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THE  
WAYS OF  
KNOWING  
GUIDE







ways of knowing partnership  
**TURTLE ISLAND**  
conservation

# THE WAYS OF KNOWING GUIDE



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Toronto Zoo Ways of Knowing Partnership Turtle Island Conservation programme would like to acknowledge with infinite gratitude and respect all First Nation Elders, First Nation community members, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, advisory group members, talking circle participants, Friendship centers, funding partners, authors, previous programme coordinators & summer students, Toronto Zoo staff and those committed to improving all that exists in creation for generations to come! Your generous contributions, passionate care & commitment, endless patience and guidance has brought the Ways of Knowing Guide to life. Chi Miigwetch, Nia:wen Kowa!

There are many contributors to this guide who have offered their various gifts with “good hearts and good minds in a good way”. Devon Acker, Stephanie Allen, June Alison, Jeff Beaver, Nona Benedict, Derrick Bressette, Rachel BigCanoe, Suzanne Brant, Angie Brown, Jeff Burnham, Carol Ann Budd, Faelynne Cassidy, Jennifer Chambers, Michael Soo-Chan, Jane Chartrand, Eileen (Sam) Conroy, Alan Corbiere, Jackie Moore-Daigle, Melissa Deschenes, Vern Douglas, Shelley Essauce, Barbara Filion, Kate Freeman, Deanna Fry, David General, Bernice Gordon, Sharon Goulais, Jeremy Green, Stephen Green, Andrea Harquail, Callie Hill, Janice Hill, Renee Thomas-Hill, Johna Hupfield, Clint Jacobs, Isabel Jacobs, Bernena Johnson, Bob Johnson, Ima Johnson, Joanne

Kayekayash, Sam Kewaquedo, Dr. Cecil King, Chance King, Clint King, Joyce King, Ken King, Stewart King, Marcel Labelle, Dr. Lynn Lavallee, Dr. Henry Lickers, Dr. Dan Longboat, Jan Longboat, Josephine Mandamin, Edna Manitowabi, Candace Maracle, Mae Maracle, Tracey Maracle, Benny Michaud, Brenda Michaud, Wesley Miller, Louise McDonald, Ian McIntosh, Deb McGregor, Tania Morais, Paul Nahdee, Betty Naticoke, Nancy Noganosh, Esther Osche, Catherine Pawis, Tracey Pawis, Audrey Pawis, Carlene Partridge, Carol Pegahmagabow, Faith Pegahmagabow, Jocelyne Pelletier, Tyler Pennock, Mark Phillips, Wendy Phillips, Peggy Pitawanikwaat, Sandra Porter, Corrina Rae, Pazhe Rice, Eileen (Soda) Rice, Denise Restoule, Randy Restoule, Kevin Rose, Daniela Rambaldini, Stephanie Roy, Sheila Saikkonen, Garry Sault, Margaret Sault, Nicole Shawana, Leslie Spencer, Victoria Snable, Anne M. Solomon, Bob Stevenson, Verna Stevens, Doreen Stevens, Steve Styers, Jennifer Taback, Audrey Tabobandung, Oliver Tabobandung, Raymond Tabobandung, Tina Tabobandung, Trevor Tabobandung, Lynzii Taibossigai, Merritt Taylor, Steve Teekens, Gloria Thomas, Jo-Anne Thomas, Yvonne Thomas, Isadore Toulouse, Joyce Tabobandung, Leslie Varady, Lisa Webster, Aaron Wheatley, Donna Wheatley, Kim Wheatley, Mary Kate Whibbs, Michael White, Doug Williams, David Willow, Dr. Shirley Williams, Ronnie Wakegegig, Avtel Media, Gryphon Sign Works,







Design de Plume, Mizwe Biik, Kawenniio/Gaweniyo Language Preservation Project. We apologize for any oversights.

Special mention to our First Nation authors whose personal works paved that good red road of preparation and planted seeds of wisdom for those yet to come; Joseph Bruchac, Tom Porter, Basil Johnston, Edward Benton –Banai, Joseph McClellan, Leanne Simpson, Gregory Cajete, Rupert Ross, J. Graveline, J. Cruikshank, Eileen (Sam) Conroy, Thomas Alcoze.

This guide has been compiled by Nicole Bell (Anishinaabe Kwe, Bear Clan) M.Ed., Ph.D. You are the epitome of what a role model can be and we are grateful for your patient guidance and skilled expertise! Chi Miigwetch Anishinaabe Kwe!!

Writing and editing support by Eileen (Sam) Conroy.

Original photographs, drawings & artwork by Design de Plume. By special permission from Michael and Melanie Robinson Poet and the Song poem/image pg 42,43.

Production and printing by Gage.

This guide was made possible through the generous financial assistance of the Toronto Zoo, The Government of Canada Aboriginal Funds for Species at Risk and through a

contribution from the Museums Assistance Program, Department of Canadian Heritage.

The Aboriginal Funds for Species at Risk (AFSAR) was established in 2004 as an important element of the implementation of the Species at Risk Act (SARA). The protection of species at risk in Canada depends upon a meaningful collaboration with Aboriginal people and organizations in the implementation of programs under SARA. The act recognizes the role that Aboriginal people play in wildlife conservation and requires that Aboriginal traditional knowledge be taken into account when assessments of which species are at risk are carried out and when protection and recovery measures are developed and implemented. Two funds are part of the Aboriginal Funds for Species at Risk: the Aboriginal Capacity Building Fund (ACBF) and the Aboriginal Critical Habitat Protections Fund (ACHPF).

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Citation for this document:

Bell, N., E. Conroy, K.Wheatley, B. Michaud, C. Maracle, J. Pelletier, B.Filion, B. Johnson, 2010.

# FORWARD

The Ways of Knowing Partnership Turtle Island Conservation programme is a community mandated initiative that shares the hopes and goals of our First Nation partners in our commitment to the preservation of biodiversity and wild life and wild places for those yet to come. We were asked to share the reason for our development of this book. It is our hope that in that *good way with good hearts and minds* we have provided an insight to the ways of knowing of First Nations people, that affirms the wisdom of our Elders, utilizing fundamental truths and principals that have been adhered to for time immemorial.

Indigenous knowledge presents a rich fabric of knowledge and wisdom that relates directly to environmental stewardship, preservation and enhancement of biological diversity by the First Peoples of Turtle Island (North America). There is an inseparable relationship between people, land and water. This unique relationship is fundamental to cultural and spiritual beliefs held by First Nations people. Traditional Knowledge is passed down from our ancestors and teaches us how to live in harmony with nature thereby ensuring the same opportunity for future generations. This transfer of knowledge affirms that each of us is an important part of the cycle of nature connected to each other and all living things.

We are stewards of the land on which we live knowing that our health as a people is intricately tied to the health of the planet upon which we live. We must revitalize the teachings our ancestors left and share our

traditional knowledge within our nations and with those around us. One of the common ways teachings are conveyed is through stories and parables. These are time honoured modes of knowledge transmission that reinforce our inextricable connections to all of creation. The result continues to shape Aboriginal values, beliefs and stories.

It is time to share the wisdom of our Elders imparting Traditional Knowledge for future generations who will be inspired by these fundamental teachings. This will help to guide our continued relationship with our environment towards one of respect and appreciation that is meaningful in that *good way* as provided by our Creator's original instructions.

As you find ways to adopt the ancient fundamental truths and principals from our wisdom keepers, within your own lives, remember to offer respect for all those who have gone on before us and those yet to come. Each one of us holds the responsibility to share and make a difference!

All my relations,

*Misheeken n'dodem, Shkode Neegan Wawaskone,  
Shawanaga n'doonji Anishinaabe Kwe n'dow.*

Kim Wheatley, Turtle Clan, Shawanaga First Nation  
Baamaampii Gwaabmiin!









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# THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Boozhoo, She:kon, Welcome to the Ways of Knowing Guide. This guide is a journey of Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee traditional knowledge reflected through worldview, values, beliefs and stories that speak to the fundamental principle of ensuring sustainable relationships with the land. While there are many Indigenous nations in Canada, this guide focuses on the knowledge of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee nations as the shared caretakers of the Great Lakes area. However, we must not forget that at one point in our history all of this knowledge, just as Indigenous people believed the land to be, was considered communal. The intention is that the value of the information found within this guide will be beneficial for all people who read it, and a respect for different ways of knowing will be honoured.

To Indigenous people “the land gave forth food in abundance; it also unfolded whatever men and women needed to understand to know about life and being. Every day, every season, every year something

takes place that reflects some aspect of our world, our existence, our conduct, and our destiny. This is birth, growth, maturation, degeneration, death, regeneration and transformation. What a man or a woman gleans that adds to his or her understanding is revelation. The earth holds nothing back from those who open up their senses. Some glean more for their observations, others less, but each one in proportion to his talents. What one person understands of what he or she hears is not to be belittled, demeaned, or ridiculed. For how is anyone to know for certain that he or she is right and another, wrong? And if such a person were to say that another is wrong, it would be arrogant. Where differences in opinion occurred, men and women said the Creator has given me a different understanding”.<sup>1</sup>

The host of this journey is the Turtle Island Conservation Programme located at the Toronto Zoo. The Ways of Knowing Partnership Turtle Island Conservation (TIC) programme shares the hopes and

<sup>1</sup> Pg 148 in *Honour Earth Mother* by Basil Johnston, published by Kegdonce Press, 2003.

goals of their First Nation partners in their commitment to the preservation of wild life and wild places for those yet to come. The Turtle Island Conservation programme partners with First Nation communities to incorporate Traditional Knowledge into turtle and wetland conservation programming. The intention of this partnership is to bring together Keepers of Traditional Knowledge, Elders, First Nations community members and Turtle Island Conservation team members to support community cultural and natural history priorities incorporating Traditional Knowledge while building awareness with non-Aboriginal people. Too often, Aboriginal cultural knowledge has been misused from communities. In the spirit of reciprocity, a principle that is at the root of Aboriginal philosophies, TIC aims to give back to partner communities by respecting all the knowledge contained within a community which remains with all partnering communities.

Turtle Island Conservation's vision is to foster and guide communities for generations to come. Their mission is to develop ways of knowing partnerships. They have five objectives that assist in guiding their partnerships:

1. To foster respect for self, community, Mother Earth and the Creator;
2. To recognize and record significant landscapes valued by First Nations communities;
3. To integrate traditional ways of knowing with western science to monitor, protect, respect and restore landscapes;
4. To integrate language, art and crafts to sustain traditional ways of knowing and living;
5. To facilitate understanding of diversity of First Nation culture and ways of knowing among non-Aboriginals.

TIC honours the inter-dependence of all creatures and places; their relationships and responsibilities; the instructions for turtles and water creatures and the important places of the land, mind and spirit. Through interaction and dialogue, each community identifies their own unique cultural and natural history priorities for mapping and valuing special places, species, objects and processes. Their goal is to ensure the survival of creation that provides teachings and ways of knowing to guide future generations in restoring and sharing knowledge to maintain the health of the landscapes that shape and sustain them.

The importance of species preservation and biodiversity is at a critical point in history. Today's generations have never seen our lands with the abundance our ancestors knew. Never has the world experienced such a dramatic decline of plant and animal life as we have seen in the last 100 years. Species at Risk (SAR) lists are growing at an alarming rate. A "species at risk" is any naturally-occurring plant or animal in danger of extinction or of disappearing.

Traditional Knowledge can inform recovery practices and preservation of biodiversity. This knowledge has existed since the beginning of time and connects First Nations to their vast landscapes and all the biodiversity contained therein. The First Nation worldview recognizes all that exists on Mother Earth reinforcing the significance of what has and will continue to sustain them. By continuing to practice the value of respect, relationship

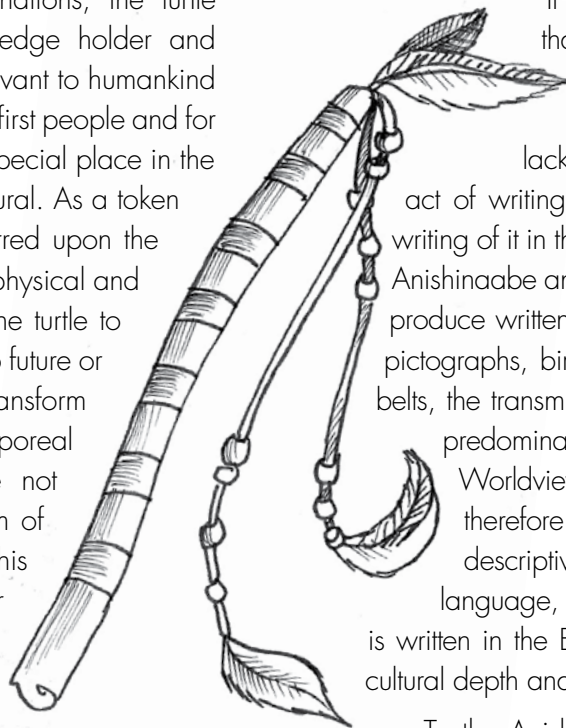


and responsibility Traditional Knowledge meaningfully contributes to the continued existence of all plants, animals, lands and waters for generations to come the way First Nation communities continue to practice and teach biodiversity preservation.

The guide of this journey is the turtle. To the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee nations, the turtle is spiritually significant as a knowledge holder and teacher. "The turtle is revered as a servant to humankind by offering its back as a haven for the first people and for the re-creation of the world. It has a special place in the realm of the natural and the supernatural. As a token of appreciation, the ancestors conferred upon the turtle unique powers transcending its physical and spatial scope and being, enabling the turtle to transgress time periods from present to future or to the past and back again; and to transform its being from its physical to an incorporeal nature. As such the turtle became not only a symbol but the actual medium of communication between beings of this world and time and beings of another world and dimension of time".<sup>2</sup> As such the turtle is recognized as an eternal time keeper using the plates of its shell to record the thirteen moons of the year and the twenty-eight day lunar cycle.

To the Haudenosaunee people "the turtle rattle represents the turtle in their Creation Story. The woman who came from another planet was put on the middle of the turtle. And that is what made life. That is why the turtle is important in the ceremonies. So when they shake the turtle rattle, Mother Earth is shaking and is becoming

conscious of life. That is her responsibility. So when the rattle is shaken the world is shaking and life is starting to loosen up and be born".<sup>3</sup> It is Turtle Island Conservation's hope that this guide, carried on the back of the turtle, will awaken mutual understanding of the earth's condition and action toward her re-birth.



It must be acknowledged that meaning and feeling of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee cultures is lacking in this guide first by the very act of writing it down, and second by the writing of it in the English language. While the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee nations did produce written records, such as petroglyphs, pictographs, birch bark scrolls, and wampum belts, the transmission of their cultures occurred predominantly through oral tradition. Worldview, values, and beliefs were therefore embedded within their very descriptive languages. The English language, and therefore this guide which is written in the English language, is lacking in cultural depth and understanding.

To the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people, "the earth is our book; the days its pages; the seasons, paragraphs; the years, chapters. The earth is a book, alive with events that occur over and over for our benefit. Mother Earth has formed our beliefs, attitudes, insights, outlooks, values and institutions. We owe the earth our all, more than we can take in, more than we can say. We can never return anything but our

<sup>2</sup> Pg. 171 in *Ojibway Heritage* by Basil Johnston, published by McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

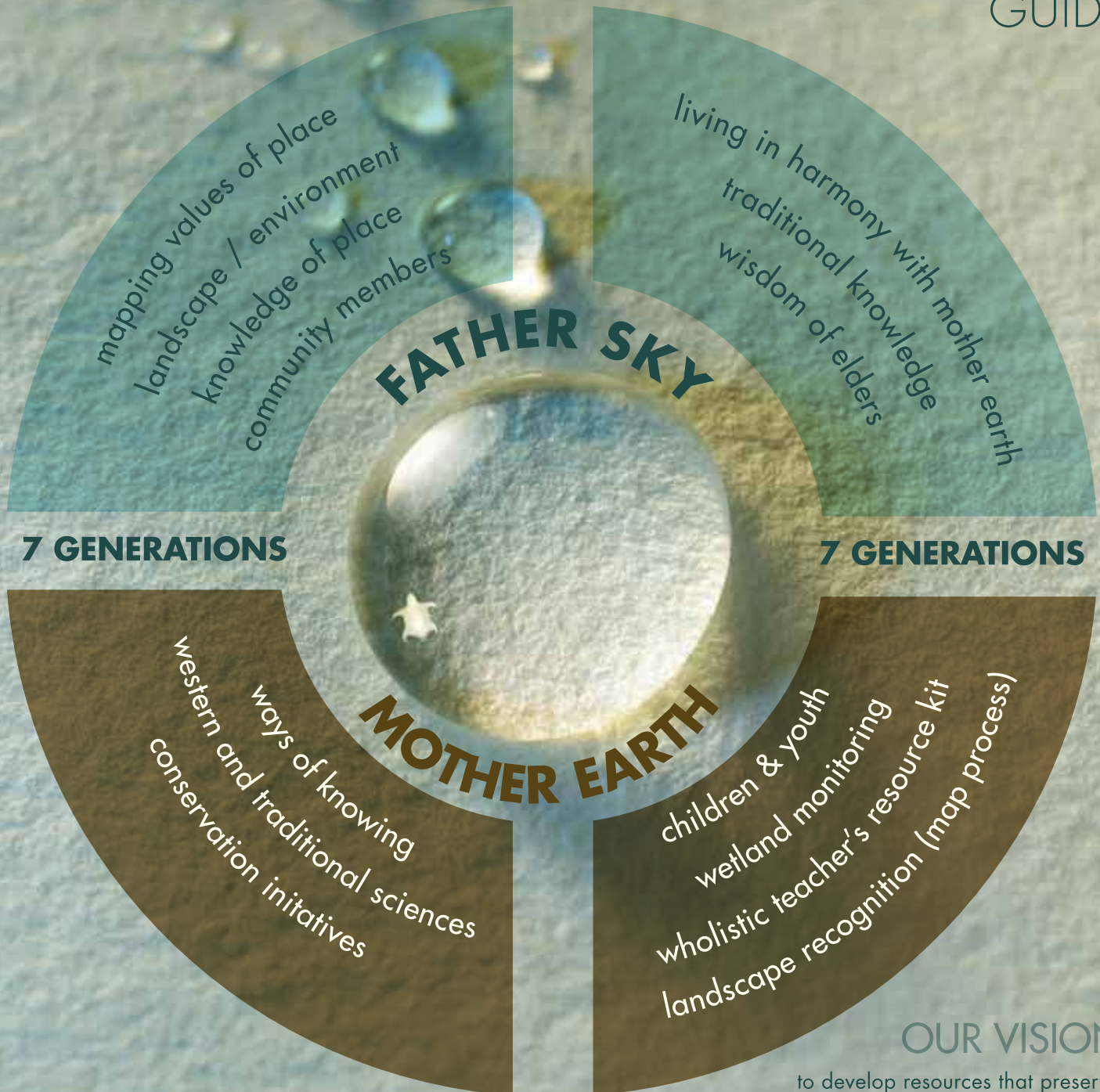
<sup>3</sup> Pg. 171 in *And Grandma Said...Iroquois Teachings as passed down through the oral tradition* by Tom Porter, published by Xlibris, 2008.

the medicine wheel is a powerful teaching tool that has been used since time immemorial by Aboriginal nations to express the interconnections between all things

# TURTLE ISLAND

## WAYS OF KNOWING

### GUIDE



## OUR OBJECTIVES

1. To foster respect for self, community, Mother Earth, and the Creator.
2. To recognize and record significant landscapes valued by First Nations communities.
3. To integrate traditional ways of knowing with western science to monitor, protect, respect and restore landscapes.
4. To integrate language, art, and crafts to sustain traditional ways of knowing and living.
5. To facilitate understanding of diversity of First Nation culture and ways of knowing among non-Aboriginals.

## OUR VISION

to develop resources that preserve and promote traditional knowledge as a tool for conservation

respect and thanksgiving.”<sup>4</sup> “Through the high places and the low, the Creator shows us, speaks to us. Our ancestors watched and listened. The land was their book. The land has given us our understandings, beliefs, perceptions, laws, customs. It has bent and shaped our notions of human nature, conduct and Great Laws. And our ancestors tried to abide by those laws. The land has given us everything. It is more than a book”.<sup>5</sup>

To assist with the language limitation, two attempts have been made to honour the oral tradition. First, Elders’ voices are used throughout to share cultural knowledge. Second, traditional stories are used to transmit cultural understanding. The use of Elders’ voice and storytelling to position a viewpoint is a deliberate act in an attempt to accomplish the goal of this guide – to come to an understanding of Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee worldview and values in relation to the land and how they can be implemented into ensuring sustainable relationships with it.

<sup>6</sup>This Ways of Knowing Guide is organized using four foundational themes embodied in various oral teachings and traditions of Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee cultures. **Respect, relationship, reciprocity and responsibility** are concepts that form the foundation of Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee ceremonies, life-ways, ways of being, systems of governance and worldviews. They are at the core of how Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people relate to the natural world and to each other. Although these concepts are discussed separately here, in reality they are fully integrated into ways of knowing and daily life. One cannot live in a respectful way without tending to one’s responsibilities. One cannot have a relationship or interact with the land in a good or respectful way without reciprocity. All four concepts are interdependent and connected in Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee ways of knowing.

In the first section, Creation/Recreation stories are used to reveal the importance of respect as a foundation for building healthy ways of interacting with each other and the world around us. These stories provide Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples with the original instructions for how to relate to all aspects of creation in a healthy and good way.

4 Pg v in *Honour Earth Mother* by Basil Johnston, published by Kegeonce Press, 2003.

5 Pg xi in *Honour Earth Mother* by Basil Johnston, published by Kegeonce Press, 2003.

6 Written by Leanne Simpson, 2010.

*Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples understand respect as a reverence for the diversity of life and peoples, for different ways of knowing, and for different ways of being in the world. Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee families model and mirror respectful interactions with the land and its gifts so their children will learn to hold the natural world in high esteem and recognize the responsibilities they carry as part of creation. This also encompasses respect for one’s self, family, community and nation. Living life in a respectful manner from the perspectives of the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee means living a life full of humility, wisdom, love, courage, honesty, truth and respect.*

*The second section deepens our understandings of relationships by discussing how the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Anishinaabe Nation related to each other as sovereign nations through those original instructions and as demonstrated in their diplomacy towards one another. These international relationships embody the same principles as other relationships – respect, responsibility and reciprocity, and they set the course for Indigenous visions of sharing, coexistence and sovereignty.*

*The third section focuses on reciprocity, which is critical in maintaining healthy and balanced relationships, and reciprocity is a responsibility we all have to our families, clans, communities, our nations and the natural world. “Giving back” in addition to “giving up” promotes sustainability. In terms of our ways of knowing, reciprocity promotes personal relationships with Knowledge Holders that are nurtured over long periods of time. Rooted in our spiritual foundations, and encoded in our languages, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee ways of knowing rely on good relationships between Knowledge Holders and Knowledge Learners for accurate knowledge transmission.*

*The final section of this guide discusses our responsibilities in working together, using all of the knowledge systems available to us to promote diversity, sustainability, and good relationships with all of the aspects of creation. Many Indigenous cultures believe that now is a critical time for all of humanity. If we all make a conscious choice to work together for the protection of our mother the earth, we can ensure good lives for future generations, and conversely our teachings also warn that if we do not seize this opportunity, that imbalance and disrespect will prevail.*





# RESPECT - THE WORDS THAT COME BEFORE ALL ELSE

## HAUDENOSAUNEE OPENING ADDRESS<sup>7</sup>

We always begin with the Thanksgiving Address. The Iroquois nations, when they have meetings or they have ceremonies or they have social dances or any big thing, always do what they call Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen. In English, some people call it the Opening Prayer, probably for lack of a better way to say it. Some people call it the Thanksgiving Address. Others call it the Greetings. But in my language, Mohawk, this is what we call it - Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen. A more

literal translation would be what we say before we do anything important.

It starts this way:

Our Creator made the whole world, the whole universe. And he made everything that grows, every animal and every bird and every kind of water – everything. And when he finished that, then the last ones he made were the human beings. In fact, of all of the human beings, our elder people say the Aboriginal people were the very last ones to get made. And then

<sup>7</sup> pg. 8-26 in *And Grandma Said...Iroquois Teachings as passed down through the oral tradition* by Tom Porter, published by Xlibris, 2008.

he put us here on this earth. And then when he put us here, he didn't just throw us here and say, "You're on your own. You do what you can do." He didn't do that.

When he let us be here at the beginning of the world, when it was new, he instructed us about how the world goes, how it operates, and how you live here. He told us that. And that's what we call Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen. It's what we say before we do anything important, what you have to observe before any important events. And our Creator gave us this miraculous life from ever since we are born until wherever we are traveling today in our life's path. And so we say to our Creator, "Thank you for the privilege that I can walk again today. And our mind is agreed." And if it is, you will say, "Huh."

And then the Creator said that whenever you come together the first thing you have to recognize is the different human life: your family, your village, your community. And so what we do is we give our kindness and our love to one another and we say thank you that we will share these moments today with each other. And our mind again is agreed.

The Creator made the earth. And when he made the earth, the Creator said that the earth is going to be a woman. And not just any woman, she's going to be the mother of all women, of all life forms. And she will have the power to give life to the trees and the birds, to the bears, to the deer, to the humans. That's why she's exceptional.

And when our Mother Earth has given life and birth, then the big job begins. Now she has to nourish us from her body with the food that we need to live. What a job that woman does. And that's our Mother, the Earth. And as my elders suggest to us, she has never thrown us away, discarded us or abandoned us since the beginning of time. And so what we're





going to do because of that is we will bring our minds together as one. What you and I will do is we will put our thankfulness one layer after another layer, here. And then we will take our greetings and make layers of it. And then you and I, who are the children of our Mother the Earth, will pick it up, and we'll carry it. And we say, "Mother Earth, today, we who are your children, salute you with love." And we say, "Thank you because our life

is nourished again. Mother Earth, thank you, with love." And our mind is agreed.

And then the next thing that happened after our Creator made Mother Earth is that he made the water that is in the creeks and the streams and the lakes. And when he did this, he said that water isn't just water, it is sacred. Every water is sacred. Every water is holy





everywhere in the whole world. He said, "The water has spirit, it's got a soul, it's got life in it."

And he talked to the water. He said, "And your job, Water, is to move, to look for the humans, look for the birds, look for the bears, look for the deer." And that's why the water is moving. It's doing its job, going looking around for the life. And then it goes into the big river and then into the big ocean and then back into the clouds, around and around, refreshing because it's alive. It's refreshing because it gives life. The waters quench our thirst and they clean and purify our body so that we may have a healthy, good life.

And then when you listen to the oceans and the big lakes, you hear the heartbeat of the water. You see that it is living. The big waves come, and they hit Mother Earth. It is the same thing as what is going on in your heart. It is beating with a rhythm because it is living. And so we will put layers of thanks, greetings and love in our heart. And we send it to the Spirit of the Waters of the World. And we say, "We, who are



your human relatives, thank you for the quenching of our thirst yesterday and today.” And on behalf of our children, we say, with love, thank you to the Water. And our mind is agreed.

And then another thing that our Creator did is he put in the water, the fish, and all kinds of water creatures. And he told those fish what their job is going to be. It is that whenever the bear or the human needs nourishment, they will sacrifice their life for us but only when we are hungry. No more. And also he said, if anything falls in the water, the fish are going to grab it, eat it up right away, keep it clean – that water. So those fish are doing their job. Even if it is hard today, because of pollution, those fish never give up. They just keep on trying to fulfill what the Creator told them to do. And so what we will do is with one mind, we send our thanks, greetings, and our love to all the Fish and the Water Life of the Waters of the World. And our mind, again, is agreed.

And then our Creator, what he did after that is he planted medicine next to the river and next to the ponds and next to the lakes. And then he planted medicine in the big hills and the valleys and in the big fields. And he said, “For every sickness that there is known to the animals and the humans and the birds, there is a medicine or two or three that can jointly or singularly take away all the sickness.” And so to the Medicines of the World who patiently wait for us to doctor our sick, we say thank you for staying with us and for doctoring those of us that you do doctor. To the Medicines of the World, with love, we thank you today. And our mind is agreed.

And then the Creator did another thing. He gave us the food that is in the garden. There are all kinds of foods in there, but he chose three to be the leaders. Those ones are the corn and the beans and the squash. We, the Iroquois, call them the Three Sisters. The turnips, the carrots – they are all under their leadership. And so I ask us people to put in front of us our thanks and greetings and love. And then we send it to that



Corn and to the Beans and to the Squashes and all the Vegetables that grew on vines and to all the other things that grow. And so to the Gardens of the World, we say thank you with love. And our mind is agreed.

And then what our Creator did is he made berries. And when he made the berries, he made lots of different kinds of them. For instance, the leader of them all is the strawberry because once the snow from winter goes away, it's the first berry to flower. And because it is the first one to wake up, it was chosen to become the leader of all the berry world. And we call the strawberry, because it looks like a heart, the Big Medicine. And so I ask that all of us put our minds together as one, and we send our thanks and our greetings and our love to the Strawberries and to all of the Berry World because they sweeten our life. They taste so good. We say thank you to them. And our mind is agreed.

And then our creator did another thing. He made the trees, all kinds of trees. And then he chose one – they call it the maple tree. And he said, "Once the snow starts to melt, that maple tree is the first one that is going to wake up. Its blood is going to start to flow. And that sap of the maple tree, you can drink that. It too becomes a great medicine for you. And then you cook it, that sap, and it turns into a sweet syrup. You can even make sugar out of it. And then shortly after all the other trees wake up and give us apples, peaches, pears, cherries. And then from those trees also we use fallen limbs, and we chop them up. Then when it gets so cold, we can make warm fires in the woodstove.

And then those trees make the oxygen in the air we breathe, the oxygen that you and I need every day. And

the buffalo need it, and the deer need it, and the birds need it. And if those trees were to stop being trees, they would no longer make oxygen. And then you and I and all life would suffocate, there would be no more life. So you see, the tree is not just a tree. The tree is one of the sources of our life. And we need to stand by them. And we need to watch over them and protect them as much as we can. For they do that for us. And so we shall become of one mind, and what we do is put many thanks and greetings and love again in front of us. As it piles up in a big heap, you and I will grab its perimeters, and we will throw it to the east, to the north and the west and to the south so that every tree will hear and feel our hello and feel our thankfulness and feel our compassion. And then they will be so touched by that that they will grow again another year. And we and our families will live again. And so to the Trees of the World, and their leader the Maple, with love, we say thank you. And our mind is agreed.

And then in those trees, in the forest, our Creator put the animals. The deer, when we need food for our ceremonies, they will give their lives. From them, from the skin of their hides, we can make shoes. And from those deer, there are medicine societies that help to heal the sick. To all the animals we say thank you. And our mind is agreed.

And the next ones are the birds. After everything was done, and the Creator made us, he did not want us to be sad in our life. The Creator did not want boredom or lonesomeness to come into our lives, although it will now and then, but not to find a home in our minds. The Creator likes to see us smile. He likes it when



we joke. Laughter is called “a big medicine”. And to guarantee that that should be the way it is – laughter and dance and song – the Creator made the robins and the chickadees, the sparrows and the mourning dove, every kind of bird. And he put beautiful coloured feathers on their bodies. So they look pretty. And then he took those birds, and he threw them everywhere in the air. And he said to them, “You will zoom by where the men and women walk on the earth, with all your bright, beautiful colors. It will be nice to see”.

And then he gathered them together, and he had a big meeting with them. And he gave them their songs and the rhythms of them, the way they are. And when he finished, he said, “Now your job is to make sure that the deer and bears and the moose and the elks and the humans do not get lonesome, and do not get bored with life. So every morning before the sun shows his face, just when the dawn light comes and it is still a little dark, I want all of your birds to get up and start to

sing the songs that bring the miraculous new day, every day.” He said, “You will welcome the miraculous day and life.” And so every day those birds were flying and those birds were singing the songs of joy of life. And so what we will do, the people, is we shall become of one mind, and we will put thanks, greetings, love, and kindness together in one big pile. And then we will grab it at the edges and throw it to the north and the west and the south and east, so that every Bird that sang this morning will hear our thanks. They will hear our kindness. And they will sing again tomorrow because they know we are going to say thank you to them. And they are so happy to do it because we said thank you. And so to the Birds of the World, for the songs that they sang this morning, with love, we salute you. And our mind is agreed.

And then there are four winds in the universe. They are coming from the north, south, east, and west. And those winds, some elders say, are two sets of twins. It is

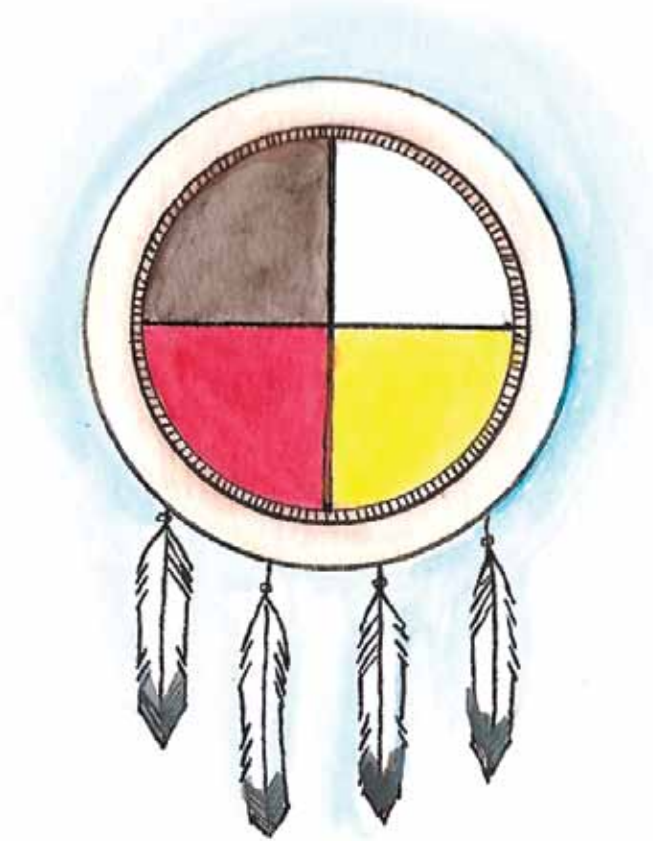




nice to hear it that way. It is a nice story. They say that Mother Earth got tired from giving birth. And so when our Mother Earth gets tired, they say that the wind of the north and the wind of the east together, they try to help. They bring a white blanket of snow, and they cover her body so she can rest. And when she has rested sufficiently, the other two brothers from the south and the west, they take the white blanket of snow off. And the next thing you know is a wall-to-wall, green carpet of grass all over Mother Earth. And flowers are popping up here and there of every color imaginable. And life is reborn.

And so the four sacred winds, they keep the balance so that life can go on with energy. If there is no air, they come and blow the strong breezes. They carry the stagnant air away and revitalize it so that it is fresh, what we breathe. And so those winds never rest. They are doing the job that the Creator told them to do. So we shall become of one mind again, and we will put thanks, greetings, and love right there. And we will throw it to the east, to the north, to the west, to the south. And we say, "Four Winds, thank you for bringing the changing of the seasons so that there will be life." And our mind again is agreed.

And then what our Creator did, this time up in the sky in the west, he put our Grandfathers, the Thunders. And so the Creator said to the Thunders, "Your job is to be the grandpa. And the people are going to be your grandchildren. And a good grandfather periodically comes to see his grandchildren. But when you go to see your grandchildren, do not just go abruptly there. Always hit your big drums, send your big thunder voice



across the sky. Let them know you are coming so they can get ready to receive you." And so with oneness of mind, we who are the grandchildren today, we put many thanks and many greetings and much love and compassion and kindness right in front of us. And then you and I, the grandchildren, will pick it up, all around the edges, and we will throw it high into the sky, especially to the west. And we will say, "Grandpa Thunder, thank you for all the work you did last summer. Thank you, we have food. Thank you, we have water to drink. Thank you, we can have water to bathe in to clean our bodies. Grandpa Thunder, with love, we thank you." And again, our mind is agreed.

And then there is another thing that our Creator did. They say he made two suns in the sky. And the one sun we call the daytime sun. They call him the Big Man. Some elders even say that the rays of the sun are like the hands of the Creator. And so you see how sacred it is, our life. And how privileged we are that the Creator touches each one of us. No matter that there

are millions of us, that light surrounds every one of us simultaneously. And such is the power of our Creator. And so to the Sun, our Eldest Brother, we say thank you with love. And our mind is agreed.

And then there is a night time sun, our Grandmother. And her, she walks twenty-eight to thirty days on a single predictable path in the universe. That is what we see. And as she does this, they say, she orchestrates all the women of every nation. And so, on behalf of all the children that were born yesterday and last night and today, Grandma Moon, we say, thank you for allowing this good life. And our mind is agreed.

Grandmother Moon is a woman, and so she likes to get dolled up when she goes out at night. Every night, she has beautiful diamond earrings on her ears, hanging way down. And she has a diamond necklace every night. And she has all over her body beautiful diamonds. Those are the stars in the sky that surround her when she walks. And so to the Stars that beautify our Grandma Moon, we say thank you, and our mind is agreed.

And then of course we the humans were the last ones to be made of all Creation. We are last. If all we humans died, everything else would keep going. So we are the ones that are the most in need of

help. And for that reason, the Creator made the Four Beings. They are four powers of the Sky World, of the universe world. Their job is to help the Creator keep the world going, keep life going. They have been assigned especially to babysit us because of that one fault we have, of not being able to tell the truth for what it is. And so, at various times in history, in various parts of the world, the different races have forgotten their teachings, neglected them. And when they have, fights have begun, and disruptions have come, and they have begun to kill each other in wars. They have thrown away the Creator's instructions for peace.

And so what our elders say to us is that whenever that happened, he would summon these Four Sacred Beings, these four powers, and one of them or jointly (usually one of them) would volunteer to be born as a human. He would be born as the Peacemaker for that region or for that particular people. He would remind them to go back and recover what they had given up that caused their wars and their disarray. And so to those Four Sacred Powers, the Peace Prophets of the World, we say thank you now on behalf of our people. And our mind is agreed.

And then there is our Creator. In your body, God is in there; the Creator is in there. And every life form

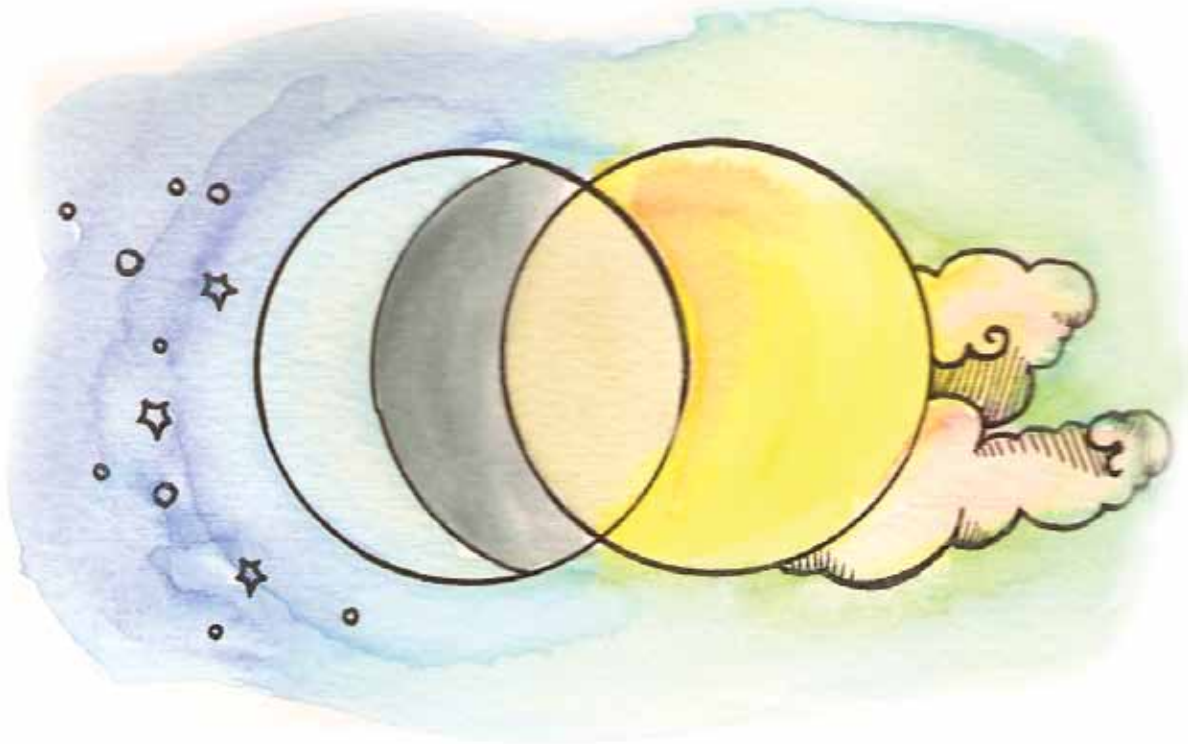




that grows, the Creator is in there. And when the Creator finished everything, he said, "I did not make a coliseum for you or an archival institute, a building for you to put all the philosophical or spiritual doctrines in. I did not write it in books or anything." He said, "The only thing I did is let you live on your Mother Earth. Any everything you need is at your fingertips. Do not be greedy. Share. And if you do this, your life will be everlasting. But I want you to know, I wait every day for every woman, every man, and every child to take just a couple of minutes, a couple seconds and face me every day. And just say, 'My Creator, I thank you for this miraculous life. Thank you, Mother Earth.'"

And that is all that is necessary for us. There is no big cathedral. There is no Library of Congress that holds our knowledge. Just a simple word, thank you, a true word to the Creator, and there will be everlasting life. And so that is why we say the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen. That is what comes before any important thing. Then we will be grounded in life.

And so to our Creator, I ask you and I to simultaneously spin out many layers of thankfulness and many layers of hellos and greetings and much kindness and love. And then what we will do is stand back at its perimeters, you and I, and grab it all at the edges, and throw it high into the universe. And say, "Creator, our Maker, thank you for this wonderful life." And our mind is agreed.



## ANISHINAABE CREATION STORY<sup>8</sup>

The Creation Story of the Anishinaabe is told as the Seven Fires of Creation, each fire being an era of time. How long each one of these is, we don't know. But in the time that the universe knows, they are seen as eons of time: from the place before time even was, when there was only silence and emptiness and darkness and cold, to the time when earth was finally created and life was placed upon its surface.

Creation unfolded in seven stages. At first we are told that there, in the vast unknown, was only darkness, emptiness, silence and cold: forever and without boundaries. And that somewhere in that darkness a sound was heard. It was a sound like the rumbling of thunder far in the distance. Then there was silence again. And after a long unimaginable silence, the sound was heard again, only this time it seemed closer.

This is the way that the very beginning stage of creation is talked about: this sound that rumbled in the distance, which after each long period of silence would be heard again. Each time it would seem closer and closer, until, finally, after an incredible time of emptiness, a blinding flash of light and deafening sound of thunder broke the long silence. What we are given to understand is that there must have been "Someone" listening in the darkness to that sound; that what was taking place was the first spark of creation, the first explosion of creative activity outward.

And then, it is said, there was a shaking and shimmering sound; a sound like the shaking of seeds in a gourd, that was heard everywhere in the darkness, without end. "What was that sound?" we are given to ask. What was shimmering and shaking? What were the seeds: Were they the thoughts of the Creator's mind? But, it is said, there was another sound. It was a different sound, a "feeling sound". That sound was before the shimmering shaking sound; it was before

<sup>8</sup> Based on the Teachings of the Seven Fires of Creation by Edward Benton-Banai, rendered as a poem entitled "The Seven Fires of the Ojibway Nation" and published in *The Sounding Voice*, Indian Country Press, 1978. Found in print, pages 17-20 of *First Nations Peoples*, 2nd Edition by Pamela Williamson and John Roberts, published by Emond Montgomery, Toronto, 2004.





the rumbling sound that came from the distance. It was before all else. It was the First Thought that ever was. There in the centre of the darkness, that sound, that thought went out into the vast reaches of the unknown. Myriads of thoughts emerged from that first thought. They went on forever in the darkness, there being nothing out there for them to bounce back from. It was known, now, that a "place" had to be created to send the thoughts to.

In the centre there was also a rhythm that was generated from the very heart, the very centre where the Thought first emerged. That heart throb was the centre of all that was to be. It moved out from the centre in great rhythmic circles, filling the whole empty void. And so it was that even in the beginning, creation could not take place by Thought alone, but by the Heart also. The rhythm of the heartbeat permeated the vastness. The thoughts, touching on the darkness, left a star; the star world was born. By the First Heartbeat and by that First Thought, the universe was created. The First Thought is the first fire of creation.

In the second fire of creation, he created a light. He built, in the darkness, a fire: the first fire, the Creator's fire which is the Sun. He did this to light up a place in the darkness, in order to create. Around the fire, he traced out a great circle and assigned the four directions.

Then he created another light: the Moon whom we know as grandmother, universal woman, the Grand Woman of the sky world. In completing this, he had created Sun and Moon, the twinness of all reality. Without this twinness, nothing else could unfold; so in all things, there must be a twin in order for life to evolve to completion in the created reality. All of wholeness is composed of twinness. In all things we see the twin. Sunrise and sunset, day and night, the two sides of being – even in you there is the twin. The unfolding of twinness is the third stage of creation, and is thus known as the third fire.

Then, in the fourth stage of creation – having created the star world with his thoughts, having built the first fire in the universe (the Sun), and having created the twin (Grandmother Moon) – the whole of the universe was established and he caused the universe to move according to the four directions. This was the fourth fire: the First Movement. And so we know that at the fourth



stage in the development of all things, in the unfolding of all life, is the beginning of movement, measured by the principles of the four directions. When you have four, then you can have movement, complete in itself and moving upon itself.

Then he gathered all of what he had created and encapsulated it in a shape and form. It contained the inspiration and the motivation to be. It was possessed of intention and it held in its blueprint the two sides of the whole (the twinness that makes up life itself), and the four quarters of the whole which is the cause of movement. By taking those things and shaping them into a form, he created a Seed, the germ of life. For every form, every shape, every being that would be given life, he shaped a seed, within which was the potential to be. And this was the fifth fire of creation: the First Seed. The Creator took his seed-thoughts and shaped them into the kernels of life essence, to be reflected back to him as creation's every possibility when planted in fertile ground.

Having completed this, he began to make a place to send the seeds of life. And so he created this Earth. Four times he tried, and the fourth time he completed this world, as we know it today. When he had completed the Earth and caused the waters to flow in and around the Earth (being her veins and arteries to carry the force of life itself), then all the birds carried the seeds to spread them over the ground. Then he saw the beauty of the one that he created: the Earth. In this Earth was absolute perfection, absolute wholeness, harmony and balance. All was complete in her, the First Earth, the First Woman. And in having created her, his creation was complete. Then he took from his first fire, the Sun, and placed a heart at the very centre of that first woman, making her first mother: the Mother Earth. She was a mother with a heart, who gave birth to all the seeds of life, her children. This is the sixth fire of creation: the Creation of Earth. Out of his desire to create, to bring into actuality his seed-thoughts, to make them real, to cause his thoughts to bounce back to himself, he therefore created this world. Out

of love he created her. Out of his desire to create the most beautiful place to give the finest expression of his thoughts, so he created the Earth. And so it was that out of kindness he created all of creation; that this Earth was made as a place for the highest expression of the Grandfather's desire to manifest and embody his dream: to give shape and form, intention, purpose and meaning to the spirit of life itself.

In the seventh fire of creation, he wished to create "one in his own image". And so he took of the very created world itself: he took four parts of the Earth and he shaped those four parts together, and formed a physical being. Then of his own thoughts, as many as the stars in the universe, he placed within that first being. With this was given the ability and the capacity to hold the very thoughts of the Creator himself. The Creator gave to the first human being his own thoughts. Then he caused to beat in his breast that same heart-throb, that same rhythm that was there in the beginning at the centre of the universe. And so it is said that he caused to beat in the heart of Anishinaabe the very rhythm, the very heartbeat, of the creator himself. Then he breathed into him his first breath, the spirit of life itself. And so, being made of this earth, the physical vessel, and being vested with mind, heart and spirit, he was lowered to the Earth: the First Human Being, made of Earth and Sky.

Though knowing that he was formed outside of the created realm, he could see that he belonged to the Earth, being made of the very stuff of the earth. He desired to be a part of this creation, as all other beings of creation were already seen and felt to be, as he saw



them moving about on the earth. It was his every desire to be at home in this world, part of that same great harmony and great balance of life.

He wanted to be a part of the great beauty of this creation; seeing how everyone of this creation was kind and was true to the ways that they were created, and shared in the harmony of life. Seeing the strength and the beauty of all that was created on this earth, he too



desired to be as this earth and as the creation. And so it is said that, as he approached the earth, he pointed his toes so that somehow, if at all possible, when he touched down on this earth, he would not stamp out or crush even the smallest blade of grass, the tiniest flower, the smallest living creature that crawled upon the earth. Rather, he would come down in and amidst the creation and be a living and loving, harmonious part of all that is.

This is how Original Human Being touched down upon the Earth. That is how the First Human Being, Anishinaabe: the red colour of man, met his Mother the Earth for the first time. And from that time, Anishinaabe has always known his Mother and has always felt his relationship to the family of creation. Being vested of spirit, the human being comes from the creator from whom he receives his purpose and intention to be. Through him flows, always, his life force that comes



directly from the Creator. But with him also comes his desire to be a part of this life and to give the finest and highest expression of his being in this world. He had within him this desire to reflect back to the Creator the Creator's very intention in making him in his image and lowering him to this earth.

And so, in these seven stages of creation, we see how all things began for Anishinaabe, the red colour of the human being. From the first thought, to the final image, the creation unfolded. In the same way, all of creative activity continues to evolve, through those seven stages of unfoldment. It is still reflected in all life activity; even to this day. Everywhere we should be able to see this. From the first thought of bringing new life into this world by couples who come together, bringing about conception itself; to the first division of that first cell, the twinness of life – of man and woman coming together inside the womb; to the first movement within the womb; to the development of that seed to its fullest potential as a human being; so life unfolds according to the original blueprint of creation. It follows that a good and kind and caring place to be in this world is fashioned – the family, the earth-home, and it is completed by the emergence of the first image – the actual human being emerging from the womb to place

footsteps for the first time upon the earth. In this natural creative process itself we can see the seven stages of unfoldment. And so it is with all of life.

Even from the first thought in the darkness of our confusion and of our unknowing, to the conception of an idea, we put together the darkness with the light and we create the twinness of our reality. In our thoughts, in our mind, we can cause the idea to move within ourselves and then introduce that idea to others so that they too can be a part of the movement and inspiration it causes. From there we create a seed of change within ourselves and around ourselves. We then make a way; make a place to plant that seed within ourselves and within others, for all to benefit from. The final result is a new being, a realized dream, that is created from this first thought that emerged in the darkness of our own mind. From the idea to the reality is again reflected the process of creation.

And so, Anishinaabe can see that if he knows his creation story, if she knows her creation story, they know also how all of life moves. They can know how life comes to be. All of life is a creative process that began in this original way and continues in the same way in all aspects of our life. In all places and all facets of creation, and creative activity, these seven stages are reflected.





# RESPECT – RE/CREATION STORIES

## HAUDENOSAUNEE – SKY WOMAN<sup>9</sup>

The Creation Story is the story that impacts our people and our concepts of the world perhaps more than any Iroquois realizes. It begins in a place called Karonhià:ke: the place in the sky. It is the name of that planet or that earth that we came from before we were on this earth. In this world somewhere in the solar system were our people, our ancestors.

This lady from the sky is Atsi'tsiakà: the matured flower. And in this world, there was this tree. And it was dark there. There was no sun over there in that solar system or wherever they were in that part of the Sky World. This tree grew in the middle. And here in this world of Karonhià:ke, this tree had everything growing on it. It had apples, it had peaches, it had plums, it had cherries, it had pears, it had everything you can think of in terms of fruit. Since this tree grew everything, it had a power. They called it the Life Tree because it produced the thing that made everything live. They talked about this tree being such a powerful life-giving source that it glowed. It had a radiance to it. And in that world where there was not sun, it was that tree whose glow gave them some light in the darkness.

And they were told, whatever is on that tree, whatever grows on there, is for the people. But you cannot do anything with that tree: you cannot climb on that tree; you cannot swing on that tree; nor can you go there and pull the peaches, the apricots or the pears off of it. It is for you, the people and the animals and the birds. But you have to wait until the pear finishes ripening and it falls to the ground. Then you can go get

it. Once the peaches come off, they are yours. But you cannot go over there and pick them because they might not be ready. Nobody can climb there because they might break the branches. And then it will interfere with the energy and the source of the power for the world. That is the teaching.

Now this woman got pregnant. Being pregnant there is the same as being pregnant today. When a woman gets pregnant, a new life begins to form in her body. And all the thousands of connections – mechanisms of the brain and things that cause you to be able to move, to see, to understand, to perceive things – all hook to this new baby to give it the same. And so it effects changes in the woman who is going through this, radical changes.

So sometimes she is in a good mood, a happy mood. And then the next minute or the next half hour, she is ready to cut your head off. A minute later she wants to do something. It is impossible to do that, but she is convinced she is going to. There are mood swings going on in her because this new human being is taking those powers and touching those nerves. That is what causes this erratic, moody behaviour.

And so this pregnant woman in the Sky World says to her husband, "In the middle of where we live, there is that tree. And I would have no greater pleasure, my husband, than if you were to go over to that tree, and get some of its small tender fresh roots, and its bark, its skin. Make a tea for me to drink. I would be so satisfied, and I would have such great peace."

<sup>9</sup> Pg. 40-53 in *And Grandma Said...Iroquois Teachings as passed down through the oral tradition* by Tom Porter, published by Xlibris, 2008.



And her husband says to her, "Did you forget that we are not supposed to touch that tree?"

And she says, "Doggone it! Get over there and do what I said, instead of talking about stuff like that."

And of course he jumped. He got over there where the big tree was, the beautiful big tree with all of its fruit. He looked at the tree, and he was still reluctant. He did not want to do it. But he was in a dilemma. So he looked at that tree, and he went a little bit closer, but he did not touch it. He looked. And right close to the base of the tree, there was a hole that appeared from nowhere, from nothing. It just appeared. And he looked at that. And "Geez", he says, "you cannot see the bottom of it." And he was not going to get any closer. That is enough, he thought. It was enough for him. And he backed off. So he went back home.

And she says, "You got that medicine or that root?"

And he says, "I could not do it."

And she hollers at him, "What is wrong with you?" She says, "I should have known not to send you over there. You got no backbone. You got no courage. You're lazy." She said that to him, made him feel bad. She wouldn't give him a chance to explain anything either. And she says, "Get out of the way. I'll go do it. I should have done it myself in the first place."

And so she went over there after scolding and making him feel like nothing. She didn't even give him a chance to finish talking. She went over there because she didn't believe him, and she saw that hole in the ground next to the tree. She said, "Gee, that's true, what he said. I wonder what did that?" She went closer

and she looked at the hole. "Gee, I can't even see how far down it is." So she got on her hands and knees and she put her nose right to it and looked at it really hard. And that was not enough. This time she stuck her head in there. And she said, "Wow. I've never seen that before."

Anyway, as she was busy investigating around in that hole, she did not notice that the grains of dirt were falling. And by this time, the hole was getting bigger. The next thing you know she started to fall. Once she realized that she was falling, she started frantically trying to grab anything she could reach. And they say, because this was the Tree of Life, there were all kinds of seeds, things that fell around those roots onto the ground below, at the base of the tree. And as she tried to avoid falling, she grabbed the strawberry plant that was growing there. And she grabbed peach seeds, cherry seeds, and different kinds of seeds in her hands.

And she began to fall down through the sky, through the atmosphere, tumbling, head over heels. And as she was falling down, you have to remember that on this earth where we live, there was no land – no mountains, no valleys. The complete planet was surrounded by water. There was no land anywhere. The only ones that lived here were turtles, fish, beavers, otters, ducks, geese, and herons. And all these creatures had webbed toes and fingers in order to survive in the water. But deer did not live here or any of those kinds of things that did not have webbed feet.

As she came falling down there was a flock of water birds who looked up. And they said, "What is that coming down here?" They had never seen such a



creature. They did not know what it was. So they flew over close to where she was falling and they examined her. They looked at her skin, and they noticed it was not like the skin they had for water. And they looked at her toes and fingers and they noticed there was nothing between them; they were not webbed to help her swim. So they gathered that she was not from their world – the world of water. And if she was going there, she would not survive.

They felt sorry for her, and they tried to intervene. So what they said was “Let’s all fly together. We’ll hook our wings together and make a soft feathery place so she can gently fall on our bodies. We’ll catch her. Then she won’t get hurt. And we’ll try to take her back where she came from because we don’t think she can survive in this water where we live.”



So they caught her gently on their feathery backs, and they began to go in an orchestrated way. They flew her way up high, as far as they could go. Pretty soon they became totally exhausted. They just did not have the energy to go any farther up. And they came to the realization that they just could not get her back up there. It was too far, too high. They had run out of power.

So they said quickly in their little council of birds, "Well, we'll have to take her to where we live. We don't know what we're going to do when we get there, though. She's in trouble. We can't fix that. But that's the only choice we've got, so we better find something to help us." And one of them said, "You go down first. Dive down there and tell all the different life in the water that there is a great emergency. Tell them what is happening. Maybe together they can find a way to think of a plan to help this being." One dove down as fast as he could. When he got near the water he began to scream at the top of his lungs. And he got the attention of all the different animals that were in the

water. They all came over. So he said, "Something has happened to us. We've never seen it before. Some kind of strange creature is falling from the sky. We don't know where she came from. Somewhere up there. And we caught her, and we saved her. Now we have to bring her down here because we couldn't take her back up where she came from. But she doesn't have anything like us to survive in the water world. So how will she survive? Maybe she's going to drown on us, die, whatever."

All the animals of the water world had a meeting. And they did not know what to do at all. They were completely befuddled about it. Just as they were ready to quit, since they did not have any options, finally the big turtle spoke up. And that turtle said, "I don't really have an answer, either. But I might have a temporary answer. How about if when they get down here, you tell them to put that creature right in the middle of my back. I'll stay afloat up on top of the water, and I'll hold



her up. And then we can try to keep thinking about what we might do to help her.”

So when they got down, they put here on that turtle. And she stood there. And all the animals came from every direction, of all sizes and shapes and forms. They were all nosy; they were all curious to see what this creature was, this monster, or whatever it was. And they looked at her. And they came to the same conclusion as the birds did – that she had to have land so she would not drown in the water.

And then she opened up her hands. She showed them that she had a strawberry plant. She had all those seeds in her hand, which were to be her food source. But there was no dirt to plant them. So the beaver said, “Dirt. I think I remember my grandfather and great-grandfathers talking one time when I as just a young kid. I heard that below this big water somewhere, way down, there is dirt down there. But we’ve never seen it. We’ve never been down there.”

Then the otter said, “I seem to have heard that too, from our grandpa, and elders. They said that there was dirt.” And they all came to the same conclusion. They had heard it. But none of them had ever been there. So finally the beaver said, “Well, I have a big tail, you know. And it can push me, and I can go fast, and I’m a good swimmer. And I can hold my breath a long time. I could go and try to retrieve that dirt. And if I do, then I’ll bring it for her, and she can plant those seeds, and she will have food.”

So he took a run and a jump and he dove. He splashed into the water, and down he went. And he was gone a long time. And all of a sudden, his body popped out of the water. And everybody saw him. He was lifeless. He was not moving at all. It appeared that he had drowned; he had died. And so they pulled his body up there. And sure enough, he had drowned. He had never made it to the bottom of the big water.

So then the otter tried it. And then different ones tried it. They all took turns, but they all died. Finally,





a little tiny one, the smallest one – the muskrat – he came forward. He does not have anything to help him to be great. He is just a little tiny scroungy thing, not like the beaver, not like the otter with their streamlined bodies that make them swift as an arrow. He is just a scroungy little old muskrat. But all the other creatures had tried it, and they could not do it, so now he was their last chance. So they were all looking at him. And if there was a place to hide, I suppose he would have hid. But there was no place. So he felt he had to be brave; he had to do his share. He said, “Well, I’m not a good swimmer. I don’t have a big tail like the beaver to propel me down in the water. All I am is just a little old muskrat. And if they didn’t make it, probably I’m not going to make it either. But at least I’m going to try.”

So they said okay. And so he ran along on top of that turtle’s back. And he jumped and he dove in and down he went. He was gone longer than every one of those animals. All of a sudden, his little old scroungy body came popping up on top. His eyes were closed. And there was no movement in his body whatsoever. And he, it appeared, had gone as well. He did not make it.

So the other animals, they went over there and grabbed him. They dragged him up on top of the turtle’s back to examine him, to see if he was dead. They touched him all over, and he was cold as ice. But finally when they touched around his chest, they felt a little warmth and a little movement. A movement so faint...but he was living. So they pushed on his stomach, and water came up. And they pushed on his stomach, and more water came up. As they revived

him, his eyes opened up, and he started to blink. And when they opened his little tiny black hand, there were some little granules of the dirt there, from the big water. And not only there, but in his little tiny mouth there was some more of that dirt.

And so when he came to, he went over there to that woman and he gave it to her, that dirt. Everybody was happy. All the animals were so elated, so joyous, because they were able to do it in their combined efforts, through great sacrifice. Life could begin. And so the woman took the dirt. And she put it right there in the middle of the turtle’s back. And then she started a kind of sideways shuffle walk in a circle where that dirt was in the middle. And as she started to move she started chanting the language of Karonhià:ke, for that’s where she was from.

And as she went around there, the miracle of birth began. And the granules of dirt began to multiply and grow. Instead of a little speckle, it had become a pile. And as she continued to sing or to chant that song, it began to multiply even more. And not only that, but the turtle began to grow in accordance with the growth of that dirt. And as she continued to go around in an even bigger circle, the turtle grew and grew until it became bigger. And there was wall-to-wall dirt covering it now. That was the miracle of birth.

So this turtle got bigger and bigger until it became what they call Turtle Island. That is why the Lakota, the Blackfoot, the Mohawks, most all of the original people, when they refer to the earth, call it Turtle Island. That is what we call this earth where we live. And it came from this story.

## ANISHINAABE – THE GREAT FLOOD<sup>10</sup>

For many years the first people lived together in harmony with all of the Creation. This harmonious way of life on Earth did not last forever. Men and women did not continue to give each other the respect needed to keep the Sacred Hoop of marriage strong. Families began quarrelling with each other. Finally villages began arguing back and forth. People began to fight over hunting grounds. Brother turned against brother and began killing each other.

It saddened the Creator, Gichi Manidoo, to see the Earth's people turn to evil ways. It seemed that the entire Creation functioned in harmony except for the people who were the last to be placed there. For a long time Gichi Manidoo waited hoping that the evil ways would cease and that brotherhood, sisterhood, and respect for all things would again come to rule over the people.

When it seemed that there was no hope left, Gichi Manidoo decided to purify the Earth. He would do this with water. The water came like a *mush-ko-be-wun* (flood) upon the Earth. The flood came so fast that it caught the entire Creation off guard. Most all living things were drowned immediately, but some of the animals were able to keep swimming, trying to find a small bit of land on which to rest. Some of the birds were caught in the air and had to keep flying in order to stay alive.

The purification of the Earth with water appeared to be complete. All the evil that had built up in the hearts of the first people had been washed away.

But how could life on Mother Earth begin anew?

There are many Anishinaabe teachings that refer to a man named "Way-na-boo-zhoo". Some people have actually referred to Anishinaabe or Original Man as Waynaboozhoo. Most of the elders agree that Waynaboozhoo was not really a man but was a spirit who had many adventures during the early years of the Earth. Some people say that Waynaboozhoo provided the link through which human form was gradually given to the spiritual beings of the Earth. Everyone agrees that Waynaboozhoo had many human-like characteristics. He made mistakes at times just like we do. But he also learned from his mistakes so that he could accomplish things and become better at living in harmony with the Earth. These things that Waynaboozhoo learned were later to become very useful to Anishinaabe people. He has been looked upon as kind of a hero by the Anishinaabe people. These "Waynaboozhoo Stories" have been told for many years to children to help them grow in a balanced way.

The teaching about how a new Earth was created after the Great Flood is one of the classic Waynaboozhoo Stories. It tells of how Waynaboozhoo managed to save himself by resting on a *chi-mi-tig* (huge log) that was floating on the vast expanse of water that covered Mother Earth. As he floated along on this log, some of the animals that were able to keep swimming came to rest on the log. They would rest for a while and then let another swimming animal take their place. It was the same way with the winged creatures. They would take turns resting on the log and flying. It was through this kind of sacrifice and concern for one another that

<sup>10</sup> Pg 29-34 of *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* by Edward Benton-Banai, published by Red School House, 1988.







Waynaboozhoo and a large group of birds and four-leggeds were able to save themselves on the giant log.

They floated for a long time but could gain no sight of land. Finally, Waynaboozhoo spoke to the animals.

"I am going to do something," he said. "I am going to swim to the bottom of this water and grab a handful of Earth. With this small bit of Earth, I believe we can create a new land for us to live on with the help of the Four Winds and Gichi Manidoo".

So Waynaboozhoo dived into the water. He was gone for a long time. Some of the animals began to cry for they thought that Waynaboozhoo must have drowned trying to reach the bottom.

At last, the animals caught sight of some bubbles of air, and finally, Waynaboozhoo came to the top of the water. Some of the animals helped him onto the log. Waynaboozhoo was so out of breath that he could not speak at first. When he regained his strength, he spoke to the animals.

"The water is too deep...I never reached the bottom....I cannot swim fast enough or hold my breath long enough to make it to the bottom."

All the animals on the log were silent for a long time. Maang (the loon) who was swimming alongside the log was the first to speak.

"I can dive under the water for a long ways, for that is how I catch my food. I will try to dive to the bottom and get some of the Earth in my beak."

The loon dived out of sight and was gone a long time. The animals felt sure he had drowned, but the loon floated to the top of the water. He was very weak and out of breath.

"I couldn't make it," he gasped. "There appears to be no bottom to this water."

Next, Zhing-gi-biss (the helldiver) came forth.

"I will try to swim to the bottom," he said. "I am known for diving to great depths."

### **The Poet and the Song**

*Born on a star path  
worn by Eagles and wind  
I live in the heart of the sun.  
My mother's heart  
is the river of time.  
The dark forest wall  
is where my father sleeps,  
where he gave me passage  
to this small bend in the river.  
The forest stands before me  
an ancient doorway  
I can silently slip through  
to dwell among the colours  
the shadows  
and the spirits living there.  
I can sing out  
with a raven's tongue  
and fly above the night  
to touch the fire  
of starlight  
and dance on the moon  
until the end of time  
but the river  
marks my beginning  
and my end  
and here  
I shall tell my story.*

Michael Robinson  
Poet/Artist









The helldiver was gone for a very long time. When the animals and Waynaboozhoo were about to give up hope, they saw the helldiver's body come floating to the top. He was unconscious and Waynaboozhoo had to pull him onto the log and help him regain his breath. When the helldiver came to, he spoke to all the animals on the log.

"I am sorry my brother and sisters. I, too, could not reach the bottom although I swam for a long ways straight down."

Many of the animals offered themselves to do the task that was so important to the future of all life on Earth. Zhon-gwayzh (the mink) tried but could not make it to the bottom. Ni-gig (the otter) tried and failed. Even Mi-shii-kenh (the turtle) tried but was unsuccessful.

All seemed hopeless. It appeared that the water was so deep that no living thing could reach its bottom. Then a soft, muffled voice was heard.

"I'll try," it said softly.

At first, no one could see who it was that spoke. The little Wa-zhushk (muskrat) stepped forth.

"I'll try," he said again.

Some of the animals laughed and poked each other. The helldiver jeered, "If I couldn't make it, how can he expect to do any better?"

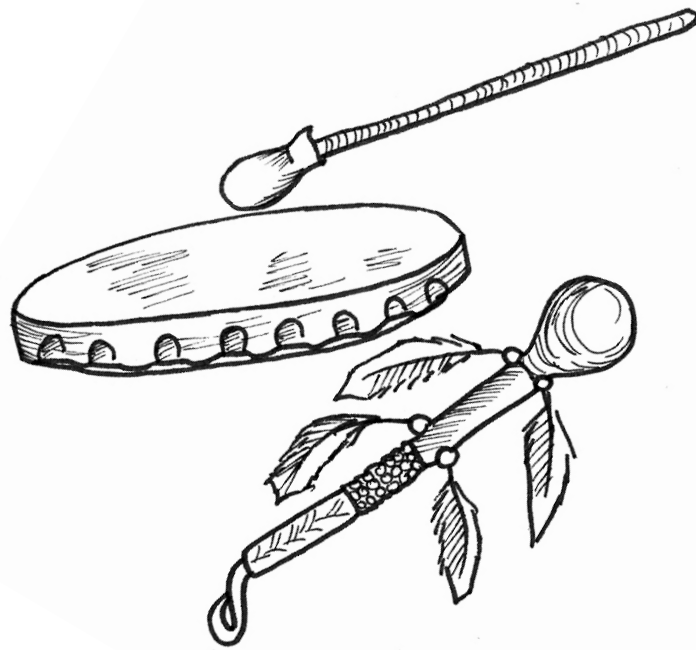
Waynaboozhoo spoke, "Hold it everyone! It is not our place to judge the merits of another; that task belongs to the Creator. If little muskrat wants to try, I feel we should let him."

The muskrat dived down and disappeared from view. He was gone for such a long time that Waynaboozhoo and all the animals on the log were certain that muskrat had given up his life in trying to reach the bottom.

The muskrat was able to make it to the bottom of the water. He was already very weak from lack of air. He grabbed some Earth in his paw and with every last bit of strength he could muster, muskrat pushed away from the bottom.

One of the animals on the log caught sight of muskrat as he floated to the water's surface. They pulled his body onto the log. Waynaboozhoo examined the muskrat.

"Brothers and sisters," Waynaboozhoo said. "Our little brother tried to go without air for too long. He is



dead." A song of mourning and praise was heard over all the water as Wa-zhushk's spirit passed to the next world.

Waynaboozhoo spoke again, "Look! Muskrat has something in his paw. It is closed tight around something." Waynaboozhoo carefully pried open muskrat's tiny paw. All the animals gathered around trying to see. Muskrat's paw opened and there, in a little ball, was a piece of Earth. All the animals cheered! Muskrat had sacrificed his life so that life could begin anew on the Earth.

Waynaboozhoo took the piece of Earth from the muskrat's paw. At that moment, Mi-shii-kenh (the turtle) swam forward and said, "Use my back to bear the weight of this piece of Earth. With the help of the Creator, we can make a new Earth."

Waynaboozhoo put the piece of Earth on the turtle's back. All of a sudden the noo-di-noon (winds) began to blow. The wind blew from each of the Four Directions. The tiny piece of Earth on the turtle's back began to grow. Larger and larger it became, until it formed a mi-ni-si (island) in the water. Still the Earth grew but still the turtle bore its weight on his back.

Waynaboozhoo began to sing a song. All the animals began to dance in a circle on the growing island. As he sang, they danced in an ever-widening circle. Finally, the winds ceased to blow and the waters became still. A huge island sat in the middle of the great water.

Today, traditional Anishinaabe people sing special songs and dance in a circle in memory of this event. Anishinaabe people also give special honour to our brother, the turtle. He bore the weight of the new Earth on his back and made life possible for the Earth's second people.

To this day, the ancestors of our brother, the muskrat, have been given a good life. No matter that marshes have been drained and their homes destroyed in the name of progress, the muskrats continue to multiply and grow. The Creator has made it so that muskrats will always be with us because of the sacrifice that our little brother made for all of us many years ago when the Earth was covered with water. The muskrats do their part today in remembering the Great Flood; they build their homes in the shape of the little ball of Earth and the island that was formed from it.



# RELATIONSHIP – INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONS

## SHARING AND SOVEREIGNTY<sup>11</sup>

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Anishinaabe Nation practiced an international diplomacy based on mutual respect, reciprocity, relationship and responsibility. The Haudenosaunee call this relationship or treaty “The Dish with One Spoon”, while the Anishinaabe refer to it as Gdoo-naaganinaa or “Our Dish”. The wampum belt for this ancient treaty relationship can be found in the Royal Ontario Museum. The Haudenosaunee tell us that the “Dish” represents the shared hunting territories of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee in the region of southern Ontario. The Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe recognized that their territories overlap, and that they therefore share ecological or caretaking responsibilities for the land. They recognized that they were eating out of the same “Dish” because all of their food came from the land. In acknowledging their responsibilities to the land and

their shared ecological connections, they decided to formally work together as caretakers of their land.

The Haudenosaunee call this treaty the “Dish with One Spoon” because there were no knives allowed near the Dish. This promoted peace between the Confederacy and the Anishinaabe nation. The spoon is symbolic of this peace.

The “Dish with One Spoon” treaty set out the terms for peaceful, responsible co-existence between the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe. At no time did these political bodies interfere with the sovereignty of the Confederacy or the Anishinaabe. They knew that they each had responsibilities for maintaining their own system of governance and their own sovereignty. The treaty is relevant today because it demonstrates how we can share territory, protect the land and promote sustainability, while also maintaining separate jurisdictions and sovereignties. This is further demonstrated in the following discussion of the Two Row Wampum and the Anishinaabe Seven Fires Prophecy.

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<sup>11</sup> This section is based on page 83 and 84 of “Our Elder Brothers: The Lifeblood of Resurgence” by Leanne Simpson, in *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, edited by Leanne Simpson, Arbuter Ring Publishing, Winnipeg, MB, 2008; and “Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Treaty and Diplomatic Relations”, *Wicazo Sa Review*, 23(2):29-42.



## HAUDENOSAUNEE – TWO-ROW WAMPUM BELT<sup>12</sup>

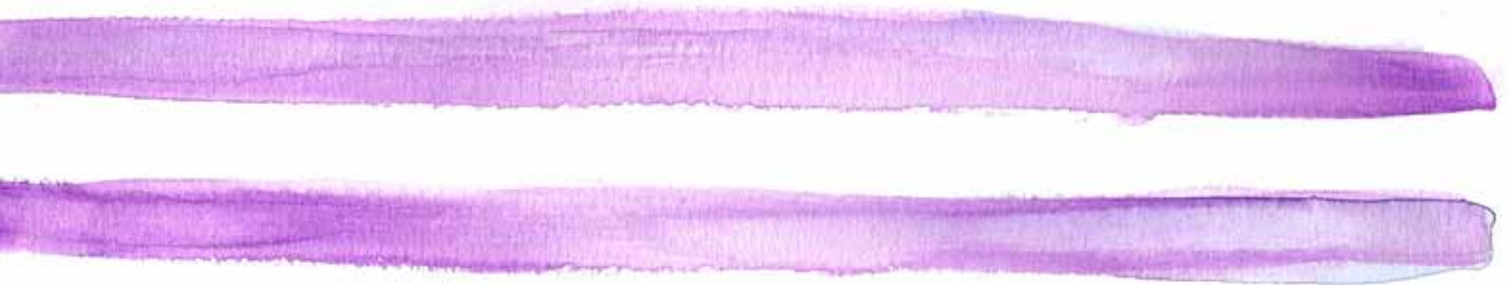
A fundamental belief of Indigenous people is coexistence. This is demonstrated in wampum belts, treaties or agreements drawn between two or more parties. The Two Row Wampum belt gives an accurate portrayal of what it means to coexist with nature.

The Two Row Wampum belt comes from the Haudenosaunee peoples and is considered the Grandfather of all belts because there is no end to it. These belts are not fashion accessories but represent contractual agreements entered into by one or more parties. The Two Row Wampum belt or *Guswetah*

was developed out of concern for the sustainability of Mother Earth in governing oneself. The two purple lines represent the separate and distinct paths of North America's First Peoples and the settler society, each with their own culture to maintain while traveling along the same river of life.

The river of life represents shared territory. Each nation is to maintain their separate and distinct cultures, working together to maintain the lands they share and the earth that sustains all. Biodiversity is a modern term for the same principles of coexistence found in the Two Row Wampum belt.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from 'First Nations' Concept of Conservation' written by Candace Maracle & Jocelyn Pelletier 2008







## ANISHINAABE – SEVEN FIRES PROPHECY<sup>13</sup>

The accounts of Anishinaabe life that have been handed down by the elders say that many years ago seven major prophets came to the Anishinaabe people. They came at a time when the people were living a full and peaceful life on the northeastern coast of Turtle Island. These prophets left the people with seven predictions of what the future would bring. Each of these prophecies was called a Fire and each Fire referred to a particular era of time that would come in the future. Thus, the teachings of the seven prophets are now called the Seven Fires of the Anishinaabe.

The first prophet said to the people, “In the time of the First Fire, the Anishinaabe nation will rise up and

follow the sacred shell of the Midewiwin Lodge. The Midewiwin Lodge will serve as a rallying point for the people and its traditional ways will be the source of much strength. The sacred megis shell will lead the way to the chosen ground of the Anishinaabe”.

The second prophet told the people, “You will know the Second Fire because at this time the nation will be camped by a large body of water. In this time the direction of the sacred shell will be lost. The Midewiwin will diminish in strength. A boy will be born to point the way back to the traditional ways. He will show the direction to the stepping stones to the future of the Anishinaabe people”.

<sup>13</sup> Benton-Banai, E. *The Mishomis Book*. 1988. Pg. 89-93.






The third prophet said to the people, "In the Third Fire, the Anishinaabe will find the path to their chosen ground, a land in the West to which they must move their families. This will be the land where the food grows on water".

The Fourth Fire was originally given to the people by two prophets. They came as one. They told of the coming of the light-skinned race. One of the prophets said, "You will know the future of our people by what face the light-skinned race wears. If they come wearing the face of brotherhood, then there will come a time of wonderful change for generations to come. They will bring new knowledge and articles that can be joined with the knowledge of this country. In this way two nations will join to make a mighty nation. This new

nation will be joined by two or more so that the four will form the mightiest nation of all. You will know the face of brotherhood if the light-skinned race comes carrying no weapons, if they come bearing only their knowledge and a handshake".

The other prophet said, "Beware if the light-skinned race comes wearing the face of death. You must be careful because the face of brotherhood and the face of death look very much alike. If they come carrying a weapon, beware. If they come in suffering, they could fool you. Their hearts maybe filled with greed for the riches of this land. If they are indeed your brothers, let them prove it. Do not accept them in total trust. You shall know that the face they wear is one of death if the rivers



run with poison and fish become unfit to eat. You shall know them by these many things”.

The fifth prophet said, “In the time of the Fifth Fire there will come a time of great struggle that will grip the lives of all First Peoples. At the waning of this fire there will come among the people one who holds a promise of great joy and salvation. If the people accept this promise of a new way and abandon their old teachings, then the struggle for the Fifth Fire will be with the people for many generations. The promise that comes will prove to be a false promise. All those who

accept this promise will cause the near destruction of the people”.

The prophet of the Sixth Fire said, “In the time of the Sixth Fire it will be evident that the promise of the Sixth Fire came in a false way. Those deceived by this promise will take their children away from the teachings of the elders. Grandsons and granddaughters will turn against the elders. In this way the elders will lose their reason for living; they will lose their purpose in life. At this time a new sickness will come among the people. The balance of many people will be disturbed. The cup of life will almost be spilled. The cup of life will almost become the cup of grief”.

The seventh prophet that came to the people long ago was said to be different from the other prophets. He was young and had a strange light in his eyes. He said, “In the time of the Seventh Fire a new people will emerge. They will retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail. Their steps will take them to the elders who they will ask to guide them on their journey. But many of the elders will have fallen asleep. They will awaken to this new time with nothing to offer. Some of the elders will be silent out of fear. Some of the elders will be silent because no one will ask anything of them. The New People will have to be careful in how they approach the elders. The task of the New People will not be easy. There will be a rebirth of the Anishinaabe nation and a rekindling of old flames. The Sacred Fire will again be lit.

It is at this time that the light-skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and Final Fire – an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood. If the light-skinned race makes the wrong choice of roads, then the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back to them and cause much suffering and death to all the Earth’s people”.

If the people of the earth could just wear the face of brotherhood, they might be able to deliver their society from the road to destruction. The two roads representing two clashing world views could come together to form one mighty nation guided by respect for all living things.



## THE TIME HAS COME TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE<sup>14</sup>

It is important that the teachings of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples remain relevant in contemporary times. After centuries of ignoring, attacking and undermining Indigenous ways of knowing, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people believe that these teachings hold powerful insights into how human beings, our communities and our nations can interact with the land in a way that promotes environmental sustainability.

As time moves on, people of all cultures in all parts of Canada are witnessing first hand the impact of modern life on the environment, be it global warming, endangered species, the destruction of natural landscapes or the impact of industrial pollution. The “environmental crisis” has also prompted some of our Knowledge Holders to believe that now is the time to start to share our knowledge of the land, so that we can all work together to create a better future for ourselves and the lands and waters, and the plants and animals, we all depend upon for continued life.

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<sup>14</sup> Written by Leanne Simpson, 2010

# RECIPROCITY – INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING

## EXPLORING INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY<sup>15</sup>

“We must be very careful when we consider the role of the spiritual plane. We are not dealing with some quaint custom, nor are we dealing with religion as many of us define that term in our post-industrial, western world. To many Indigenous people, the spiritual plane is not simply a sphere of activity or belief which is separable from the pragmatics of everyday life; instead, it seems to be a context from within which most aspects of life are seen, defined and given significance.”<sup>16</sup>

While ‘spirituality’ may be defined differently by every person, there are some common undercurrents in the river of Indigenous spirituality.<sup>17</sup> Indigenous spirituality is a holistic and respectful worldview that was created by the Indigenous historical, social, and geographical existence on ‘Turtle Island’.

“The notion ‘world view’ denotes distinctive vision of reality which not only interprets and orders the places and events in the experience of a people, but lends form, direction, and continuity to life as well. World View provides people with a distinctive set of values, and identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and a place, and a felt sense of continuity with a tradition which transcends the experience of a single lifetime, a tradition which may be said to transcend even time”.<sup>18</sup>

A common teaching in the spiritual path is the understanding of interconnectedness: that all things are dependent on each other. Even though each individual and all things have their own special gifts and place in the world, all “are dependent on and share in the growth and work of everything and everyone else”.<sup>19</sup> One’s very existence depends on the web of

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from Bell, N. *Just Do It: Providing Anishinaabe Culture-Based Education*. 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Ross, R. *Dancing With a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*. 1992, p. 54-55

<sup>17</sup> Cajete, G. *Igniting the Sparkle: An Indigenous Science Education Model*, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Ortiz in Beck & Walters, *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge Sources of Life*. 1977, p. 91

<sup>19</sup> Graveline, J. *CircleWorks: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*. 1998, p. 55.





interconnectedness between the self and the community and between the community and nature.

“Our community prospers when the work that each member performs is in alignment with the Earth and is a direct and sacred expression of Spirit. In Aboriginal Traditional forms, the spiritual infuses a person’s entire existence within the world. A spiritual connection helps not only to integrate our self as a unified entity, but also to integrate the individual into the world as a whole. Spirituality is experienced as an ongoing process, allowing the individual to move towards experiencing connection - to family, community, society and Mother Earth”.<sup>20</sup>

Fundamental to Indigenous worldview is the link between individual responsibility and community well-being. One must be responsible for their own actions in relation to their community and ultimately the world. “Self-In-Relation is linked to tribal worldview and is very important in the formation of an Aboriginal identity”.<sup>21</sup> Several key components related to the construction of Aboriginal identity which represents a model that is ‘multigenerational’ and ‘transdirectional’ is articulated as:

- discovering the centrality of self, especially individual will and ability or “medicine”;
- transmitting individual power to family through values, attitudes, behavior and institutions;
- extending the family to the broader end of community and developing agency to connect diverse groups of people;

- challenging the existing imbalances between the cultural/structural divide of all peoples of the world, and;
- recreating self in solidarity with those who are, those who have been and those who are yet to be.<sup>22</sup>

The impacts of experiencing ceremonies and teachings are profound on the transmission of cultural knowledge and understanding. In the community, many hours are spent listening to the teachings and participating in ceremony which is repeated seasonally year after year. “Carried with these teachings are values, principles, attitudes, and codes for [a good life]. A significant aspect central of an [Indigenous] worldview is faith, belief and understanding of a parallel spiritual realm. Having an appreciation and respect for the existence of a spiritual reality supported by faith and belief is necessary then”.<sup>23</sup> Cultural stories and traditional teachings therefore elaborate on and explain what it is to be an Indigenous person.

“Cultural stories not only direct personality, social order, action and ethics; they also set out the proper context for a person’s life. Cultural stories and traditional teachings give life structure and meaning. They are the oral reference libraries that account for stories, legends, prophecies, ceremonies, songs, dances, language, and the philosophy of the people”.<sup>24</sup>

20 Graveline, J. *CircleWorks: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*. 1998, p. 55.

21 Graveline, J. *CircleWorks: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*. 1998, p. 57.

22 Dion-Stout, M. *An Indigenous Perspective on Healing and Wellness*. 1994, p. 14-15

23 Rheault, D. *Anishnaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (The Way of a Good Life)*. 1999, p. 19

24 Rheault, D. *Anishnaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (The Way of a Good Life)*. 1999, p. 109.





Ceremonies provide a unique opportunity to communicate with the spiritual realm. It is also a time when “accumulated wisdom of the people is passed along to a new generation, thus ensuring a continuum of proper behaviour and attitude in life”.<sup>25</sup> The traditional knowledge shared through ceremony fosters a relationship with all living beings while allowing the person to find their place in the world by providing the necessary foundation upon which to examine that world.<sup>26</sup> Ceremony therefore “allows one to cross the seeming divide between physical and spiritual realms, whereby one can observe with a more complete perception”.<sup>27</sup> This sense of relatedness therefore has the ability to transform a person’s spiritual and cultural realities in a process that employs ceremony. This gift that is given is profound: “the Indigenous theory of relatedness demands that each and every entity in the

Universe seeks and sustains personal relationships. Furthermore, the spiritual aspect of knowledge about the world teaches that relationships not be left incomplete. Traditional protocols, Indigenous language, and stories teach the lesson of relations....Indigenous stories... have the ability to integrate and synthesize all the living relationships or events at any given moment in life. When we rely on a story to guide us we are not only integrated with the natural environment around us and our living relations, but also with the timeless past and culture of our ancestors”.<sup>28</sup>

Faith and belief in spirituality frames a worldview which informs the values of the people. The foundational values teach protocol regarding actions and behaviours. These actions and behaviours which manifest the value system are ritualized in ceremony through the relationships that are connected in ceremony. These relationships are therefore grounded in the teachings of the earth which in turn informs the spirituality of Indigenous people.

25 Rheault, D. *Anishnaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (The Way of a Good Life)*. 1999, p. 83.

26 Rheault, D. *Anishnaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (The Way of a Good Life)*. 1999.

27 Rheault, D. *Anishnaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (The Way of a Good Life)*. 1999, p. 101.

28 Colorado, P. 1988, p. 55.







## THE LAND AS THE RECEPTACLE OF WORLDVIEW<sup>29</sup>

Contained in the spiritual laws of Indigenous people are the laws of the land. Instructions which are perceived as 'sacred gifts' were obtained through dreams and visions, as well as from teachers. The laws of the land were guided by the spirit world and the law of its use is sacred to traditional Indigenous people today. "Elders teach a world-view based on the knowledge that all things in life are related in a sacred manner and are governed by natural or cosmic laws".<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Adapted from Bell, N. *Just Do It: Providing Anishinaabe Culture-Based Education*. 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Kulchysk, P. i et al, *In the Words of Elders: Aboriginal Cultures in Transition*. 1999, pg xvi.

The land communicates as a teacher and is a receptacle of knowledge and wisdom. When Indigenous people seek wisdom it is to Mother Earth that they return. With her they dream, have vision quests, and obtain the knowledge and wisdom they need. The knowledge and wisdom they glean from the land is not founded in logical thought framed within the Western rational scientific tradition. Rather, it is thought that is grounded in the land. Land is a metaphor for the whole universe.

"We also have to ask how the hunter-gatherer experienced - and thus understood - his (sic) worlds. Though he lived on a mental as well as a physical plane,



I suggest that those planes were “felt” as opposed to abstractly learned. Further, a people whose knowledge is “felt” knowledge, sensory knowledge, will look at the world very differently from those whose knowledge is primarily intellectual; this difference may be central to the Indigenous concept of a spiritual plane”.<sup>31</sup>

As well as Indigenous Elders, non-Indigenous scholars have recognized the qualities of Indigenous ways of knowing. Knudston and Suzuki (1992) offer the hypothesis that there is a common thread that unites all Indigenous peoples’ thought. The care, involvement, passion, and above all, the interconnectivity that characterize Indigenous thought is crucial, they suggest, to the survival of our planet. Levine and Suzuki (1993) write of the narrow focus of the scientific paradigm that isolates, reports back to the world of truth, and is based merely on vignettes of separate life experiences as if they were all of life. Missing in this knowledge is the interconnectivity of thought to which Houle (1992) refers to as the legacy of the ancient ones. This missing interconnectedness of thought in non-Indigenous thinking is uncovered by Beam (1989) when

31 Ross, R. *Dancing With a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*. 1992, p. 81.

he exposes the dissimilar attitudes towards the world of Indigenous people and Euro-Canadians. “An Indigenous viewpoint is that it was made for its own sake: man (sic) has to live in accordance with that structure. One system believes that you are a part of everything, and one says that you are on top of everything, and everything is there for your use - everything else is lower”.<sup>32</sup>

Indigenous children could be the most advantaged with respect to a holistic education based on spirituality, along with a cultural model which encompasses all aspects of the ecosystem. In the early years of the twenty-first century, there is a need to use Indigenous spiritual beliefs and cultural ways of life in the ecosystem context, in order to help Indigenous people to know their own heritage and assure their identity with the earth, as well as to assist them to live in two cultures successfully. This is not to say that Indigenous people could or should return to nature totally, living solely off the land, but to emphasize that their ways of life are valuable and that without being themselves as Indigenous people, they face confusion in utilizing the teachings of an Indigenous spiritual belief and a great spirit who has given them life. In order to gain the best of two worlds and still create a paradigm shift, they must live life according to their own spiritual and cultural guidance.

32 Beam, C. *Carl Beam The Columbus Project Peterborough*. 1989, p. 13.



## INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW AND VALUES<sup>33</sup>

Based on traditional Indigenous worldview, core values exist as a set of protocol to inform actions and behaviours. Anishinaabe tradition speaks of the Seven Ancestors who were given the responsibility by the Creator to watch over the people of the earth. The ancestors realized that the people were not living life to its fullest potential, and sent a helper to find a human who would be taught how to live in harmony with Creation. A child was selected to bring these teachings back to the Anishinaabe.

These Seven Sacred Gifts are influenced by the gifts of vision and the attitude of respect, which exist at the very core of Anishinaabe belief. Vision refers to the ability to see beyond the confines of the physical world, to view Creation in a more holistic manner by acknowledging the reality and validity of other levels of existence. This is often referred to as three hundred and sixty degree vision.<sup>34</sup> People who have not realized this gift are said to have one hundred and eighty degree vision. The attitude of respect acknowledges the inter-connectedness of all living things and speaks of honouring the sacredness of this connection between all of Creation.

The seven sacred gifts which are influenced by vision and respect are:

1. WISDOM: to cherish knowledge and the gift of vision, expressed in the experiential variety and depth of one's life.
2. SHARING/LOVE: to approach the inter-connectedness of all things in a generous and cooperative manner. To strive for peace in inter-personal and intra-personal relations.
3. STRENGTH/RESPECT: to honor all of creation and to be aware of the need for kindness and respect for oneself and others, to exercise restraint and self discipline in an attempt to create and maintain peace with oneself and others.
4. BRAVERY: to face a foe with integrity and courage so that there will be a safe and peaceful environment for the individual and the community.
5. HONESTY/KINDNESS: the capacity for caring, a wish for harmonious and well intentioned relationships with others.
6. HUMILITY: to know oneself as a sacred being within Creation, honoring the equality of all things: a desire for peaceful relations and balance with all of life.
7. TRUTH: to know all of the teachings and act accordingly. To recognize the inherent equality and dignity of the self and others.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Adapted from Bell, N. *Just Do It: Providing Anishinaabe Culture-Based Education*. 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Dumont in Stiegelbauer, S. *The Individual is the Community; The Community is the World; Native Elders Talk About What Young People Need to Know*. 1992

<sup>35</sup> Benton-Banai, E. *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*. 1988, p. 64.









The Haudenosaunee people have teachings called the Great Law of Peace which informs their worldview. These teachings are shared here by Mohawk Elder Tom Porter. There was a time in this world when there was peace and tranquility, and spiritual things occurred day-to-day amongst the people of the Iroquois nations. But the elders tell us this was another one of those dark times in our history when the culture, ceremonies and the peaceful ways of life were almost lost.

The Creator was very sad to see the deplorable situation the people were in. It is for this reason that the Creator sent one of the Four Sacred Beings to be born among the people. The mission of the Peacemaker was to restore kindness, love, joy, and peace to the villages of all our people.

The Peacemaker said, "I have three things. Peace, the power (strength) to live, and righteousness. That is what I have. And that is what the Creator wants the people to have. And love, compassion."

And then the Peacemaker said, "In place of the weapons of war, I will give you this sacred tobacco. And this is what you will use in times of need. When anything like that comes to threaten you, you will build a fire and you will offer this tobacco that I have given you. When you burn the tobacco, that will summon the spiritual world. And you will call to the Creator and you will call to me. And we are the ones who will stop whatever threat comes to you."

And then the Peacemaker told them to hold hands together in a symbolic way: lock their arms together. "And in a big circle the fifty Chiefs will be and in the middle of that great circle where the Chiefs are holding hands, I will plant the Great Tree of Peace. And it will be so tall that it will pierce the sky. And it will be the symbol of sharing, the symbol of brotherhood and the symbol of peace in the world. And the roots will be so big and they will be white, one to the north, the east, the south, and the west. And they will carry peace to the world. And those roots are white, so they can be noticed by all. And when people see the white roots, if they want peace, they can follow them. And they can make their minds known where the Tree of Peace was planted. And they will seek to sit in peace, in the shade of the tree, with all of us Iroquois nations."<sup>36</sup>

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36 Porter, T. *And Grandma Said...* 2008, pg. 272-316.





## THE TRANSMISSION OF WORLDVIEW AND VALUES<sup>37</sup>

Understanding Anishinaabe knowledge and worldview begins with Medicine Wheel teachings: the gifts of the directions (vision, time, reason, movement), the actions of those gifts (see it, relate to it, figure it out, do it), and the learning process (awareness, understanding, knowledge, wisdom). Building from this Indigenous knowledge can be defined as wholeness, interrelationships, interconnections, and balance/respect.

Wholeness requires that one look in entirety; that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, yet the parts cannot be fully seen until the shape of the whole can be seen. Interrelationship requires that one establish a personal relationship with the 'whole' - with all that surrounds them. In addition, one must establish a relationship with their whole being; this includes one's spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional aspects. Interconnections create an environment which is mutually sustaining; where there is a transcending of logic and linear thought to reveal synthesis and dynamic interdependence. Balance and respect provide an order and structure to the whole and all its relationships and interconnections while providing an appreciation for the 'awe' of it all.

It is necessary to consider Indigenous knowledge as a collection of knowledges from different Indigenous nations. Indigenous knowledge is therefore culture specific, contained within the local knowledge and worldview of the nation. It therefore also has to be ecological, where the knowledge is contained within the land of the geographic location of the nation. Knowledge is also contained within the people of the nation. Indigenous knowledge then becomes personal and generational as there is a process of generational transmission. Indigenous knowledge is epistemological, in that, each nation determines for itself how it knows what it knows.

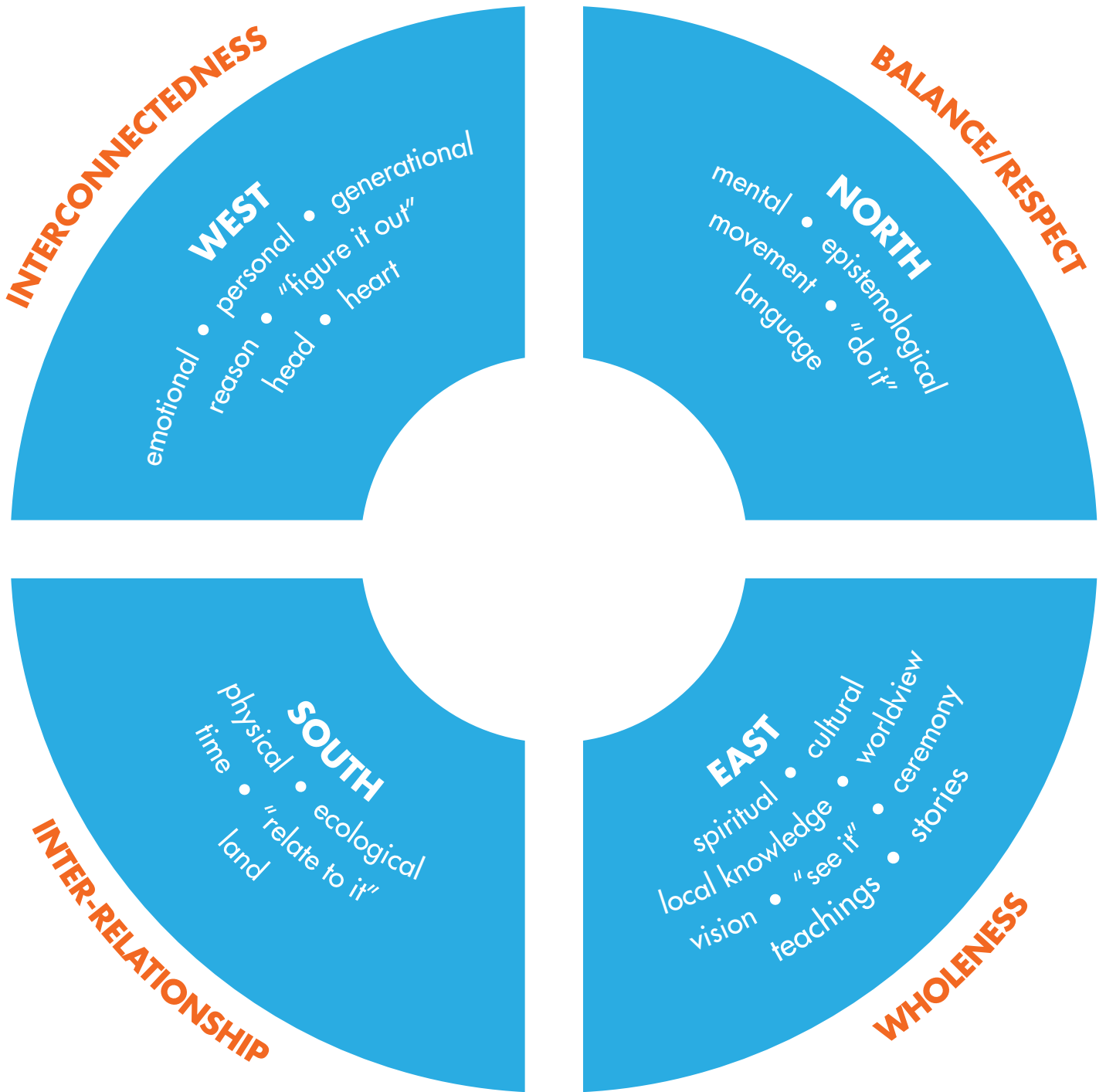
While Indigenous worldview articulates that Indigenous people need to develop themselves, including their children, in a holistic way which addresses their spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental capacities, they need to address how to transmit learning through all of those personal aspects. The spiritual can be touched through ceremony, teachings, and stories. The physical can be transmitted through the land, while the emotional aspect can be developed through a balanced connection between the heart and the head. Mental capacities can be developed through the language and integrative learning.

"What one sees at the top of the mountain is not what one sees at the bottom. Without this wisdom we close our minds to all that we cannot view from our position and so limit our capacity to grow and improve. But with this wisdom, there comes an awakening. We recognize that alone one sees only so much - which, in truth, is not much at all. This is the wisdom that opens our minds to improvement, knocks down prejudices, and teaches us to respect what at first we cannot view. What you cannot see can be seen from a different part of the mountain"<sup>38</sup>.

Indigenous knowledge and worldview is attained by choosing to do what is necessary to climb the mountain in order to obtain multiple perspectives from which to view the world. This in-depth searching for knowledge is what leads to wisdom.

<sup>37</sup> Adapted from Bell, N. *Just Do It: Providing Anishinaabe Culture-Based Education*. 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Kim & Mauborgne, 1992, p. 127.



## THE TRANSMISSION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE



## LANGUAGE<sup>39</sup>

*The gift of the Native language  
to the children is immeasurable  
and will secure the future of our Native Nations.  
(Kahnawake Survival School)*

Language is critically important to the survival of Indigenous people and their cultures. It is important to understand that Indigenous languages were an oral language in that their words were never written down prior to European contact, even though they had a recorded history through pictures and symbols on rocks (petroglyphs, pictographs), birch bark (birch bark scrolls), and sand (sand paintings). Momaday (1987) speaks to the deliberate action of not writing down a traditional language as a way of preserving its sacredness.

“One who has only an oral tradition thinks of language in this way: my words exist at the level of my voice. If I do not speak with care, my words are wasted. If I do not listen with care, words are lost. If I do not remember carefully, the very purpose of words is frustrated. This respect for words suggest an inherent morality in man’s (sic) understanding and use of language. Moreover, that moral comprehension is everywhere evident in Indigenous speech. On the other hand, the written tradition tends to encourage an indifference to language. That is to say, writing produces a false security where our attitudes toward language are

concerned. We take liberties with words; we become blind to their sacred aspect”.<sup>40</sup>

“What would happen in the Creator’s law if the robin couldn’t sing its song anymore? We would feel very bad, we would understand that something snapped in Nature’s law. What would happen if you saw a robin and you heard a different song, if it was singing the song of a seagull? What would you say, ‘robin, that’s not your language, that’s not your song’”.<sup>41</sup>

Many Indigenous people see the loss of their language as ‘one of the most critical problems’ facing them today.<sup>42</sup> A breakdown in communication occurs between children and their parents and grandparents when the language is lost. This results in the children being cut off from their past and their heritage,<sup>43</sup> yet tribal heritage and the sense of group membership it provides is essential in the face of an overly individualistic and materialistic modern society.

Language is the conceptual universe that people carry in their heads; it is the principal means by which the members of a society communicate and exchange information about their culture. Indigenous languages, as all languages do, present an untold richness of the human spirit built up piece by piece over thousands of years. Language is the outward expression of an accumulation of learning and experience shared by a group of people over centuries of development. It is not simply a vocal

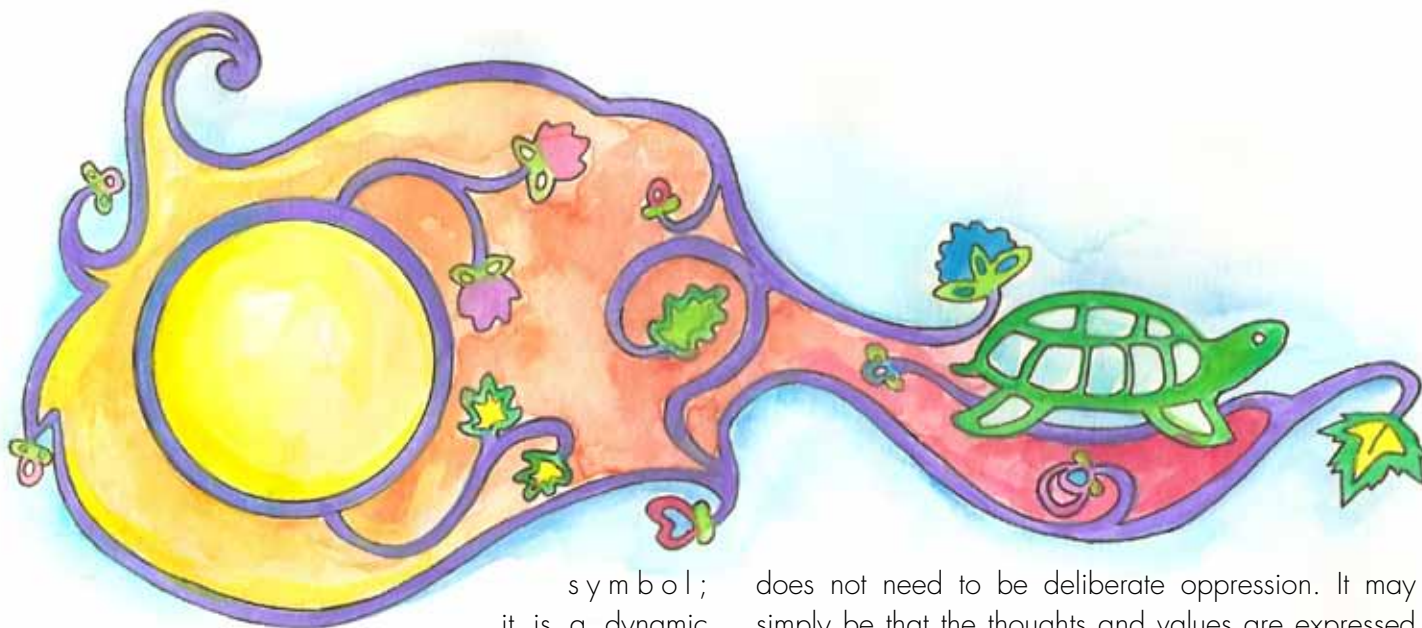
39 Adapted from Bell, N. *Just Do It: Providing Anishinaabe Culture-Based Education*. 2010.

40 Momaday, N. S. *The American and the Problem with History*. 1987, p. 160.

41 Grand Chief Mike Mitchell, 1988.

42 Reyner, J. *Teaching the Indian Child*. 1988.

43 Agebajew, R. *Annual International Native American Language Issues Institute*. 1986.



symbol ; it is a dynamic force which shapes the way a person looks at the world, his/her thinking about the world, and his/her philosophy of life. Knowing his/her maternal language helps a person to know him/herself, being proud of his/her language helps a person to be proud of his/herself. The connection between the self and between the self and cultural society is thus maintained. However, the further connection between the cultural group and other groups is also maintained. The strength of the whole is maintained by the strength of its parts. If the Canadian culture is to be strong and flourishing, all of the groups that represent the various cultural differences must be maintained as strong.

To inherit language is to acquire the possibility of understanding the world from a particular cultural perspective as language contains the thought of the people.<sup>44</sup> Learning to speak a language is equivalent to learning to think in a particular way. Language contains the thought of the people and their cultural psychology.<sup>45</sup> When language is not taught, or when language is not allowed to be spoken, the operant language dominates the worldview of those who are denied the possibility of speaking their language. Language may oppress a people through failure to recognize or acknowledge the thought of another. It

does not need to be deliberate oppression. It may simply be that the thoughts and values are expressed by the minority language do not exist in the dominant language. Domination occurs when a group of people fails to experience its language because the dominant language group teaches the minority their beliefs and values through language. Failing to teach the minority language, or even to recognize the language, is to exert control and power. In fact, it is possible to control a group of people by preventing them from learning their language. Taking away the language is often the first act of the colonizer. This results in a group of people disinherit their language. Children lose the privilege of experiencing their own language with its inherent beliefs, and values and ways of thinking. This process has been defined by Battiste (2000) as 'cognitive imperialism'.

Language reflects and expresses the culture, spirit, and philosophy of a people and consequently is the ocean in the world of cultures of people. As is the case for all cultural groups, for the Indigenous people, they are their language. The Indigenous language is the message. In it are embedded a value system and a system of human relationships. If the language is destroyed, not only are relationships broken, but also the connection with the Great Spirit, nature and the order of things as values in the Indigenous culture. The Indigenous language is a means of transmitting their system of knowledge and wisdom with its accompanying values and beliefs. Language is

44 Whorf, B. L. *Language, Thought and Reality*. 1956.

Bruner, J. *Acts of Meaning*. 1990.

45 Bruner, J. *Acts of Meaning*. 1990.



traditional Indigenous education. However, traditional Indigenous education comprises more than language as a body of knowledge and wisdom. Language also offers the ability to communicate with others, to express values, beliefs, and thoughts. When a language is not recognized or is denied, or is simply not taught, people are silenced. Their thoughts, values and beliefs are not heard and the knowledge and wisdom of the silenced culture is lost.<sup>46</sup> The dominant language assumes power by imposing the inherent worldview. When this occurs, the people who have lost their language are oppressed by the offending culture. Their identity as a people becomes confused.

Because the Indigenous language carries the entire worldview of the culture, it is linked directly with spirituality. This is because the Indigenous language is descriptive rather than directive (verb-based rather than noun-based). Instead of stating what something is, the Indigenous language speaks to its being. For instance,

the word for 'coffee' (which is a non-traditional word that has been created in modern times) describes what coffee is - a black liquid formed when beans are crushed and added with water. The Indigenous language therefore reinforces the importance of connections as a prominent spiritual value in the culture. Because the English language is not descriptive at a structural level (although attempts are made to make it descriptive by using adjectives and adverbs), the sense of connection and interrelationship is not paramount in the language. From an Indigenous perspective, the value of connections and interrelationships is what is missing in the Euro-Canadian society. The appreciation and respect of inter-connectivity and inter-relationships is beneficial to all people especially when the state of the environment is considered. Therefore this issue of making connections and reinforcing the importance of inter-relationships, which is provided in the Indigenous language, becomes a general issue.

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46 Gysin, C. *The Lost Horizon*. 1993.

## STORYTELLING<sup>47</sup>

Stories have played a very prominent role in the traditional lives of Indigenous people. Many have survived and can consequently be of importance to contemporary Indigenous people in rediscovering the culture of their people and in teaching it to younger generations. Archibald (1997) reminds us that stories can be used as a way in which to achieve holism. The offering of stories is therefore essential. According to King (2003) everything is a story; personal beings are stories. Cultural survival therefore depends on the telling of these stories in their many forms.

Stories were historically used by Indigenous people as a means of externalizing human plight by embodying and representing them in storied plot and characters. This externalization provided a means of communion among the people as externalization involves the subjectifying of the world in which they lived by communally sharing in the nature of internal experiences. For Indigenous people in particular, storytelling was a time of social gathering and entertainment which utilized the means of externalization through humour.

Stories also served as a filter for experience in that they were utilized to contain fears. Indigenous people traditionally utilized the sharing of stories to represent in liveable form the structure of the complexities through which they must find their way.

Stories were also utilized as a pedagogy in teaching the young. Through stories, children were given explanations as to why the world is the way it is and why their people do what they do - providing explanations for

natural phenomenon. This is evident in the creation story of the Anishinaabe people as well as stories addressing circumstances such as how the loon got the ring around its neck, or how the raccoon got its mask.

The pedagogy of stories also addressed and taught moral values, and social and behavioural conduct. Consequently, stories were utilized by Indigenous people as a means of shaping the identity of their young. The stories of traditional Indigenous people contained a variety of images, identities, and models that were considered to be socially acceptable. Hence the stories reinforced individual personalities to imitate the moral models contained in the various stories.

“Stories with the power to capture the imagination were like a library of scripts that people could play with; they could try on different identities and roles, without the costs and risks that accompany choices in ordinary reality. Stories fostered character development by offering patterns that people could use as models or reject. They could also provide criteria for self-examination”.<sup>48</sup>

Stories have an important place in the lives of contemporary Indigenous people. They can turn to these teachings of the past to acquire some of the spiritual teachings which are needed for the survival of the people. The stories contain the spiritual ways in which ceremonies, dances, and other spiritual activities should be conducted. Many contemporary Indigenous people who are searching for, or following, the spiritual road are approaching the Elders for the spiritual knowledge contained in the stories.

47 Adapted from Bell, N. *Just Do It: Providing Anishinaabe Culture-Based Education*. 2010.

48 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 626





In making a link with the traditional stories, Indigenous people can acquire a positive sense of Indigenous identity. Through acquiring the traditional knowledge of their people, the Indigenous person can gain a sense of pride and understanding for who he/she is as an Indigenous person. His/her sense of self will consequently become evident in the actions as the individual will begin to imitate the teachings and knowledge of the traditional teachings and stories, in both a subjective and objective way. Consequently a personality will be shaped by the knowledge contained in the traditional teachings passed on through stories.

Because many of the stories were directed to the children as a means of education, they can again acquire this important role in today's Indigenous society. Indigenous children can learn the moral codes of conduct and behaviour through the traditional stories told by the Elders. The children can learn values and morals as well as vital knowledge which explains their world in a culturally relevant way. In essence, they can acquire the knowledge to follow the traditional road of their people. Consequently, the children will have the knowledge to carry the culture of their people through

future generations. It is believed that this will ensure the younger generation's survival as Indigenous people.

While stories have played a prominent role in traditional times and still provide cultural value today, personal narratives and stories historically and presently provide cultural value as well. Narrative's primary function is one of authorizing, founding, and setting in place ways of experiencing the world.<sup>49</sup> The evolution of meaning through narrative posits that "meaning does not inhere in events but involves weaving those events into stories that are meaningful at the time. Events, after all, are stories known directly only to those who experience them and interpret them to others, who in turn make their own interpretations of what they hear. Personal narratives based on shared metaphors and responses to common problems in one generation may be reworked quite differently by the next. A concept of narrative - like culture - that is more complicated and differentiated provides ways of thinking about how human communities continue to hold together, and about how divisions that at one time seem deep recede and are reworked in the process of building alliances at another time".<sup>50</sup>

49 De Certeau, M. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 1984.

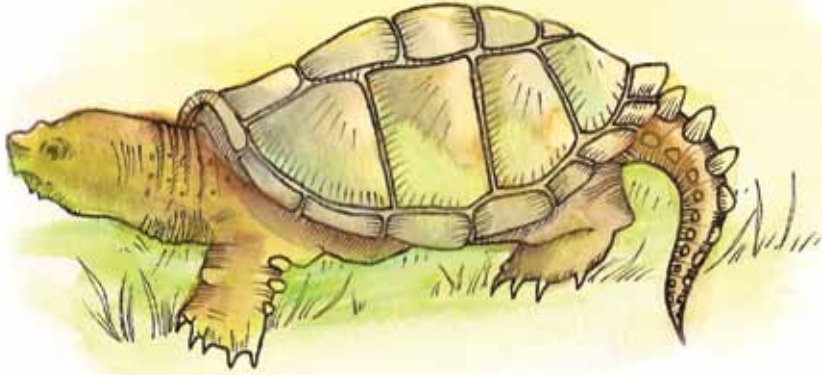
50 Cruikshank, J. *The Social Life of Stories*. 1998, p. 2.

Many stories that Elders tell are narratives about social transformation of the society in which they live as well as about individual creativity. "Oral tradition may tell us about the past, but its meanings are not exhausted with reference to the past. Good stories from the past continue to provide legitimate insights about contemporary events. What appears to be the 'same' story, even in the repertoire of one individual, has multiple meanings depending on location, circumstance, audience, and stage of life of narrator and listener".<sup>51</sup>

The stories of Turtle Island's (North America's) Indigenous people have played an important role in their traditional lives. They have provided knowledge, explanation, humour, teaching, and entertainment. They are thus essential to the survival of today's Indigenous people as they contain the vital history, teachings, and knowledge of the traditional ways which are required for those traditional Indigenous people who are struggling to find a balance of Indigenous identity in a modern Euro-Canadian world.

51 Cruikshank, J. *The Social Life of Stories*. 1998, p. 43-44.





## TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE<sup>52</sup>

Indigenous science is intuitive and empirical in its scope. Indigenous people use all six senses in the collection and dissemination of their knowledge – sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste and intuition. These senses are considered by many Indigenous people to be gifts from the Creator which they are continually thankful for.

Modern science is a newer system of learning than Indigenous knowledge; rooted in concepts from Judeo-Christian and Greek thought.<sup>53</sup> There is no inferiority or superiority in either western science or Indigenous science.<sup>54</sup> Both have validity in determining a “sense of wonder within the physical universe and conjures up visions of nature”.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, there is a pretense determined by dominant society which puts greater value and emphasis on Western science and subordinates Indigenous knowledge to a soft science.

Western science is more fragmented than Indigenous science, “scientists set out to confront the awesome mysteries of the cosmos with sensibilities that are in some sense one step removed from the primary, experiential, holistic perception of the nature mind”.<sup>56</sup> Western science views nature as inanimate objects, in which scientists use complex formulas to explain the rational workings of the planet rather than the six senses that guide Indigenous knowledge.

This reductionist viewpoint limits western science, “to a finite set of natural laws”<sup>57</sup> better able to be compartmentalized into ordered groupings. Scientists are insulated from experiencing nature’s totality as it is understood in the Indigenous mind.

Indigenous knowledge exists within Indigenous ways of knowing that range in the senses from personal experience, emotional and physical as well as knowledge that stems from learning by Earth’s creation, learning through oral tradition and ceremonies. Indigenous knowledge is passed on through seven generations within ways of life and ways of knowing.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) encompasses different ways of knowing which is culturally based, place specific, collective, holistic and also includes long periods of observation. Western Science differs from TEK because there is a time limited observation process, science usually requires a quantitative validation, and it is often believed and considered valid once written down into textbooks whereas oral tradition is knowledge that is embedded within Indigenous ways of knowing. Scientists assume that there is a consistent reality, that events in the universe follow patterns that are capable of being understood, explained and predicted. Indigenous knowledge is an ecological context whereby Indigenous people studied the behaviour of life forms and seasons to develop an

52 Adapted from Jocelyne Pelletier

53 Knudtson & Suzuki, *Wisdom of Our Elders*. 1992.

54 Knudtson & Suzuki, *Wisdom of Our Elders*. 1992.

55 Knudtson & Suzuki, *Wisdom of Our Elders*. 1992, p. 10.

56 Knudtson & Suzuki, *Wisdom of Our Elders*. 1992, p. 10.

57 Knudtson & Suzuki, *Wisdom of Our Elders*. 1992, p. 10.







understanding of the dynamics of a space and role of each life form in it. They also studied life forms and seasons to create a lifestyle that was harmonious with the local ecosystem. For example, the Anishinaabe people traditionally used the turtle shell as a calendar system in that it describes the changing seasons and each is celebrated with a ceremony (the thirteen large interior plates on the shell represent the thirteen moons). Animal behaviour, such as the turtle foraging before the winter months are cues to the season beginning to change and when turtles will soon go into hibernation. Animals have always served as humanity's mentors in coming to know the nature of the world. Anishinaabe men and women are observers of this and most often prepare themselves for fall and winter by certain animal behaviours. This represents the long periods of observation compared to a time limited process.

Western science takes things apart and looks at systems. Indigenous science looks at relationships. For centuries Indigenous people have had appointed healers, teachers, and Elders that have practiced science within their culture. These teachers could very well be called Scientists. Science as defined academically may be only one approach to studying nature; its rules set it apart from other approaches, from other knowledge systems such as Indigenous knowledge. "To understand the foundations of Indigenous science one must become open to the roles of sensation, perception, imagination, emotion, symbols, and spirit as well as that of concept, logic, and rational empiricism. Indigenous science encompasses such areas as astronomy, farming, plant domestication, animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, metallurgy and geology, in brief, studies related to plants, animals and natural phenomena".<sup>58</sup>

58 Cajete, G. *Native Science*. 2000, p. 3

# RELATIONSHIP – THE SKY WORLD

## GRANDMOTHER MOON<sup>59</sup>

The first of all mothers was a spirit who lived in the sky. She gave birth to two children, twins. One was a spirit and the other was like us in many ways, a physical being. Because they were so different, the twins fought and eventually destroyed each other. For a long time after that, the first woman lived alone. Then the Creator sent her a companion and she conceived again. Her companion left and she was alone again. Some of the creatures of the Earth noticed her in her loneliness and they asked her to join them on the Earth.

At first her only company were the animal beings. Then the children she had conceived were born. One was a girl and the other was a boy. They were different from her last children. Both were made of physical substances (water and earth), yet each had a soul-spirit (a soul). Their soul-spirits had the ability to dream and to have visions. These new people were called Anishinaabeg. They were the Earth's first humans.

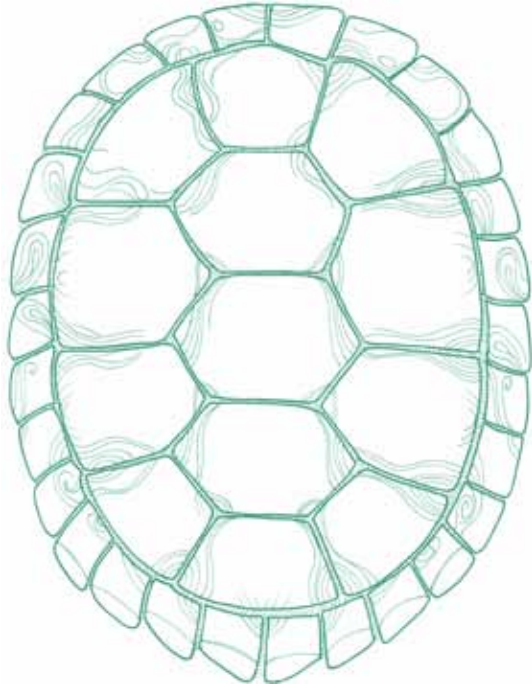
For many years, the first of all mothers lived on the Earth with her children and the animals. When she was satisfied they could survive on their own, she told them she would return to the sky, the land of peace. She told them that when their time on Earth was complete, their soul-spirits would join her there. That is why the Anishinaabe believe that all of us go to the land of peace when we pass on to the spirit world. Then the Spirit woman ascended into the sky to return to her home. Thereafter, the Anishinaabeg remembered the first of Mothers, Nokomis (Grandmother), whenever the moon gave light. At the same time, they remembered the primacy of women, who bore the unique gift of life, for it was through woman that the cycle – creation, destruction, recreation – was completed.<sup>60</sup>

So the first of all mothers is Grandmother Moon. At night she shines down on the Anishinaabe, offering her love and comfort to the people. Her light helps guide humans on their journeys through life.

<sup>59</sup> Pg. 37-38 of *The Good Path: Ojibway Learning and Activity Book For Kids* by Thomas Peacock and Marlene Wisuri, published by Afton Historical Society Press, 2002. 1-800-436-8443 [www.aftonpress.com](http://www.aftonpress.com)

<sup>60</sup> Johnston, B. *Ojibway Heritage*. 1976, p. 17.





## THIRTEEN MOONS ON THE TURTLE'S BACK<sup>61</sup>

The Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people of the woodlands have always depended upon the natural world for their survival. Watching the changes going on in the natural world with each season, they also look up into the sky and see it changing. These Nations relate the cycles of the moon (called Grandmother Moon) to those seasons. In every year, there are thirteen of those moon cycles, each with twenty-eight days from one new moon to the next.

The Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee people look at the Turtle's back as a sort of calendar, with its pattern of thirteen large scutes standing for the thirteen moons of each year. It reminds them that all things are connected and we must try to live in balance.

<sup>61</sup> *Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back: A Native American Year of Moons* by Joseph Bruchac and Jonathan London, published by The Putnam and Grosset Group, 1992.

## GRANDFATHER SUN<sup>62</sup>

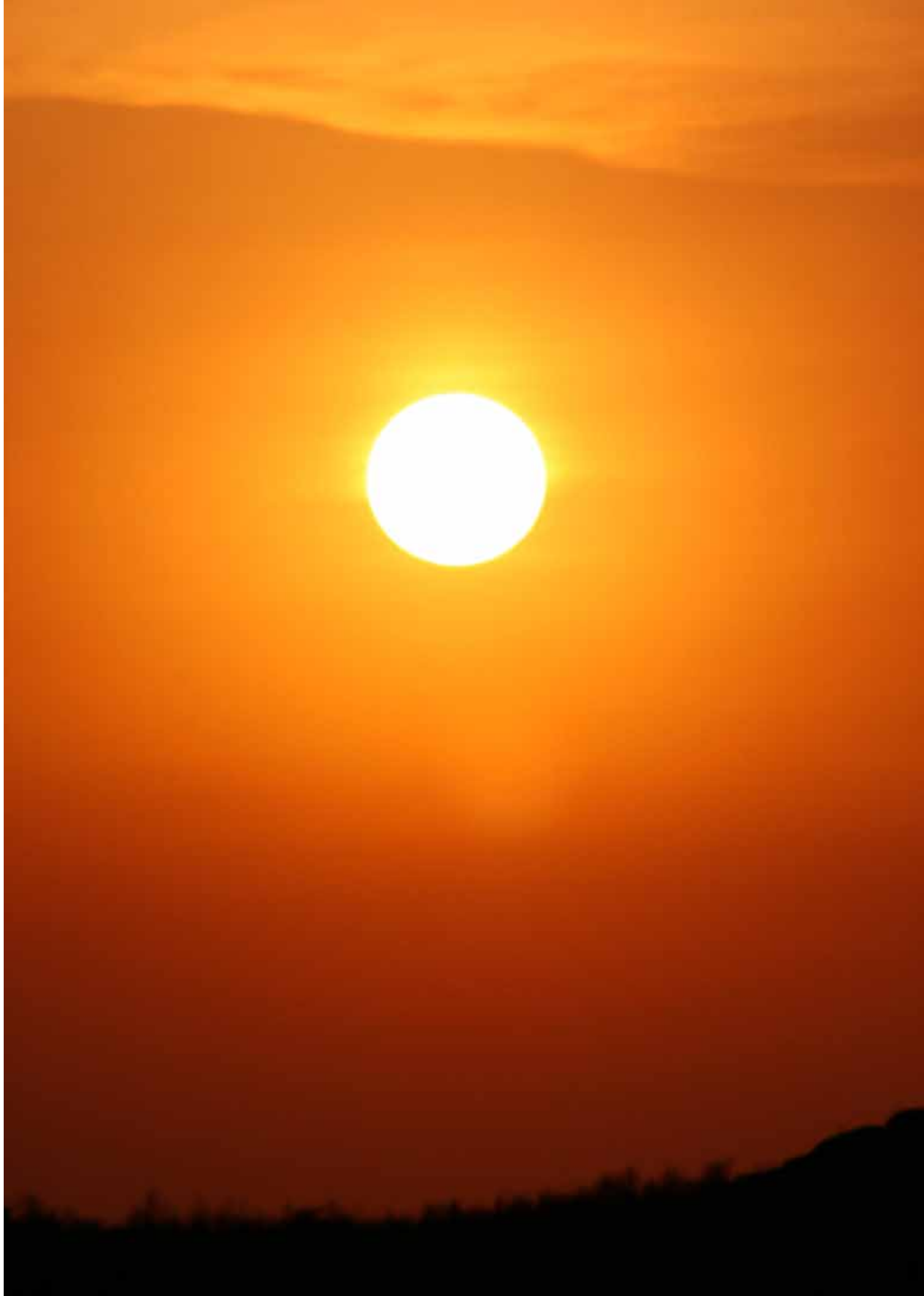
In the order of things, the Anishinaabe saw the sun as the grandfather. To pay respect to the grandfather, all the lodges in the traditional villages were built facing the east, to the rising sun. Tobacco was offered in prayer to the rising and setting sun. In rising, the sun gave life through its warmth and energy; in setting, the sun gave plants and animals time to sleep. Sunlight was needed to sustain life, working in conjunction with the Earth.

When the sun withdraws light, he also reduces life. In the spring when the sun grows warm, the whole world regenerates; in autumn, when the sun is less warm, life departs leaving only shadows of what was, and shades of what will be. In life giving, the sun is the father of all. Just as Indigenous people rendered prayers of thanks in the morning, so did they give thanks in the evening for the gifts received during the day.

Prayers of thanksgiving were part of daily life and living, not separate from man's labour or recreation, nor cribbed in ritual. As the giver gave freely and generously, so the receiver must acknowledge his gratitude in the same spirit. To the Indigenous people there was no gift or giving without a recipient. At the same time the recipient must know how and in what terms to acknowledge benefits. The gift of life is given once, but it is renewed daily in each dawning.

There is yet another aspect to the gifts bestowed by the Creator. Everyone shares in the gifts of light, life, and warmth. Thus no one person may presume that the gift is intended for him alone or deny the enjoyment of such gifts to another. All have received, all must acknowledge the great bounty.

<sup>62</sup> Pg. 38 of *The Good Path: Ojibway Learning and Activity Book For Kids* by Thomas Peacock and Marlene Wisuri, published by Afton Historical Society Press, 2002. 1-800-436-8443 [www.aftonpress.com](http://www.aftonpress.com)  
Pg. 22-23 of *Ojibway Heritage* by Basil Johnston, published by McClelland and Stewart, 1987



# RELATIONSHIP – THE WATERS

## LIFE BLOOD<sup>63</sup>

The Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee believe the earth to be their mother and therefore the waters to be like the blood that runs in our veins. From the great oceans to the underground wellsprings, the waters provide life to all living things on earth. In the spring time the waters gush as mother earth cleans herself from her long winter sleep to prepare for the hard work of bringing forth new life. Just as it is important to keep one's blood clean for a healthy body, so too is it essential to keep the waters clean to have a healthy and sustainable earth.

"The water is not just water, it is sacred. Every water is sacred. Every water is holy everywhere in the whole world. The water has spirit, it has a soul, it has life in it. The Creator said to the water, 'And your job, Water, is to move, to look for the humans, look for the birds, look for the bears, look for the deer.' That is why the water is moving. It's doing its job, going looking around for

the life. And then it goes into the big river and then into the big ocean and then back into the clouds. Around and around refreshing because it is alive. It is refreshing because it gives life. That is what the waters do, they quench our thirst and they clean and purify our body so that we may have a healthy, good life. Then when you listen to the oceans and the big lakes, you hear the heartbeat of the water. You see that it is living. The big waves come, and they hit Mother Earth. It is the same thing as what is going on right in your heart. It is beating with a rhythm because it is living".<sup>64</sup>

Indigenous people believe that it is our responsibility to maintain clean water in dealing with waste management in order to maintain biodiversity. The understanding that people must ensure resources are protected for generations to come is essential to protect and sustain them.

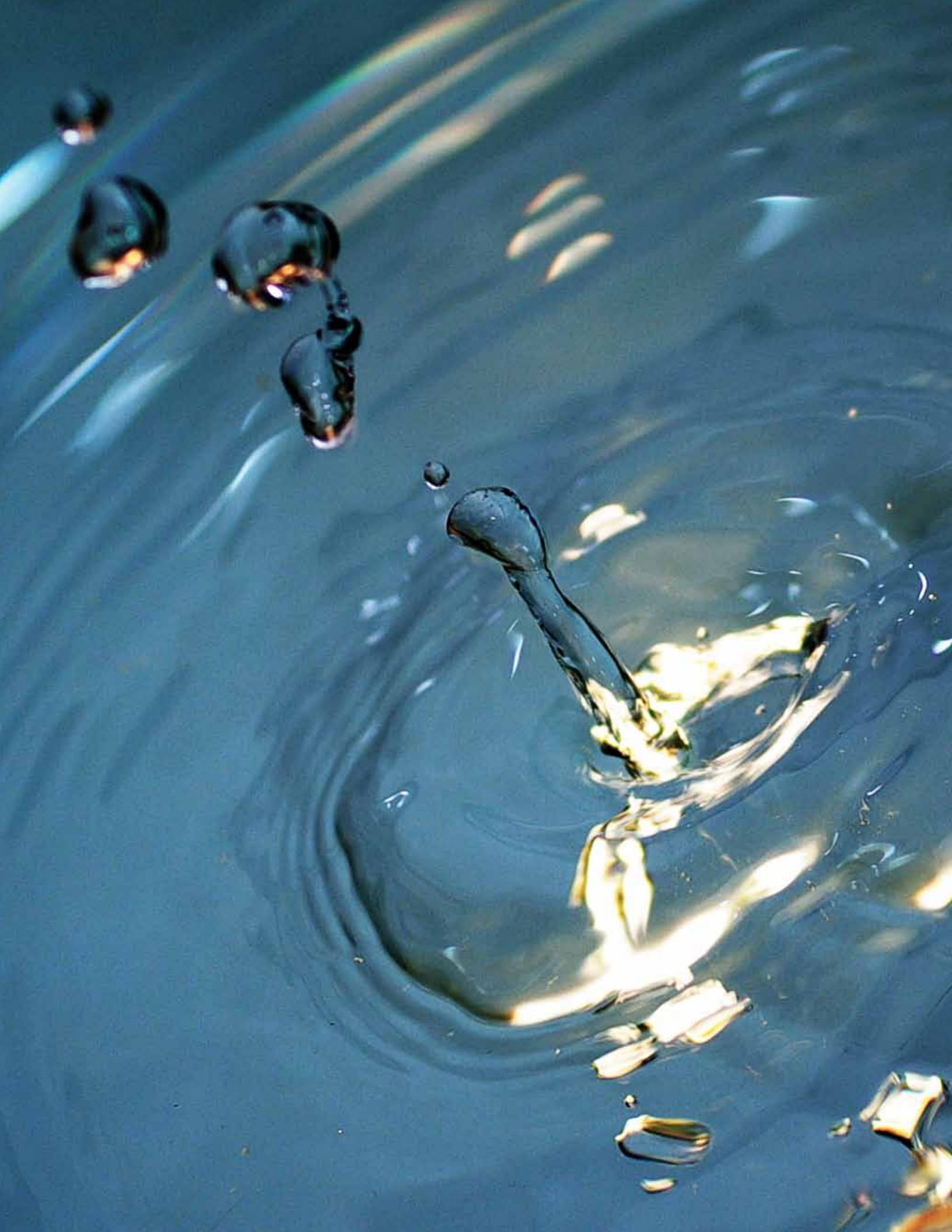
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63 Adapted from Maracle, C, Pelletier, J

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64 Pg 12 of Porter, T. *And Grandma Said...* 2008.





## WOMEN'S RESPONSIBILITY

The turtle shell women's teaching speaks to the shell's outer rim as representing a women's moon time. Every twenty-eight days the cycle of the moon and women bring cleansing and renewal. This close relationship between Indigenous women and the moon is thus manifested in caring for the waters as the moon contains the great power of moving the waters.

One Anishinaabe woman elder has taken her responsibility for the water seriously. Josephine Mandamin leads the Mother Earth Water Walk, a journey around the great lakes to raise awareness of the plight of the waters and the need for action. "Josephine Mandamin warms you with her grandmotherly smile and speaks in soft aboriginal tones that lull you into agreement, even as she conks you on the head. "I really think – and I don't like saying it either – that it seems that it's always been the native people that bring these things to light ... to awaken people."

What Josephine wants illuminated is environmental collapse. And while one might be perturbed by the notion that Indigenous people care more about that than the rest of society, it should be pointed out that Josephine has walked around the great lakes to reinforce her point. Josephine grew up on Manitoulin Island, eating fresh fish daily and drinking straight from Georgian Bay. During her lifetime, she has seen the Great Lakes nearly ruined – the fish killed by invasive species, the harbors poisoned, and, now, the water evaporating into the clouds of global warming.

Since the lakes provide drinking water to 35 million people, you'd think their health would be a raging public issue. In 2005, more than 60 scientists





endorsed a report declaring the Great Lakes ecosystem so stressed that it's nearing "irreversible" collapse – a prediction ignored by most of the region's media.

First Nations' grandmothers do not love their grandkids more than anyone else, but they may have a clearer view of the horizon. In the Anishinabe tradition, women fetch the water. So, in 2003, when Mandamin was "moved by the spirits" to speak out for the Great Lakes, it was natural for her to pick up her copper pail and start walking. She decided to circle the lakes and tell people that "the water is sick ... and people need to really fight for that water, to speak for that water, to love that water."<sup>65</sup>

Raising awareness of the need to protect fresh water is a cause worth "walking the talk," Mandamin says. "I want to leave what I am doing for all of the future generations, so that they will know somebody cared enough to say something," and so she carried the water for us all.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Kevin McMahon, *Toronto Star*, 2009.

<sup>66</sup> First Nation Environmental Network, 2006.





## ANISHINAABE STORY – HOW THE TURTLE GOT ITS SHELL<sup>67</sup>

A long time ago, Turtle did not have a shell. He was a small, little green creature who spent most of his time hiding in caves or in trees or under rocks for protection from all of the other animals.

One day Nanaboozhoo was very hungry, so he started to fish. He was not having any luck catching fish anywhere. All of a sudden, a little turtle poked his head out from under a rock near the stream and said, "Nanaboozhoo, my brother, why don't you go down the stream to where the rocks are? There are lots of fish there."

"OK," said Nanaboozhoo, "I'll try to fish over there."

After he went down to where the rocks were, he caught lots of fish. That evening he had a wonderful supper. With a full stomach, he went back to thank Turtle.

"Miigwech, my little brother Turtle, I had a fantastic supper. Now I am going to do you a favour." He looked around until he found a round rock. He picked it up and painted it beautiful colours. He put it on top of Turtle and showed him how to pull his head, arms and legs inside.

"From now on this rock will be your shell. It will protect you from the other animals, as thanks for showing Nanaboozhoo where to fish."

<sup>67</sup> *Nanabosho: How the Turtle Got Its Shell* by Joe McLellan, published by Pemmican, 1994.



## HAUDENOSAUNEE STORY – TURTLE RACES WITH BEAVER<sup>68</sup>

Long ago, Turtle lived in a small pond. It was a fine place. There were alder trees along the bank to give shade and a fine grassy bank where Turtle could crawl out and sun himself. There were plenty of fish for Turtle to catch. The small pond had everything any turtle could ever want, and Turtle thought his pond was the finest place in the whole world. Turtle spent his time swimming around, sunning himself, and catching fish whenever he was hungry. So it went until the cold winds began to blow down from the north.

“Ah,” Turtle said, “It is time for me to go to sleep.” Then he dove down to the bottom of the pond and burrowed into the mud. He went to sleep for the winter. He slept so soundly, in fact, he slept a little later than usual and did not wake up until it was late in the spring. The warming waters of the pond woke him, and he crawled out of the mud and began to swim toward the surface. Something was wrong, though, for it seemed to take much too long to get to the surface of his small pond. Turtle was certain the water had not been that deep when he went to sleep.

As soon as Turtle reached the surface and looked around, he saw that things were not as they should be. His small pond was more than twice its normal size. His fine grassy bank for sunning himself was underwater!

His beautiful alder trees had been cut down and made into a big dam.

“Who had done this to my pond?” Turtle said.

Just then Turtle heard a loud sound. WHAP! Turtle turned to look and saw a strange animal swimming toward him across the surface of his pond. It had a big, flat tail and as it came close to Turtle, it lifted up that big, flat tail and hit the surface of the water with it. WHAP!

“Who are you?” Turtle said. “What are you doing in my pond? What have you done to my beautiful trees?”

“Hunh!” the strange animal said. “This is not your pond. This is my pond! I am Beaver and I cut down those trees with my teeth and I built that dam and made this pond nice and deep. This is my pond and you must leave.”

“No,” Turtle said. “This is my pond. If you do not leave, I will fight you. I am a great warrior.”

“Hunh!” Beaver said. “That is good. Let us fight. I will call my relatives to help me, and they will chew your head off with their strong teeth.”

Turtle looked closely at Beaver’s teeth. They were long and yellow and looked very sharp.

“Hah!” Turtle said, “I can see it would be too easy to fight you. Instead we should have a contest to decide which of us will leave this pond forever.”

<sup>68</sup> Pg. 61-62 of *Keepers of the Animals: Native American Stories and Wildlife Activities for Children*. By Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac, published by Fulcrum, 1997.

"Hunh!" Beaver said. "That is a good idea. Let us see who can stay underwater the longest. I can stay under for a whole day."

As soon as Beaver said that, Turtle saw he would have to think of a different contest. He had been about to suggest that they see who could stay underwater the longest, but if what Beaver said was true, then he would beat Turtle.

"Hah!" Turtle said. "It would be too easy to defeat you that way. Let us have a race instead. The first one to reach the other side of the pond is the winner. The loser must leave my pond forever."

"Hunh!" Beaver said. "That is a good contest. I am the fastest swimmer of all. When I win, you will have to leave my pond forever. Let us begin to race."

"Wait," Turtle said, "I am such a fast swimmer that it would not be fair unless I started from behind you."

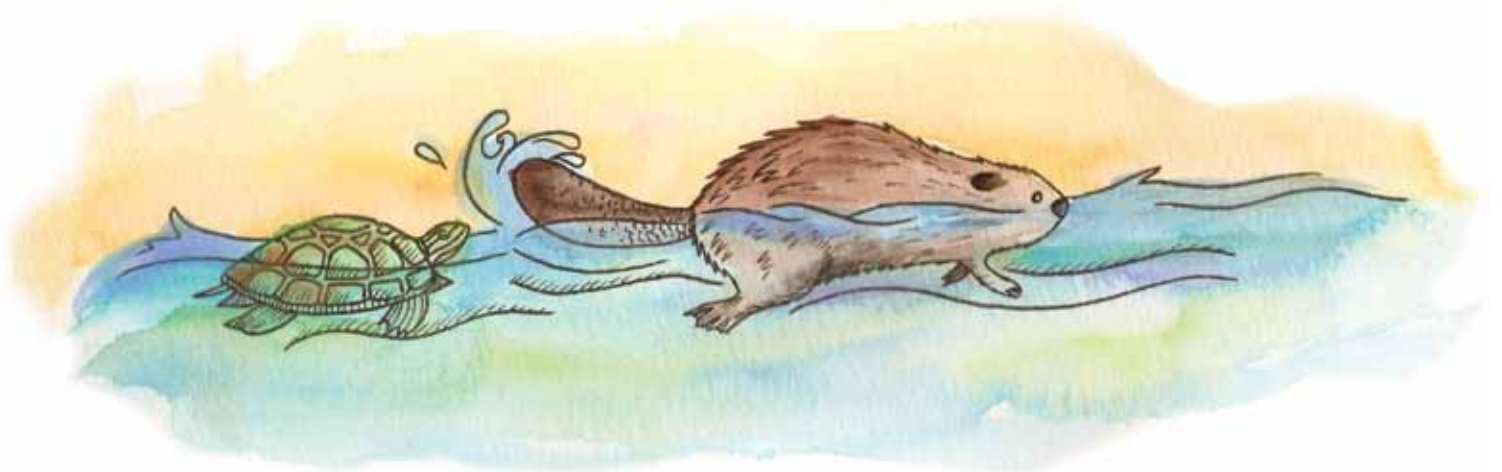
Then Turtle placed himself behind Beaver, right next to Beaver's big tail.

"I am ready," Turtle said, "let us begin!"

Beaver began to swim. He was such a fast swimmer that Turtle could barely keep up with him. When they were halfway across the pond, Turtle began to fall even further behind. But Turtle had a plan. He stuck his long neck out and grabbed Beaver's tail in his jaws.

Beaver felt something grab his tail, but he could not look back. He was too busy swimming, trying to win the race. He swung his tail back and forth, but Turtle held on tight. Now Beaver was almost to the other side of the pond. Turtle bit down even harder. Beaver swung his tail high up into the air, trying to shake free whatever had hold of him. Just as Beaver's tail reached the top of its swing, Turtle let go. He flew through the air and landed on the bank! Beaver looked up, and there was Turtle! Turtle had won the race.

So it was that Beaver had to leave and Turtle, once again, had his pond to himself. With its new deeper waters there were soon even more fish than there had been before and Turtle's alders grew back once more. Truly, Turtle's pond was the finest place in the whole world.







## THE GREAT LAKES TERRITORY<sup>69</sup>

Much of the area surrounding the Great Lakes is shared territory between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee. Places like Toronto were meeting places of the many nations. The lakes and rivers were used as traveling routes. The Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes sustained themselves physically with the resources supplied to them in their natural environment and spiritually as they practiced their ceremonies and manifested their teachings. The Algonquian (Anishinaabe) and Iroquoian (Haudenosaunee) nations gathered to trade and celebrate through social practices like pow wows. With the westward migration due to the continued influx of the settler society and colonization, the nations engaged in warfare for territory to sustain their livelihood. Treaty agreements between the nations created a tradition of sharing the land and its resources.

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<sup>69</sup> Adapted from Jocelyne Pelletier

# RELATIONSHIP – THE EARTH

## MOTHER EARTH<sup>70</sup>

The Anishinaabeg predicated fatherhood of the sun. In the same way they proclaimed motherhood in the earth. Both sun and earth were mutually necessary and interdependent in the generation of life. But of the two pristine elements, Mother Earth was the most immediate and cherished and honoured.

In function both Father Sun and Mother Earth were different, just as man and woman are dissimilar. The sun illuminates, the earth sustains with beauty and nourishment. One cannot give or uphold life without the other.

Perhaps motherhood of Earth emanated from its elemental substance, rock. As such, it seemed to remain unchanged, enduring winds, winter and summer. It appeared immune to change that man could see immediately, unmoving as it were, so as to live on in order to give life. The same kind of character and quality was expected of motherhood whose foundation

was love. If children were to grow into manhood and womanhood, they had to have confidence in the abiding nature of the love of motherhood, otherwise they would be wanting in trust in themselves and in others. But the constancy of the earth in life giving and in the bounty of her giving was more assumed than that of human motherhood.

Just as the Anishinaabeg saw the sun as a symbol of the fatherhood of man, so they saw in the earth, motherhood. A woman, by a singular act with a man conceives and gives birth to new life. Thereafter she must sustain the new life. In a similar way the earth responds. With the coming of spring and the warmth of the sun, the earth conceives and gives birth to flowers, grasses, trees, and food-bearing plants. She then nourishes them. As a woman deserves honour and love for her gift of life, so does the earth deserve veneration. In honouring the earth through prayer, chant, dance, and ceremony the Anishinaabeg honour all motherhood in a special way.

<sup>70</sup> Pg. 23-26 in *Ojibway Heritage* by Basil Johnston published by McClelland and Stewart, 1976.



The rock was strong and enduring. Plant beings, animal beings, and man come to an end, but the earth lives on. Mother Earth continues to be bountiful, sustaining all beings. All else changes; earth remains unchanging and continues to give life. It is a promise to the future, to those yet to be born. There is in addition to constancy in Mother Earth, generosity. This attribute is acknowledged in prayer and ceremony.

A mother begets a child. She nourishes him, holds him in her arms. She gives him a place upon her blanket near her bosom. A woman may give birth to many children. To all she gives food, care, and a place near her. To each she gives a portion of herself; to each she assigns a place in the household. No child by virtue of priority of birth or other attributes may demand for himself more than his brothers and sisters. A mother gives equally to all of her children, from first to last, from strong to weak. All are entitled to a place near her bosom in her lodge. Her gift does not diminish but increases and renews itself. Similarly

is the earth bounteous. Her mantle is wide, her bowl ever full and constantly replenished. On the blanket of Mother Earth there is a place for hunting, fishing, sleeping, and living. From the bowl comes food and drink for every person. All, young and old, strong and weak, well and ill are intended to share in Mother Earth's bounty and magnanimity.

The principle of equal entitlement precludes private ownership. No man can own his mother. This principle extends even into the future. The unborn are entitled to the largesse of the earth, no less than the living. During his life a man is but a trustee of his portion of the land and must pass on to his children what he inherited from his mother. At death, the dying leave behind the mantle that they occupied, take nothing with them but a memory and a place for others still to come. Such is the legacy of man: to come, to live, and to go; to receive in order to pass on. No man can possess his mother; no man can own the earth.





## PLANT BEINGS<sup>71</sup>

The Creator made the Earth first, followed by the plants. Plants can live without animals or people. They depend only on the physical properties of the earth and sky (water, earth, sunlight, and heat) to exist. Through the remarkable process of photosynthesis, plants can convert light from our sun into energy. Plants also draw

minerals directly from the earth and from water. And plants come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and textures imaginable, from giant redwoods to tiny wildflowers. Each plant has its own soul. Even more remarkable, each plant soul can join with other plants to create a collective soul. Each valley or any other earth form – a meadow, a bay, a hill – possesses a mood which

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<sup>71</sup> Pg. 50-51 of *The Good Path: Ojibway Learning and Activity Book For Kids* by Thomas Peacock and Marlene Wisuri, published by Afton Historical Society Press, 2002. 1-800-436-8443 [www.aftonpress.com](http://www.aftonpress.com)



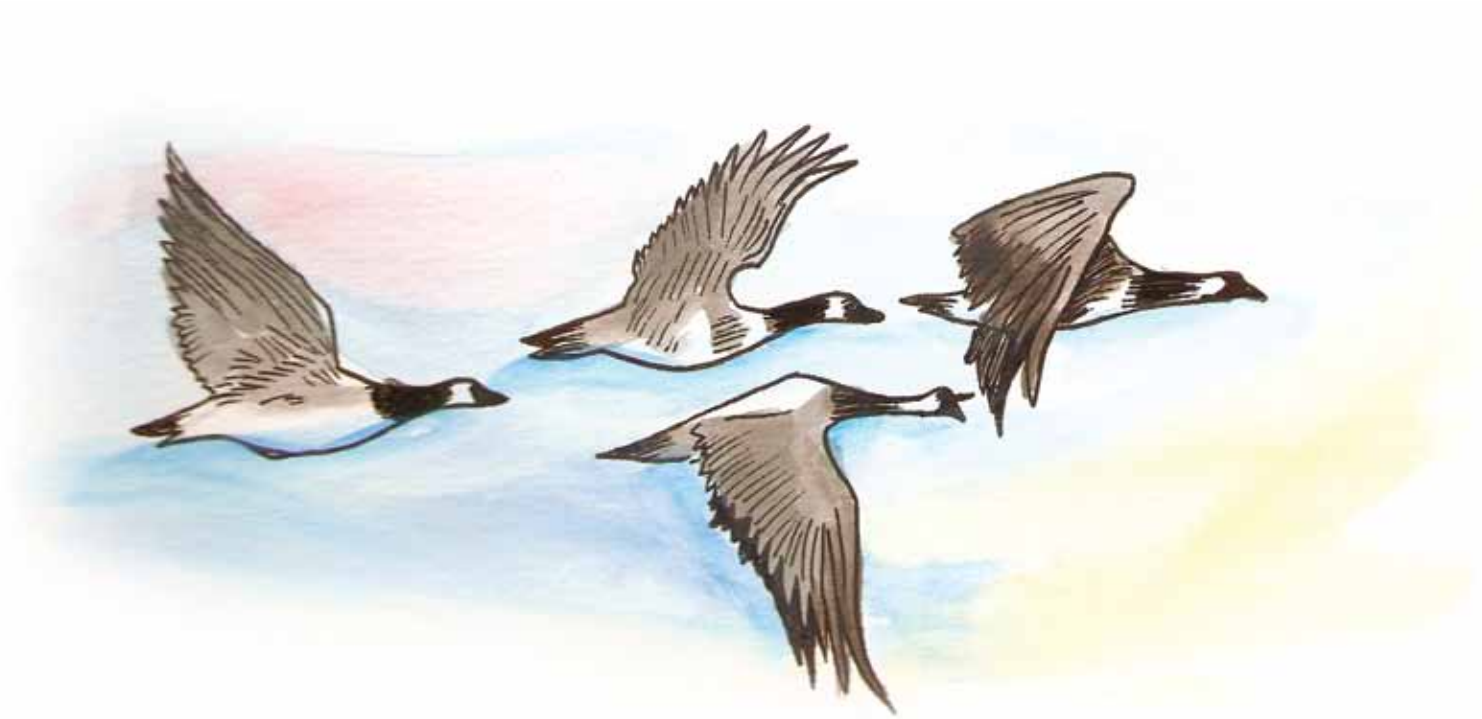
reflects the state of being of that place. Whatever the mood, happy, peaceful, or melancholy, it is the tone of that soul-spirit. As proof, destroy or alter or remove a portion of the plant beings, and the mood and tone of that valley will not be what it was before.<sup>72</sup>

A culture that believes plants have souls would not purposely destroy them. Plants, like all life forms, are

sacred beings. Each has an important purpose as a part of creation. Plants serve as food for animals and humans, as medicine, and as ceremonial substances to help communicate with the Creator. Tobacco, sage, cedar, and sweetgrass are examples of ceremonial plants.

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<sup>72</sup> Johnston, B. *Ojibway Heritage*. 1976, p. 33



## ANIMAL BEINGS<sup>73</sup>

After the Creator made the plant beings, the animal beings were created. Animals depend on plants and the physical earth and sky (earth, water, wind, sunlight, and heat) for their existence. Because they were created before humankind, animal and plant beings are referred to as our elder brothers and sisters. Animals were given unique powers. One of their powers is precognition (sometimes called the sixth sense), which is the ability to sense things before they happen. For example, some animals can sense storms before they happen. Each animal was created for a special purpose, and each has some of the Creator's nature (the Creator's ways). Dogs love unconditionally without expecting to be loved in return. Snakes keep the fields and meadows

clean. Bears represent strength. It was the animals that saved the world after the flood. It was the muskrat that sacrificed itself to get a piece of the old Earth upon which the new Earth was created.

Humankind depends on animals for food and clothing, and also for their unique knowledge of the world. When Indigenous people wanted to know when the seasons were about to change, for example, they would watch the animals. They knew that summer was changing to fall when birds began gathering in large groups and started their migration. Squirrels would begin storing food. Bears would fatten up for their hibernation. And because animals were given some of the Creator's character, we can learn much by watching how they live their lives.

<sup>73</sup> Pg. 51-52 of *The Good Path: Ojibway Learning and Activity Book For Kids* by Thomas Peacock and Marlene Wisuri, published by Afton Historical Society Press, 2002. 1-800-436-8443 [www.aftonpress.com](http://www.aftonpress.com)



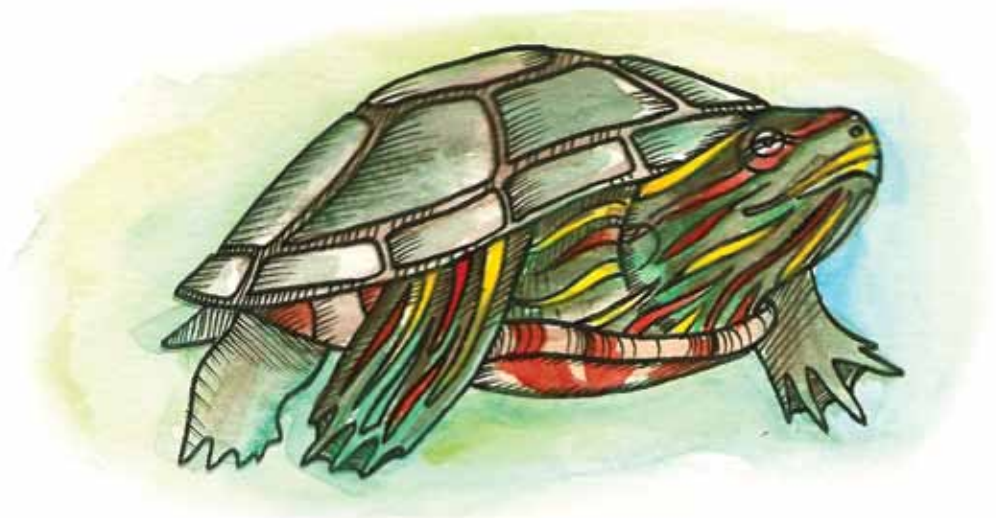
## CONSERVATION AND SPECIES PRESERVATION<sup>74</sup>

Traditional Indigenous knowledge examines the universe in its totality. All things are connected. This concept is manifested in the very word used by the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee when referring to the earth, our Mother. The Kenienke'ha (Mohawk) root of the word comes from the idea of the power and strength that is required for life; the idea of life force and life power which literally means that she is the one that gave you life. This acknowledges the life giving power of women and shows great respect, passion and caring. If the word for mother is prefixed by 'uti', it describes the earth. The earth nurtures, feeds, cares for, and guides us like a mother. When we die we go back to our mother (earth). This cycle encourages gratitude towards the earth and emulates the behaviour we need to display towards women and the earth as a giver of life.

Indigenous knowledge acknowledges the reciprocal nature between humans, animals and plants – each

dependent on the other for survival. Indigenous people express thanksgiving for their relationship through ceremony, song and prayer. Western concepts of conservation implies a hands-off approach to nature and the careful utilization of a natural resource in order to prevent depletion. Controlled human access is legislated in certain conservation areas around the world with the intent that this will allow for restoration and regeneration of natural resources. Rather than strengthening our relationship with Mother Earth we are encouraged to distance ourselves from the one that sustains us, alienating our connection to the land. Indigenous community approaches to conservation are more hands on; the more we honour and care for the plants and species the more of them there will be.

The turtle can be used to illustrate the connection to the earth, but this requires an integrated approach and a broader understanding of the world around us. For example,



<sup>74</sup> Adapted from Maracle, C., Pelletier, J.



in Indigenous languages the names of turtles provide information about the meanings and teachings the turtle can provide (ie; the western painted turtle – where the sun sets painted). As herbivores, carnivores and scavengers, turtles play an important role in aquatic ecosystems. Loss of wetland habitat, road mortalities, pollution, collection for the pet trade and for food, and predation threaten Ontario's turtles. Turtle populations cannot sustain this threat. Seven of eight turtle

species in Ontario are listed with COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada).

Long before the arrival of the settler societies, Indigenous people occupied Turtle Island, developing ways to live sustainably while coping with the change of seasons, hunting and fishing, and cultivating the land. All living creatures had to live in balance acknowledging each other's interdependence in order for their survival.



“Each animal and plant had something to teach us about our responsibility to the earth. For example, the tiny mouse teaches us to focus, to observe the world with all our energy and our being and to appreciate the wonder of our world. The bear teaches us to walk quietly upon the earth and to live in harmony with the cycles. One had only to observe and to take the time to see with more than our eyes and our mind. These teachings were heeded very solemnly by our ancestors. The institutions and the relationships that developed over thousands of years of interdependence have become tied perennially to our psyche as Indigenous people.”<sup>75</sup>

Each plant and animal species had a function within the cycle of interdependence that exists in nature. Our ancestors observed the natural world around them to gain an understanding of their environment. The Clan System arose out of these observations and provided the social structures that are recognized today. Each animal in the clan system possessed a gift given to them by the Creator. Members of

the turtle clan will often display personality characteristics demonstrated by turtles such as strength, consistency and willingness. The turtle is also known to be extremely wise as the Keeper of Time for millions of years in many Indigenous teachings. Turtle is connected to time through the pattern on his back which represents 13 moons in the year. Turtle clan members of the community are respected as they contribute to the social, economic and political needs of the community in relation to the environment around them. The clans reinforce the Indigenous connection to the land and remind them of how interconnected animals, plants and humans truly are because they rely upon one another for many aspects of survival.

Indigenous people learn much from the natural world. Elders say that as species become listed as endangered and then lost, so too does the knowledge gained from the species. As these species become endangered, so too do humans. All animals and plant species are vital to the ecosystem. The disappearance of species disrupts the delicate balance that exists in nature.

<sup>75</sup> Our Responsibility to the Seventh Generation Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development, 1992



# RESPONSIBILITY – SEVEN GENERATIONS

## COMMUNITY MAPPING – SACRED SPACES AND SPECIAL PLACES<sup>76</sup>

“Indigenous science and technology traditionally encouraged and directed curiosity, or the human instinct of learning. Children learn by doing and experiencing, such as in planting, hunting, preparing food, and helping to erect a traditional shelter. Indigenous education methodologies then include role playing, or learning relationships or roles that humans play, as well as the ways of animals...Participating with nature through play, work, hunting, gathering, fishing, gardening, and traveling reinforces the innate “biophilia” or sense for affiliation with the natural that is so essential in the development of the mind, body, and spirit of children.<sup>77</sup>” In traditional times Indigenous children were actively involved in their culture and traditions through their daily living in community, speaking their language and interacting with the Elders who passed on those stories and teachings as were needed. Mapping of the traditional hunting, gathering,

and fishing areas was done through oral means and by being there.

Part of the legacy of the residential schools in Indigenous communities was the absence of their children and youth during their formative years – when traditionally they would have been out on the land with their families hunting, gathering, fishing, picking medicines, participating in ceremonies, and getting to know their land and waters in a personal and spiritual way. “Relationships between Native peoples and their environments became so deep that separation by forced relocation in the last century constituted, literally, the loss of part of an entire generation’s soul.. the connection ...to their land was a symbol of their connection to the spirit of life itself. The loss of such a foundational symbol led to a tremendous loss of meaning and identity.”<sup>78</sup> The traditional knowledge and teachings would have been shared by their Elders in their own language and passed on to the youth in

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<sup>76</sup> Written by Sam Conroy

<sup>77</sup> Cajete, G. Native Science. Natural Laws of Interdependence. P102  
Clean Light Pub New Mexico c2000

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<sup>78</sup> Cajete G p188



the oral tradition. As more children were removed from the communities each year, it became very difficult to sustain the passing on of the oral traditions regarding the land and the waters. Often it was not possible for families to continue to visit and work on their fishing grounds, sugar bushes, and hunting and trapping areas because there were not enough members to help out with the work.

Today the young ones and the youth are asking their communities to take them back to the land and the water. They are seeking the stories and teachings that were put away. They want to be able to speak their language. They have a strong desire to pick up those bundles and carry them forward to the next generation. Where were their family's fishing places? What kinds of fish used to be caught and how did they catch them? Which maple trees were theirs to tap? Where did the medicines grow to help take away a fever or a cold? It is time to look back to the past so that they can plan for the future. They can do this by joining together with their Elders to map their communities.

Richard David (Eel Clan) from the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne's Dept of the Environment and Les Benedict (Wolf Clan), from the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe's Environmental Department have worked tirelessly since 1991 on documenting the locations and health of black ash stands in Ontario and New York State at the request of the Elders and basket-makers of their communities who have concerns that the black ash trees are not healthy. They visit both Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe communities helping to find and study the trees that are so sacred to the people. Richard



and Les visit the community's forest areas, searching for good habitat for black ash. They identify good places for black ash trees to grow. They collect the seeds and grow them to seedling size, returning them to the communities for planting in identified areas. Richard and Les understand that the seedlings that are being planted today will not mature in their lifetime – they are planting a legacy for the next generation, and in the process they are mapping the communities that they visit.

“In an age of Nintendo and computers, will our children ever understand the joy of pounding a log after school and wondering at the way the splints rise off the log? Will they appreciate the craftsmanship of the grandmothers and grandfathers as their own nimble fingers craft a strawberry basket from splints as fine as finest jewels? Will they understand the pride of the basket maker's first basket, given away in appreciation of the skill taught to him or her? It (the black ash) is important to the people of Akwesasne for many reasons.

It was used in the construction of snowshoes, sleds, seats, baskets, drum frames, and many other things. It was said that a really good basket maker could weave a basket so fine that it would hold water. Baskets were used in many ceremonies of the Haudenosaunee people. No wedding would be complete without the exchange of baskets between the bride and groom. Baskets can also be found in the legends of our people. It was said that the creator gave all the knowledge of the world to the Haudenosuanee people in three great baskets.” Henry Lickers.<sup>79</sup>

Mapping the community's historical hunting, fishing, gathering, trapping areas and cabin sites has been beneficial in providing proof of traditional land and water use by First Nations peoples. As well, mapping present locations of resource-based development activities provides the community with the information

<sup>79</sup> Handbook for Black Ash Preservation Reforestation/Regeneration, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Dept of Environment, revised March 2004





needed to plan for their future.<sup>80</sup> By mapping the community with the help of the Elders, they provide their youth with an opportunity to reclaim their culture and language of the land and water. "Native cultures have indeed amassed an enormous knowledge base related to the natural characteristics and processes of their lands through direct experience and participation... Native cultures have traditionally aspired to live in accordance with an ideal of reciprocity with the landscape, guided by cultural values, ethics, and spiritual practice."<sup>81</sup> Mapping the community has economic benefits as well. Dean Jacobs from Walpole Island's Heritage Centre described the work that has been done in his community. "It is critical to develop baseline knowledge – we are conducting environmental monitoring, a life science inventory, our terrestrial inventory, and fish habitat studies. (They have identified their rare plants

and animals.)...local community research is being done project by project building community knowledge. We have done an environmental audit and have done a First Nation's Environmental Management Strategy. We have also produced environmental guidelines for people/businesses wanting to do business in our territory- consultations guidelines. ...Traditional Ecological Studies on fishing, hunting, and trapping were completed including GIS mapping showing we did have significant traditional activities in the proposed corridor."<sup>82</sup>

By inviting Indigenous youth and Elders to work together to map their community resources both historically and in the present, they can help themselves to heal as a community and as individuals, as they grow in knowledge and spirit.

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80 Adapted from Laren Bill – Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study Pelican Lake First Nation  
81 Cajete,G p183

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82 Dean Jacobs, Walpole Island Heritage Centre- Three Fires Council – Our Waters, Our Responsibility- May 2004



## SEVEN GENERATIONS TEACHING<sup>83</sup>

Indigenous people value the transmission of worldview, values, beliefs, teachings, stories, knowledge, and traditions to the younger generation. This in turn ensures the cultural survival of their people. They believe that they need to honour those who have walked ahead of them (their ancestors), respect those that walk with them (their helpers), and consider those that have yet to come (the unborn). “We cannot simply think of our

83 Adapted from Jocelyne Pelletier

survival: each new generation is responsible to ensure the survival of the seventh generation. The prophecy given to us, tells us that what we do today will affect the seventh generation and because of this we must bear in mind our responsibilities of them today and always.”<sup>84</sup>

Selfish human acts of dominion have robbed the rivers, lakes and streams. We have injected toxins within

84 [http://www.iisd.org/pdf/seventh\\_gen.pdf](http://www.iisd.org/pdf/seventh_gen.pdf)



the folds of Mother Earth which takes time to heal, more than seven generations to heal. Thinking seven generations ahead would impact our world's natural systems.

"From man and woman's compassion and love, there will be replicas of them born. Those are the generations. And the Iroquois always say seven generations. So that when we think, we are supposed to be thinking seven generations. So that what we are doing today is not going to hurt those seven generations when they come. The decisions we make have to touch them. They have to go that far. The things we do in our

daily life are not just for you and me. They are just as much for the ones that are not born yet.

And when the Creator finished everything, he said, "I did not make a coliseum for you or an archival institute, a building for you to put all the philosophical or spiritual doctrines in. I did not write it in books or anything. The only thing I did is let you live on your Mother Earth. And everything you need is at your fingertips. Just do not be a pig about it. Do not be greedy. Share. And if you do this, your life will be everlasting. But I want you to know, I wait every day for every woman, every man, and every child to take just a couple of minutes, a couple of seconds and face me every day. And just say, 'My Creator, I thank you for this miraculous life. Thank you, Mother Earth.'

And that is all that is necessary for us. There is no big cathedral. There is no Library of Congress that holds our knowledge. Just a simple word, thank you, a true word to the Creator, and there will be everlasting life."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Porter, T. *And Grandma Said...* 2008, p. 24-25.



