our lifestyle, and to our overarching health in general, which then leads directly to midwifery.

If we hold that water is our first medicine, as midwives, one of the unique positions that we have is monitoring of water. We monitor water in so many different ways. Water as blood, water as urine, water as vomit, and water as amniotic fluid. We know very much what it means when water becomes poisoned, when it becomes contaminated. And the very real health ramifications of what poisoned water are. It's just simply something we as humans, and we as animals living in the space, can't afford. We can't afford poisoned water because it will literally mean our end, and the sickness of our children.