

WE HAVE
THE RIGHT
TO EXIST

A Translation of Aboriginal Indigenous Thought

The first book ever published from an

Ahmishinahbæó'tjibway Perspective

by

Wub-e-ke-niew

BLACK THISTLE PRESS
NEW YORK CITY 1995



CHAPTER XIV

RELIGION

The *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway Midé* is the religion, the philosophy, the government, the legal system . . . etc. . . . of the *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway*. The birchbark scrolls of the *Midé* trace our history back through four ice ages¹—about a million years. Fundamentalist Christians express the beginning of their Judeo-Christian tradition as the "creation of the world" slightly less than 6,000 years ago.² Although they give an account of their African "evolutionary roots," Western European scientists describe the first "man" as having lived (in Asia) three ice ages ago, and trace their own roots into the last ice age.³ The Aboriginal Indigenous peoples of this Continent are not included in their charts of "Evolution of Man."

The *Midé*, our Aboriginal Indigenous religion, teaches us to live in harmony, in reality, with responsibility; that we are all part of the Circle of Life.

Midé cannot be translated from the *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* language into English, nor Chippewa. The Chippewa Indians and the Christians tried to translate *Midé* as "Grand Medicine Lodge," and said that we were "Devil-worshippers," who practiced "bad medicine." What the Indians call the "Great Spirit," and what the Christians call "God," do not exist in our religion, and neither does the Devil. These concepts come from the good-and-evil dichotomy of their believers' European, Catholic roots. The fragmentation of peoples' world-view into pairs of opposites with emotionally-laden connotations is a part of Lislakh hierarchical society.

How can Aboriginal Indigenous people be "Devil worshipers" when the land, the water, everything about the ecosystem

was kept in such a beautiful condition? Now, under the Euro-American and Indian religion and economic system, everything is destroyed. All the lakes and streams are polluted, and the water is undrinkable.

The Euro-Americans always say "Church and State are separate." After the 1863 Indian Treaty was signed with the Chippewa, the U.S. Government gave *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* land to the Christian Churches. The Indians sold the land, and the Euro-Americans divided up our religion and our church, so that the immigrants could build their churches and practice their own religion. It is claimed that the United States of America was founded on "freedom of religion."

The *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* religious and philosophical tradition, the *Midé*, is holistic—there is no compartmentalization between religion, economics, science, philosophy, and politics. From an Aboriginal Indigenous perspective, the traditions of the Lislakhs also comprise a holistic totality, although for those studying that system from within, it is usually broken into disconnected categories. If one looks at the history of the various schools of thought through which these people of Western Civilization understand their own system, it may be easier to see the whole pattern. The abstract within which social and religious reality is defined comes to the Western Europeans through the Ancient Greeks: into modern science through Aristotle and into modern religion through Judeo-Christianity, which also has roots in Ancient Greek ways of thinking. Greek philosophers, including Diogenes and Plato, realized that truth was unattainable within their idealized structure, and demonstrated this in various and sometimes humorous ways. One contemporary scholar who has made connections between religion, economics and politics is MIT economist Paul Samuelson.⁴

The *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* cannot sell our *Midé* religion, which is a part of our land. In English we were being asked to sell "land," but Grandmother Earth and our relationship to her is part of our religion. The Indians have never understood this, since they have approximately the same values as their Lislakh

fathers. Selling Aboriginal Indigenous land does not pose existential prohibitions of identity, sacrilege, and fundamental morality for these immigrant Judeo-Christian peoples. Political scientist Murray Edelman wrote,⁵ "Religion, as Langer points out . . . work[s] together with economic organizations . . ."

The Indians whom the Euro-Americans created on this Continent are just as important as Christianity in maintaining the economic system and other parts of the inter-related imported European infrastructure. The social structure of Western European Civilization depends on establishing metaphysical justification for its economic system, which functions so that the people at the top of the hierarchy retain most of the wealth created, and the workers are kept in their place. The economic system, in turn, is a means of controlling access to resources, and distributing both the bare necessities and the incentive goods in a way which will maintain the hierarchy. The symbolic value attributed by Western European civilization to gold, silver, and paper or other promissory money is a smokescreen. What their money is really about is power, and control over the resources with which that power is maintained. The Indians are as necessary as institutionalized Christianity for the functioning of the imported Euro-American economic system. Indians are critical in maintaining the fiction that the Euro-Americans have a legal and honorable right to the Aboriginal Indigenous peoples' land of this Continent, through the Indian treaties. The institutions and dogma of Judeo-Christianity provide the foundation upon which Western European civilization occupies this Continent—and provided the rationalization for the genocide, dispossession and enslavement of the so-called "pagan" Aboriginal Indigenous peoples.

Part of the purpose of the Euro-Americans' Indian boarding schools was to destroy Aboriginal Indigenous religions. All I knew when I went into the Boarding School was the *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway Midé*. I did not know about the Christian God, the Indians' "Great Spirit"—or the Devil, which is also part

of Christianity. During the first few years that I was at the Boarding School, there was a German prefect named Leo Schwartz, who was obsessed with the Devil. During the night, we could hear him praying in his room, and then he would start chasing the Devil. "Out, out," he would say, in German. He had a toilet in his room, and he would flush the Devil down the toilet, and then he would chase his Devil from his room into the sickroom, down the stairs into the playroom, and out the front door. I don't know why he never chased him out the back door. Sometimes we would meet Schwartz on the stairwell, chasing the Devil. He would be hollering "Out, Out, Out!" When he saw us he would stop chasing the Devil, and look at us sheepishly as he snapped out of his abstract hallucinations. Then, he would go back upstairs to his room. We wondered where the Devil went when Schwartz stopped chasing him—we figured the Devil went back into Schwartz' room.

Leo Schwartz looked like a crazy man; he had strange blue eyes with red rims. Once when I was sick, alone in the sickroom during the day, Schwartz chased the Devil out of there twice. I was so sick I didn't pay any attention the first time. When he came through again my curiosity got the best of me. I wanted to see what the Devil looked like. I sat up in bed and looked, because I'd heard so much about him in school. I didn't see anything. I recuperated right then, put on my clothes, and as sick as I was, I got out of the sickroom.

Both the Chippewas and the Catholic priests have superstitions arising from their Lislakh roots; illusory ideas generated by the artificial cultural mechanisms which sustain their social hierarchy. The centralized power and artificial ranking of their society is reflected in Judeo-Christian metaphysics. The *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* children did not find the Christians' description of Heaven very attractive. We figured that if we went to Heaven, we would be at the very bottom of the Heavenly hierarchy, spending eternity among strangers, polishing all the gold.

By intentionally blurring the distinctions between the *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway* and the Chippewas, the United States Government purposefully confused the *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway Midé* with the very different Chippewa Indian religion, and used the Indian religion which they had created to try to obliterate the *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway Midé*.

The Chippewa Indians have a Lislakh patriline.⁶ The replacement of Aboriginal Indigenous people with people of this patriline is prescribed in the Judeo-Christian Bible:

... Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee ...

The land that the Lord was giving away to his chosen people, already belonged to somebody else. The seed (patrilineal heirs) to which the Bible refers repeatedly,⁸ is a directive for world conquest through genetic engineering.

TWO WORLD-VIEWS

The *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway* do not want to take over the world; cherishing diversity is an inherent part of our traditional values. We have lived harmoniously and non-violently on our own land for more than one hundred millennia. We, the *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway*, have a right to exist on our own land as a Sovereign people.

There are two very different religious philosophies on this Continent. One is the aggregate of the centralized, hierarchical world religions and other rigid schools of thought, including Indian religion. The other is the philosophy and world-view of the *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway* and other Aboriginal Indigenous people. The *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway Midé* is a way of living in har-

mony and community; a facilitation of each person's Sovereign relationship with Grandmother Earth, with Grandfather *Midé*, with the Circle of Life which encompasses us, and with the Great Mysteries of the Universe. The *Midé* is experienced, it is directly connected to Grandmother Earth; they are married. This is where we come from.

The *Midé* is an egalitarian religion/philosophy, and relates not only to what happens after death, but also relates directly to life. We have said in English, "all life is sacred," although a more accurate translation would be "all life transcends Western Civilization's dichotomy between the sacred and the profane." The *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway Midé* is a philosophy, but it is also and simultaneously a non-abstract experience in physical reality. Proselytizing is not a part of our religion. *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway* are born into the patrilineal *Dodems* of the *Midé*.

The hierarchical world-view of Western Civilization has survived, been refined, sophisticated and expanded over the past six thousand years. The imaginary and symbolic worlds of its purported reality are remarkably consistent in internal structure. Nearly every possible loophole through which a person might catch a glimpse of what the *Ahnishinahbæo'jibway* and other non-hierarchical peoples understand as reality has been blocked by diversionary tactics, re-interpretation, automatic mind-blocking processes of denial, and emotionally-laden stereotypes. Because of this culturally-imposed blocking of information which is threatening to the hierarchy, I would be greatly surprised if even one percent of the people who read this understand what I am writing. I am not questioning that the people who are reading this are intelligent people. I am simply observing that the boxes of compartmentalized thinking into which the heirs of Western Civilization are forced by their culture, are extremely difficult to escape. Regimentation is an important part of any hierarchical culture, and even brilliant trained observers have a mental block, buttressed by several millennia of hierarchical cultural and linguistic evolution. Standing outside the system, this structure is obvious. The reality of the Lislakh cultural, linguistic, and

religious tradition is almost invisible from inside that system, but it's there.

Margaret Mead, who re-wrote and popularized the discipline of anthropology, tried to meticulously avoid value judgements about other peoples' cultures. But, she was trapped by the arrogance of the system into which she was born. Even though she was trying to be fair, her own culture's values led her to subtly discredit the perceptions of the people she was studying. Her self-definition and training as an anthropologist constrained her, and she could not discard the Western European analytical categories she brought with her. If she had remained with one group of egalitarian people, had learned their language fluently, and if she had been able to see herself as human in their context, then she might have been able to go beyond what other anthropologists have called the "glass wall," into an Aboriginal Indigenous understanding of the world, and see something truly beautiful. Lislakh reality is structured in such a way that venturing outside of its constructs can seem terrible and frightening, but there have been a few Euro-Americans who have seen at least part way into an Aboriginal Indigenous reality.

Aboriginal Indigenous people are, because of our egalitarian, non-violent and holistic understanding of reality—and because of our inalienable connection to the land and resources upon which expansionistic societies depend—seen by the Euro-Americans and their cohorts as intrinsically threatening. Christianization was seen by U.S. policy-makers as a means of transforming us into a sub-group within their hierarchy, an ethnic group or a minority, and thereby no longer dangerous to their social order. This agenda was expressed at the Lake Mohonk Conference as a mandate for missionaries to "act as one body representing one great constituency, and combining their various energies to one great end, the Americanizing, civilizing and Christianizing of the aborigines of the soil."¹⁰

At St. Mary's Catholic Mission at Redlake, the staff wanted to bring us into their imaginary world, and simultaneously protect themselves from experiencing our world. Some of the defense

defense mechanisms of the Lislakh hierarchy became obvious. When I asked questions which the Nuns felt were threatening, they slapped me, and said "Have blind faith!" They were not educating me in the sense that *Ahnishinahbæō'jibway* would expect a person to be taught—they were programming me. The beautiful, loving reality of my Grandfather was too much a part of my reality for the programming to stick, although the brutality of the Mission School experience was enough to cause me and every other *Ahnishinahbæō'jibway* child who experienced it, years and years of anguish. *Midé* religious elders said, "don't believe them, they're lying," but I had to understand what it was that would make people act like the missionaries and other European people here had acted. There is more to know than simply rejecting the Euro-Americans as "liars." I had to find out why they did what they did, and how they think.

INDIANS

The nature of Lislakh reality directly relates to the Aboriginal Indigenous peoples' problems with Indians. It doesn't matter if Europeans or Métis dress up in feathers, say they're Indians, and act foolish. That's not our problem. The problems arise when immigrant peoples try to appropriate and re-define Aboriginal Indigenous peoples' identity, claiming that they are "American Indians," and thereby facilitate the alienation and theft of our land, and the destruction of our environment, our culture, and our people.

The invention and maintenance of Indians is done in European languages. There is no word for Indian in the *Ahnishinahbæō'jibway* language—the Métis use the word *Shi-nabbe* but that's a word they stole and broke into a shorter word.¹¹ Indians are a crucial theme of the Euro-American mythology about their relationship to this land and their identity as "Americans." Many get very nervous when they perceive themselves in danger of "losing their Indians." Metaphysical Indians are indispensable to the American Dream. With surgical precision, the molders of public opinion script their Indians to

portray whichever extreme of the good-evil dichotomy meets the exigencies of the moment. Indians were polarized as the Noble Savage, they were also concocted from the Euro-Americans' worst fears and bogey-men, and there are a disproportionate number of Indians in prison because of the dichotomies of this projected stereotype. From the Wicked Witch who went after Hansel and Gretel, to the Big Bad Wolf who ate Little Red Riding Hood, the Indians are the polar opposite of what civilized and Christian Euro-Americans are presumed to be or fear they might be. As such, they balance the social equations of artificial dichotomy. Without Indians as a buffer between themselves and the reality of their history, the Euro-Americans are in the position of having to confront some very painful truths.

DICHOTOMY AND PARADOX

Professor-philosopher Harvey Sarles, whom we thank for returning long-distance phone calls to discuss some of these issues, and linguist-philosopher Noam Chomsky, whom we thank for answering our letters with thought, have both helped me come to a clearer understanding of the way that the Lislakh people think. With regard to religion, I thank Dr. Sarles for his advice, "read Genesis, John, and Revelations of the Bible, to help understand how they think. If you want to know, read it without getting angry."

Lislakh reality is a mind-game fraught with artificial paradoxes. Good and bad, Jekyll and Hyde, God and Satan are all part of the abstract entity, forced into extremes and then kept apart by artificial categories of compartmentalized thinking. Responsibility is an inherent part of *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* reality, but is avoidable in the compartments of linear European reality. As long as certain rules are followed, a Lislakh can evade accepting the responsibility for the consequences of his actions, at least within the figments of his mind.

I can go from the *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* culture into the Euro-American culture, and I am still the same person. I am comfortable with my identity and I know who I am. My peoples' ancient

roots grow deep here in this land. I am not a stranger here. I am not European, and in Germany I felt the disconnection from one's aboriginal indigenous place that Euro-Americans must have to live with on this Continent.

Most Europeans, including the Chippewa Indians, cannot go into the *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* culture. They can look right at something, and not see it, because they don't know how to get outside of their prescribed definitions of reality, and look at the real world. The extent of their detachment from reality is readily apparent in reading European philosophy and religious texts. Any philosophical school where the practitioners seriously wonder whether or not they exist, is caught up in masochistic mind games. From the *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway* perspective, there are mysteries but no paradoxes. Our continual contact with Grandfather the *Midé*, with our inherent nature as living beings, and with Grandmother Earth where we come from and where we will go, does not make us primitive or ignorant.

JUDEO-CHRISTIANITY

I do not have anything against the Judeo-Christian or Islamic traditions (or any of the others they call World Religions), as the personal spirituality of those who sincerely live these philosophies. However, the Holy Roman Empire and other Judeo-Christian Churches are also political institutions—and the individuals of whom the institutions are composed bear a responsibility for the actions of those institutions. Judeo-Christians, in particular the Catholics and Protestant Episcopalians, on my land. For a century and a half, they have used unimaginable violence against my people. They have been telling my people that they "know how to live," and have discredited the culture, traditions and religion of the *Ahnishinahbæó'jibway*.¹² It is with this background that I write what I do about Judeo-Christians. All peoples of the world have a right to live on their own land, harmoniously in accordance with their own traditions.

The abundant, harmonious, and lush paradise which encompassed both of these Continents was an expression of Aboriginal Indigenous peoples' religion and philosophy. The Europeans could not believe that such a place ever existed, and the miracle of it was such, that they readily believed myths of Golden Cities and Fountains of Youth. These are the same people who believed that the world was flat, and whose languages retain vestiges of flat-world thinking to this day.¹³

The Europeans who came to these Continents came from a plundered wasteland. The wars which raged back and forth across Europe had destroyed the European ecosystem and polluted the water. The social disharmony and ecological destruction that are a consequence of the Lislakh practice of war were a breeding-ground for countless plagues. War creates masses of starving people, and fosters the rape of both the women and the land. *Ahnishinahbæw'jibway* see this kind of behavior as unacceptable and insane.

The Lislakh paradigm of world conquest comes directly from their religions. They absolve themselves from responsibility by retreating into the abstract, and recently by saying "church and state are separate," but the very first chapter in the Judeo-Christian Bible includes the political admonition:¹⁴

... and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

We do not see the *Ahnishinahbæw'jibway Midé* as extending beyond our Aboriginal Indigenous lands—although there are other Aboriginal Indigenous traditions which belong in each place of Grandmother Earth. The *Ahnishinahbæw'jibway* believe in valuing what we have, and taking care of it respectfully, rather than strip-mining our own ecological infrastructure, and then looking for somebody else to rob. For nearly a million years, we have lived in harmony. We never took all of anything, and we made sure there was enough left for future generations. If a

young person heedlessly takes more than they need, or kills any living being without good reason, they are certain to get a kind but effective lecture from one of the Clan Mothers.

I had a well-meaning White friend question how we could have survived without being expansionistic. He did not understand that we lived in harmony, not only with our environment but also with our neighbors, and that being ourselves on our own land was enough for the *Ahnishinahbæw'jibway* to survive harmoniously as a Nation, throughout the sixty centuries of brutal peace and strife encompassing the rise and fall of every Lislakh empire.

The Lislakhs' expansionistic world-view precludes their dealing with those peoples who are their neighbors under conditions which are harmonious. Peace and harmony are two different things.

Social hierarchy means parasitic social relationships. Judeo-Christianity uses the concept of sin to bring people into their web of centralized control. The metaphor which the Judeo-Christian Bible uses to describe this intrinsic parasitism is a cannibalistic one: "eat of my flesh, drink of my blood," with the explanation that the human sacrifice of Jesus Christ will "take away sin."

People will spend all day in the Church, doing penance for their sins, seeking ritual purity.¹⁵ Indian religion is the same as Christianity in this way. Guilt is one of the hooks used to catch people's psyche. It's a necessary part of the economic system and often motivates people to donate all their worldly goods to the church (or to other charities which buttress the overall structure), because they are sinners. There have been, and can be again, harmonious, balanced communities without such psychological distortion.

I remember my first experience of Christian cannibalism at St. Mary's Catholic Boarding School at Red Lake. It was traumatic and profound, and to someone from the *Ahnishinahbæw'jibway* tradition, gruesome beyond belief. The Nuns gave us little children what they said was our "first communion," with instructions about how to "receive the Host." They told us that the