

MODULE TWO: A LONG, LONG TIME AGO
HOW THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF NORTH AMERICA
LIVED BEFORE EUROPEAN CONTACT

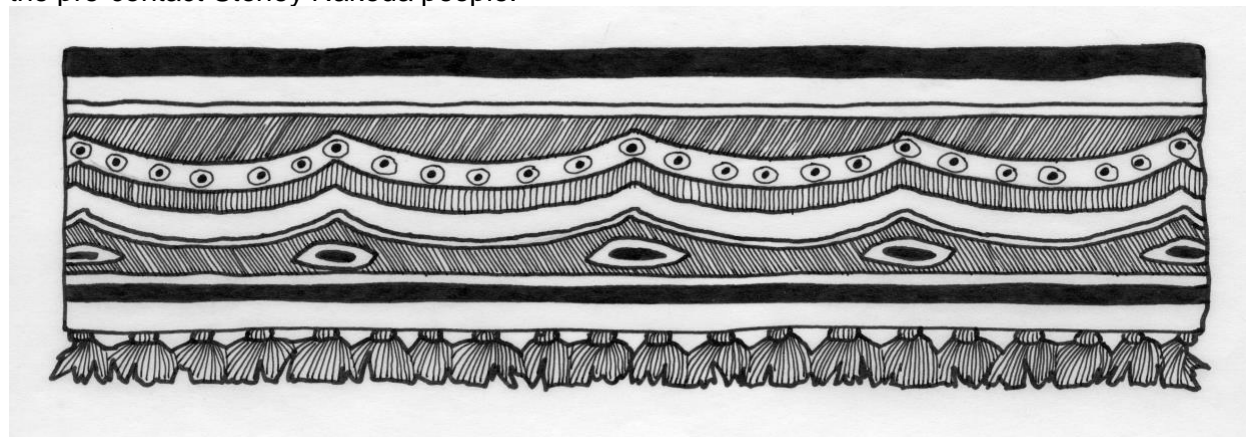


Introduction

Millions of Indigenous people from hundreds of language groups and cultures had been living rich and productive lives for thousands of years before Europeans ever reached the shores of what we now refer to as the Americas. Empires and whole civilizations rose and fell and rose again. Elaborate and beautiful cities were constructed in hundreds of localities ranging from present-day Peru to Guatemala to Mexico to the Southwest United States to the Mississippi Valley to California to British Columbia. Fortified city-states, with a network of roads between them running thousands of kilometers, were already here long before the Europeans arrived. In fact, the largest city in the Americas 500 years before European contact (Cahokia located in present-day Illinois) was significantly larger than any of the cities of Europe at the time. Astrological scientists were able to chart the movement of the sun and the moon and the stars in every season and predict to the minute, with stunning accuracy, astrological events such as a full eclipse of the sun. Trading goods moved over an elaborate network of trade routes from the northernmost reaches of Canada to the southernmost tip of South America. Horticulture and agriculture were so advanced that when the Europeans realized the rich cornucopia of food and medicine enjoyed by Indigenous civilizations in the Americas, they rushed to take the knowledge of how to grow and utilize these plants back to their home countries. Just a few of these horticultural achievements included tomatoes, potatoes (many varieties), maize, wild rice, pumpkins, peanuts, chocolate, blueberries, sunflowers, several varieties of beans, chili peppers, and avocados.

Despite all of this, much that Indigenous peoples of North America had in terms of traditional knowledge, cultural and spiritual wisdom teachings, systems of governance and decision-making, medicine and healing knowledge, family and community relations and much more were relatively invisible to the first Europeans who set foot on this continent.

This session will cover four topics as follows: 1) a rapid review of pre-contact historical periods and cultures in North America for the roughly 14,000 years of Indigenous occupation prior to European contact; 2) a window into Indigenous cultures and lifeways across the Americas in the Pre-contact period; 3) a rapid survey of the Indigenous history and cultures of Alberta prior to contact; 4) a more in-depth look at the pattern of life, culture, beliefs, practices and worldview of the pre-contact Stoney Nakoda people.



A. Stories of Innovation in the Ancient World

1. The Iroquois Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace

When Europeans first reached what is now upstate New York, Ontario and Québec, they were met by a Confederacy of five (later to become six) Indigenous nations (the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca), which European historians later referred to as the "Iroquois Confederacy." The people's own collective name for themselves is Haudenosaunee—the people of the longhouse. The longhouse is the traditional Haudenosaunee dwelling. At the time of European contact, the longhouse was constructed from saplings and covered with bark, some 80 to 100 feet in length and roughly 18 feet in height, shaped like a railroad passenger car. Members of the same extended family lived together harmoniously in this dwelling. The longhouse also became a symbol of the five nations living together harmoniously under a single roof.

At a time when European nations had not yet evolved past feudal kingdoms constantly at war with one another, and within which ordinary citizens had absolutely no voice in deciding on anything of importance to their lives outside of their own households, these so-called "savage" inhabitants of the "New World" had created a society that united five distinct nations and thousands of their citizens in one common union dedicated to peace, democracy and collective security.

The far-reaching vision and effectiveness of this traditional governance system so impressed European visitors who encountered it, that it eventually became the subject of an enormous body of scholarship, and it is generally agreed that the Constitution and democratic structure of modern-day France and of the United States were modelled, at least in part, on the Great Law of Peace, which is the Constitution of the Confederacy still recited by memory to this day in the traditional longhouses of the Haudenosaunee people.

Most scholars agree that the origins of the Confederacy date back to the mid-1400s. The way the origin story goes, a young Huron boy named Deganawidah was living in a time when all of the nations were at each other's throats and trapped in cycle upon cycle of violence. The boy explained to his mother that he had been given a mission of great responsibility by the Great Spirit "to bring the good news of peace and power" to the tribes and nations of Turtle Island. The old stories vary in some details, but legend has it that the boy who was to become "the Peacemaker" had a speech defect and was deformed of body. He was therefore in no way a natural leader, or an orator who could easily command respect, and yet he was determined to fulfil his spiritual responsibility of bringing the message of peace to the tribes and nations around.

Part of the story tells of how he fashioned a canoe out of white stone (his very first miracle), and then paddled it across Lake Ontario from the area where present-day Kingston is located to the shores of a territory occupied by the Onondagas, who had a reputation for being the most cruel, fierce and warlike people among all the tribes of the region. He sought out the lodge of one of the worst murderers and cannibals among this people with the intention of melting his heart with love and causing him to



Etching of Deganawida, downloaded from <http://ecstatictruthpdx.blogspot.com/2013/10/deganawida-great-peacemaker.html>

become an emissary of peace to the nations. This, he told himself, would be a true test of his Spiritual Power.

Finding the man's lodge empty, he climbed up onto the roof and lay prone with his face looking down through the smoke hole. He saw a kettle of water slowly cooking over the fire. It contained human body parts. When the warrior returned, he looked into the kettle and he saw the reflection of The Peacemaker's face looking up at him. Because there was nobody else in the lodge, he thought he was seeing his own face. And yet he knew that something wasn't right, because the face he saw reflected back to him was one that shone with the light of love and peace and gentle nobility, which did not fit his own character at all. He knew deeply that his face should look like this but that, in reality, it did not, and he was ashamed. In revulsion, he dumped out the contents of the cooking pot, and for many hours he sat by himself and brooded over his failure to live up to his true nature.

The Peacemaker then came down and entered the lodge through the door, announcing to the warrior the message of peace and power that had been entrusted to him. The warrior



immediately recognized the truth of this message and vowed to help the Peacemaker any way he could. This man who had been a person filled with anger and rage became the first disciple of the Peacemaker, who would work closely with him for many years to spread the message to all of the tribes of the region. From that day forward the warrior turned disciple of the Peacemaker became known as Hiawatha, which means "the one who combs the snakes out of the hair" of those who are trapped in violence.

For many years the Peacemaker and his helper travelled from village to village giving the message of peace and unity. There were many barriers, and at times it seemed as though it was a hopeless mission that could never be accomplished. At one point, when opposition rose like the waves of a stormy sea around him, legend has it that the Peacemaker performed another miracle by blotting out the light of the sun until it became as dark as night in the middle of the day. After this marvellous occurrence, the story continues, all the dissident opposition to the Peacemaker's message melted away, and the great Confederation was formed.

The Peacemaker planted a great Tree of Peace—a white pine—with white healthy roots that extended in the four directions to all the regions of the earth so that all people, wherever they may live on the earth could trace the source of one of these roots back to the tree. Beneath the roots of this tree, the leaders of the five founding nations buried their weapons of war and pledged themselves to lasting peace.

The Peacemaker then said the following prayer, that has from that day forward been recited in the longhouses of the Haudenosaunee people.

Into the depths of the earth, down into the deep under earth currents of water flowing into unknown regions, we cast all weapons of strife. We bury them from sight forever and plant again the tree. Thus shall the Great Peace be established and hostilities shall no longer be known between the five Nations but only peace to a united people. (The Peacemaker and the Tree of Peace: An Iroquois Legend, downloaded from <https://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/ThePeacemakerAndTheTreeOfPeace-Iroquois.html>)

The structure of this league of Nations was such that each nation retained its sovereignty while at the same time joining with their neighbours and relinquishing part of their authority to the great Council of the Confederacy, housed in Onondaga territory. In this great Council, representatives from the five nations meet to discuss their common issues and challenges around "the fire that never dies". In all, some fifty chiefs meet in the great Council.

Along with the Peacemaker and Hiawatha, a third person is considered one of the founders of the Confederacy. During the period of time when the Peacemaker and Hiawatha were working to convince the nations to lay down their weapons and come together in a confederacy of peace, mutual understanding and collective security, a woman named Jigonhsasee opened her home many times for meetings of the leaders of the rival nations. In recognition of this critical role that women played in the shaping of the Confederacy, traditional leadership of the Haudenosaunee is chosen by the clan mothers in a matriarchal leadership system. The elder women have the authority not only to choose leaders, but to remove them if they are not carrying out their responsibilities in keeping with the principles underlining the Great Law Of Peace.

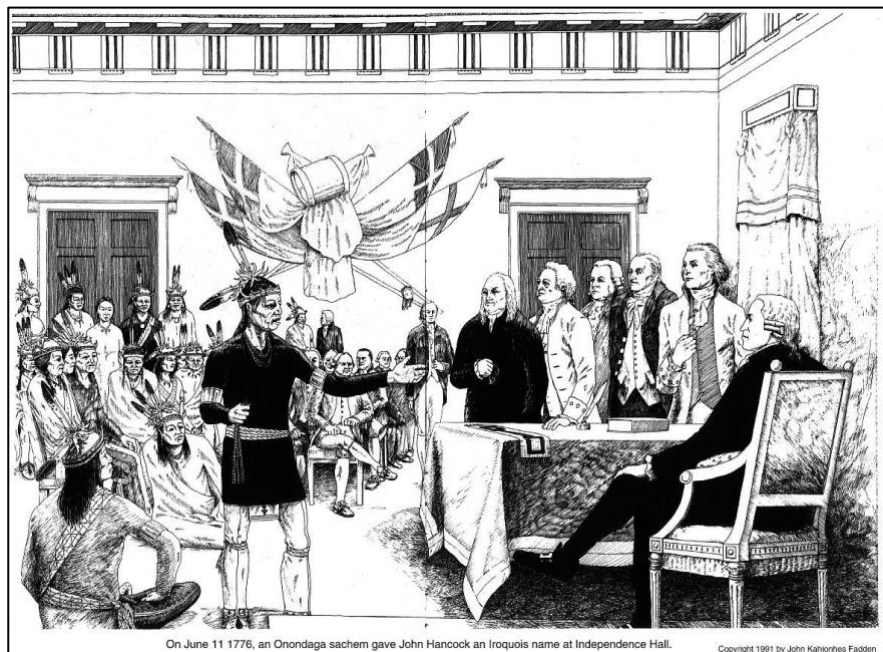
Within the longhouse system established by the Peacemaker, every adult member of every community that is part of the Con

federacy has a voice in decision-making through consultative processes in the longhouse. Decisions are made primarily by consensus at every level from village to tribal to the Grand Council of the whole Confederation.

In this short summary about the significance of the Iroquois Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace, there is much has been left out, but the impact of the Confederacy and the teachings and practices surrounding the implementation of The Great Law on Haudenosaunee life is profound, both in the past and in the life of present-day communities.

One of the fascinating lessons that emerges from this story is the inseparable connection between spiritual teachings and practical life. Here we have the story of a government system and a League of Nations

emerging because, according to the old stories, a seemingly unlikely messenger of the Great Spirit was instructed to bring peace and the rule of law to nations that were trapped for generations in repetitive cycles of violence and war. At the heart of the Great Law of Peace is the living connection of the people to the spiritual world. That living connection is maintained through prayers, ceremonies and rituals that have continued without interruption for hundreds of years from the very first beginnings of the Confederacy to the present day.



The Iroquois Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace influenced the creation of the American Constitution.

2. Science and Technology in the Mayan Civilization

Introduction

The Mayans developed what was to become the most elaborate and extensive civilization in Mesoamerica that spanned 10,000 years and covered most of present-day Belize, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Study of the Mayan civilization occupies the lifelong work of whole departments of scholars in major universities around the world. Specializations within Mayan studies focus on Mayan architecture and art, writing system, transportation and trade, politics and administrative forms, social organization, war and political alliances, the Mayan calendar and ceremonial cycle, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, agriculture... The list goes on and on because the Mayans had a fully developed civilization that rivaled that of ancient Greece and Rome 2000 years before the time of Christ.

In this very brief scan of some of the highlights of science and technology in the Mayan world, we will focus on a few interesting innovations that provide a small window through which readers can catch a glimpse of the sophistication of the thinking, science and technology of ancient Mayans. Most scholars agree that the Mayan world was extremely hierarchical, with the kings and ruling elite controlling most of the resources, including access to education and literacy, and the orientation of science and technology was continually bent to the service of their interests, and usually not to those of the 90% of the Mayan population that were commoners.

This is not to say that the common people received no benefits. On the contrary, they lived within a relatively ordered universe that, for most of the period of Mayan rule, was able to provide an abundant livelihood and considerable social and economic security for everyone.

It was only in what is known as the Late Postclassic, from around 800 A.D. to around 1500 A.D. that significant numbers of major city states imploded and huge population shifts occurred. While it is not known for sure why these collapses occurred, it was likely a combination of causes, including constant warfare between city states and regions that absorbed huge quantities of resources, combined with overpopulation that could not be sustained by the available water and food supplies in some areas, likely further exacerbated by environmental degradation and drought. Certainly, this history is a cautionary tale for our times.

The Big Picture

The Mayan civilization never became an empire in the sense of a unitary central power that held all the pieces together. Rather, it consisted of some 40 large cities with populations anywhere between 50,000 and 200,000 people, each of them surrounded by many secondary towns and cities, all linked together with an intricate road network that was so efficient that the elite living in cities along the Caribbean coast near present-day Cancún were able to have ice in their drinks that was brought to them from the highlands of Mexico and Guatemala by runners. These runners were able to transport messages and important packages (such as ice for the rich) in a relay chain that continued day and night for hundreds, sometimes even thousands of kilometres.

The Mayan road system was called "sacbe" (plural, sacbeob) which literally translates to "white road"). These marvellous structures were raised as much as 6-8 meters above the irregular jungle floor, and travelled completely flat and, for the



Sacbe at Dzibilchaltun in the Yucatán

most part straight for hundreds of kilometres. Many of the sacbeob were plastered with a mixture of limestone and honey and painted white so they would reflect the light of the moon and the stars, thus enabling uninterrupted day and night travel.

The Mayan world essentially consisted of city state networks made up of political and military alliances that were continually at war with each other over territory and scarce resources. Many of the most powerful city state networks consisted of a major city and its network of interconnected cities and towns that were allied with one another, and consisting of many thousands, even millions of people.

Scholars have compared these Mayan city state networks to those of medieval Europe, both in the style of their top-down control-oriented leadership and in the way they carried on ruthless competition with one another for dominance in trade, territory and political control.

Astronomy

Near the city of Oaxaca in southern Mexico is the ancient Mayan capital of Mount Alban. In the central square there is a great pyramid, and before it, a huge plaza that could hold tens of thousands of people at a time.

Opposite the pyramid is an astronomical observatory. It's possible even today to descend a narrow staircase to a small room some 68 m below the surface of the ground and to look upwards through a small stone observation tube. Even in the brightest part of the day it's possible to see the moon through this tube, which Mayan scientists used to track the movement of the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars. Their observations were so accurate that they were able to predict, for example, the 584-day Venus orbit around the sun within a margin of error of two hours.



With the aid of a forked stick, astronomer-priests used only the naked eye to take observations that allowed them to calculate the path of Venus and other celestial bodies. From the records of their observations, they could calculate with precision events such as solar eclipses. downloaded from <https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmc/exhibitions/civil/maya/mmc07eng.html>

However, the underlying agenda for Mayan astronomical observation was not the scientific prediction and control related to weather, agriculture and other practical purposes that might have benefited the average citizen. They were interested in divination, that is, in the astrological prediction of auspicious or inauspicious times for military or political action. They were also interested in syncing the living Mayan calendar to the cycle of ceremonies and rituals that marked the religious observances of the Mayan world.

On one famous occasion, tens of thousands of people were gathered in the open space before the pyramid. The priest appeared on the high platform overlooking the crowd and announced that the gods were displeased with the people in the city, and because of this displeasure, they were going to take away the light of the sun. In the Mayan religious world, an important function of ceremony and ritual life was to appease fickle and sometimes hostile gods that could either bring benefit or wreak havoc on the human world.

Shortly after this announcement, the sky began to darken, and the crowds began to scream, wail and pray for mercy. The priest told them that if they prayed hard enough, perchance the gods would hear their prayer. Eventually it became as black as midnight. The day birds had gone to sleep and the night birds and bats of the night sky were venturing forth.

The priest reappeared on the platform. He urged the people to pray with all of their might. Suddenly a brilliant sliver of light flashed from the body of the priest. It became brighter and brighter until its radiance completely filled the arena with new light.

And here's the story behind the story. The Mayan scientists in the observatory had calculated the precise time that a full eclipse of the sun would begin and end, thus empowering the priest with predictive capacity. When the first sliver of light returned after the eclipse was passing, it's first rays were captured through a specially constructed shaft and reflected upon a powerful mirror, and the light was then projected across from the observatory onto the body of the priest. The priest was conveniently dressed in a robe that was covered with mica, the most reflective substance available in those times, and hence to all who witnessed this "miracle", the source of the return of the sun was the priest.

In this story, we can see at least two really important elements about the Mayan world. From our perspective we could say the priest was a fraud. From the Mayan perspective, it was a brilliant performance that combined science and religion in an awesome display of accuracy, power and influence. The astronomical observations of the Mayans were recorded in codices, and when compared to the predictive capabilities of European astronomers, the Mayans were at least as advanced, and often more accurate.

Medicine

Next to the observatory in Mount Alban, one can visit the ruins of the medical school, and based on stone tablets which served as textbook illustrations for medical students, it can be deduced that students were introduced to a range of surprising medical practices and techniques such as underwater birthing, dentistry and brain surgery. While it's not known exactly how these techniques were used, or to what effect, it's clear that, as in many other fields of endeavour, the Mayans were innovative and extremely systematic in the application of observation, mathematics and practical technical operations.

Mathematics

Like the Aztecs, Incas and other Mesoamerican groups, the Mayans used a base 20 numbering system that included the 0 that was actually used in calculations. It is disputed as to whether it was the Mayans or the Babylonians who first discovered this innovation, but there is no doubt that the Mayans engaged in advanced mathematical calculations using the system until around 1600, when Spanish priests extinguished the system by destroying every possible written text on which they could get their hands. Because the general population was not literate, they had only to prevent the elite from retaining and spreading their knowledge. Fortunately, the Spanish did not find all extant texts, and those few that were preserved become the basis for a renaissance of understanding regarding the Mayan world.

Writing system

The Mayan writing system is sometimes referred to as hieroglyphs because it looks a bit like the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt. Within this writing system, parts of the symbols represent phonetic signs and parts represent whole words. The



<http://mayansandtikal.com/mayan-languages/mayan-hieroglyphics/maya-hieroglyphics/>

Mayans wrote on stone tablets and monuments, ceramics, and on a kind of paper they manufactured from tree bark known as "amatl". The ongoing use of the Mayan writing system was completely stopped in the general Mayan population by the Spanish. While linguists and anthropologists struggled to understand the system for many years, it wasn't until the very end of the 20th century, that scholars understood how to read the texts with accuracy and fluidity.

We do know that the Mayans recorded everything that was important to them, which included the historical records of kings; dynasties and wars; scientific and technical observations in fields as diverse as agriculture, architecture, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy; and in the religious and ritual life at the centre of Mayan culture and civilization. It is believed that there were schools where specially trained scribes were prepared for a lifetime of service using the language for the purposes of those that employed them. It is thought that, at least in later periods, codices were written with a brush that utilized a pliable hair tip and written on Mayan paper (amatl).

Architecture

Mayan architecture rivals the architecture of other great civilizations in human history both for its beauty and for its technical achievements. This unique architectural style is best known for its

soaring pyramids and ornate palaces which were built in all Maya centres across Mesoamerica... Multi-level elevated platforms, massive step-pyramids, corbelled roofing, monumental stairways, and exteriors decorated with sculpture and molding of Maya glyphs, geometric shapes, and iconography from religion such as serpent masks are all typical features of Maya architecture. (Cartwright, Mark, 2015 "Maya Architecture", in *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from https://www.ancient.eu/Maya_Architecture/, January 3, 2019)

The Mayans produced a huge array of buildings and other structures including pyramids, temples, palaces, domed observatories, causeways, ball courts, patios, plazas, viaducts, defensive walls, and many others. Many of the most important buildings were decorated with brilliant coloured paint in bright green, yellow, red, blue, white and black. Frescoes, sculpture and painted stucco with carved three-dimensional relief images adorned the most important buildings.

The Mayans not only designed buildings, they designed whole cities. The term "acropolis" is sometimes used to describe a large and integrated complex of Mayan structures arranged on platforms of various heights to form the core of a great city or even an important secondary compound.

Mayan buildings were constructed mostly of locally available material, which varied from region



Monte Alban, Oaxaca, Mexico. Image downloaded from <https://www.pinterest.at/pin/56787645272779752/>

to region, but included limestone, sandstone, volcanic rock, and adobe bricks. Rock blocks were cut with rock tools and fit together, sometimes using a mortar made of burnt limestone and sometimes covered with the same material utilized as a smooth plaster.

It is probable that Mayan society developed specializations within the thousands of workers required to build the vast Mayan cities of the ancient world. They most certainly would have required architects, stonecutters, masons, stone carvers, painters, and thousands of others who worked in supporting roles within the processes of construction. For example, archaeologists estimate that 65% of the lab

our required to build one nobleman's residence was used in quarrying, transporting (note that the Mayans didn't have the wheel) and finishing the stone used in the construction. In one such building, it was estimated that it took roughly 11,000 man-days to build a single building in a vast city. One of the larger cities of the classical period, Tikal, spread over some 20 km². To build such a city would have required millions upon millions of man-days, much of it from highly skilled technicians and artisans.

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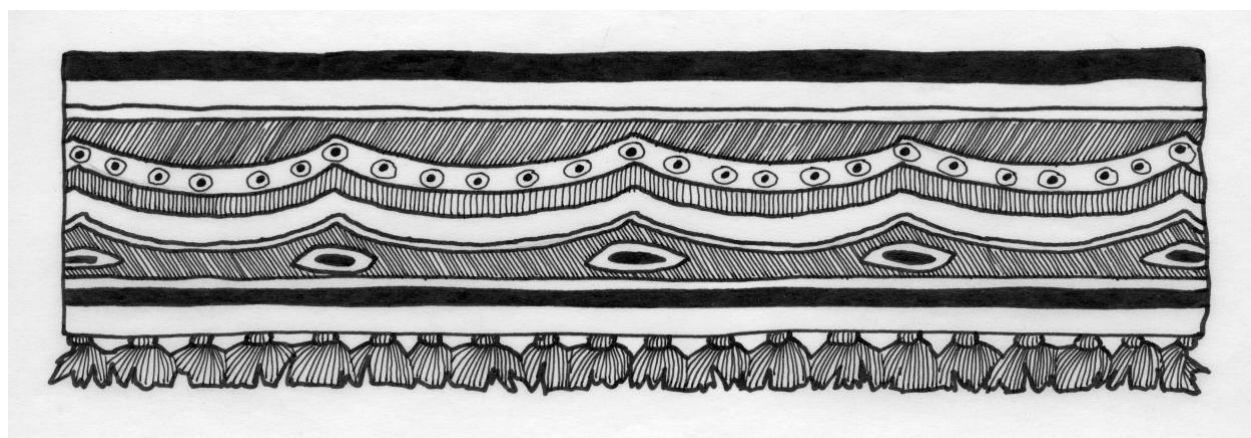
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B. The Seven Fires and Eighth Fire Prophecies

Introduction

Some of the remarkable things about the ancient Indigenous world are easily accessible to the Western mind, such as the Great Law of Peace that contributed so much to the development of modern democracies, or the enormous contributions of the Mayan and other Indigenous tribes of the Americas to the foods of the world, or the sheer grandeur and brilliance of Mayan architecture and the amazing accuracy of Mayan astronomical calculations.

However, there is also another, more invisible component of ancient Indigenous life and that is the interconnection between the material and spiritual worlds that made it possible for northern boreal as well as plains bison hunters to be guided by dreams and visions in finding bison, caribou, moose and other food sources. One striking example of this sort of Indigenous capacity to be guided by the spiritual world may be found in the example of the Seven Fires Prophecy and the Great Migration.

The Anishinaabe (Ojibway, Pottawatomie, Chippewa, Odawa and other peoples), who now live in communities surrounding the Great Lakes and other locations further west to which they later migrated, at one time lived on the east coast of Canada. These people long possessed ancient prophecies which told them that a "light-skinned visitor" would eventually come to the North American continent. It was foretold that the coming of this "visitor" would cause enormous chaos and suffering among the Anishinaabe people and would be so overwhelming that it would destroy their way of life. The people were warned that in order to prevent this from completely overcoming the people and to prepare themselves for future days of hardship to come, they would need to undertake a great migration from their then eastern homeland to a region many days journey inland to the west, to a place where "food grows on water" (i.e., wild rice).

According to oral tradition, seven separate prophets came to the people to guide them on this journey, which took as many as 500 years to complete. This set of prophecies is collectively known as the "Seven Fires Prophecies". They not only accurately foretold what was going to happen, but they also laid out the pathways the people were to follow to seven very specific stopping places around the perimeter of the Great Lakes region. The stopping places include somewhere near Montréal, Niagara Falls, the Detroit River, Manitoulin Island, Sault Ste. Marie, Duluth Minnesota, and the Madeleine Islands in Lake Superior.

The timeline of these prophecies is estimated by Anishinaabe historians to begin around the year 900 A.D. when the Seven Spirits are said to have visited the people and given them the prophecies. The old stories tell of tens of thousands of people travelling westward in great canoes between the time the prophecies were given and the migration was completed in around 1400.

When the prophecies were first received, one of the Anishinaabe peoples called the Wabunukeeg (Daybreak People) decided to stay along the eastern shores and not take the migration journey. These people were almost completely destroyed when the Europeans arrived.

A Summary of the Seven Fires and Eighth Fire Prophecies

Following is a brief summary drawn from Anishinaabe oral tradition of the Prophecies.

From the standpoint of those who believe in the prophecies, they were warned that a "light-skinned visitor" would come and would create such chaos and oppression that the people's way of life would be all but destroyed. No one within Indigenous communities doubts that that is exactly what happened. The prophecy goes on to say that a migration westward would save the

people from complete destruction, and give them time to strengthen cultural and spiritual resources so that they could withstand the period of oppression that was going to follow.

The prophecies say that they would be offered a new way of life that would lead to destruction. They further prophesy a time of great struggle and suffering in which the people would be induced to give up their spiritual and cultural traditions, and that if they did so their suffering would last a long time. Again, Indigenous observers would say that there is no doubt that this prophecy was fulfilled

Prophecies also foresaw that younger generations would abandon the teachings of their Elders, and that Elders would lose a sense of purpose. It was predicted that the people would begin to suffer from a "new sickness" in which "the cup of life would almost become the cup of grief". Indigenous observers would say that all of this has come to pass, that the great sickness referred to in the prophecies is alcohol and drug abuse, which virtually overwhelmed many Indigenous communities for many generations.

The prophecies also foretold that among these broken people, there would be those who would arise to recover the old traditions and the lost knowledge, and that if they persevered, the Sacred Fire would be relit and there would be a rebirth of Indigenous spirituality and traditional knowledge that would offer light and hope, not only to Indigenous communities, but to the whole world at a time of humanity's great need for finding a sustainable way of life.

At that time, this "new people" arising from the ashes of ancient tribes with a renewed spiritual vigour coming from the revived traditions of their peoples would light "the Eighth Fire" around which all the peoples of the world could gather. Before this great ingathering however, human beings everywhere would come to a fork in the road. If they chose the materialistic path that had absorbed them and brought them to this point of crisis, the whole world would be plunged into a long period of great suffering. If, on the other hand, they chose the sustainable path upon which indigenous guides were standing to show the way, the whole world would be able to find a way to live together in peace and harmony with each other and with the natural world.

Reflection

We introduce the Seven Fires and Eighth Fire Prophecies at this point in our learning journey to point out that this knowledge existed in the long, long-ago time before Europeans even thought of coming to North America. Even though the history that we will study about in subsequent modules will confirm the fulfilment of this ancient prophecy, the prophecy itself stands as a cultural and spiritual artifact of the ancient world.

The Oshkimaadziig Seventh Fire and Eighth Fire Prophecy emblem, downloaded from <https://anishinaabek.com/2012/12/>



The Seven Grandfather Teachings

Many Anishinaabe believe that along with prophecies, their people received Sacred Teachings about how to act in ways that would sustain the unity and integrity of the people so that they could live well and prosper. Whatever their origins, the Seven Grandfather Teachings were known and practiced not only by the Anishinaabe, but also by the Cree, the Lakota, Dakota and Nakoda peoples and many others. In short, this code for living was common among most of the tribes of what is now Canada.

While there are many variations that explain what the Teachings mean, following is a summary that endeavours to capture what is most commonly shared.

1. **Respect** – Place others before yourself and don't look down on anyone; show respect for all living beings.
2. **Love** – Open your heart and give love to every person, and also be open to receiving love from others so that the fire of love burns in the heart of every relationship, every family and every community.
3. **Courage** – Have a fearless heart; show integrity and do what is right no matter what the consequences.
4. **Honesty** – Be honest first with yourself and seek to be honest in all circumstances with others.
5. **Humility** – Know yourself to be a sacred part of the whole of creation, equal to others but not better; do not seek to place yourself above others, but rather seek to serve them.
6. **Truth** – Be fearlessly devoted to seeking the truth in every situation and understanding reality for what it is. Do not allow yourself to be misled or confused by what others tell you. Seek to know the truth with your own knowledge. See with your own eyes and hear with your own ears.
7. **Wisdom** – Wisdom is the intelligence and capacity to apply the Sacred Teachings wisely in every situation, combining the lessons from all of them to bring about the best result.

Reflection: It should come as no surprise that people who lived by these universal principles would open their arms to the teachings that the missionaries brought, believing them to be another articulation of essentially the same thing.



<https://unitingthreefiresagainstviolence.org/services/the-seven-grandfather-teachings/>

C. Significant Features of Dene, Blackfoot, Stoney Nakoda and Cree Lifeways

Dene Lifeways

The traditional pre-contact Dene were expert hunters, trappers and fishers, who survived and thrived in one of the harshest climates on earth for more than 10,000 years before Europeans even imagined traveling to North America.

Dene people before European contact lived in small conical tents (much like short teepees) made out of caribou skin covering lightweight poles. These shelters could be made warm in winter, kept cool in summer, and were easily transported, thus fitting perfectly into the nomadic lifestyle of these northern boreal hunters and gatherers.

For the most part, the Dene lived in small family groups for much of the year, but came together during the short summer season in larger extended family and clan gatherings at fish camps where lakes and rivers converged, fishing was good, and there was sufficient wind to keep the dense population of mosquitoes and black flies at bay.

Similar gatherings were often held at midwinter, although these were typically smaller, and held in sheltered areas protected from the prevailing winter winds, but close to caribou and moose populations. Both summer and winter gatherings served as a kind of socio-political institution through which marriages and agreements were negotiated, disputes were resolved and collaborative arrangements for effective utilization of territory and available resources were made. Sometimes, during these large gatherings, communities held what became known as Tea Dances, in which community members would dance round and round the circle to the rhythm of ancient songs and drumming patterns. Everyone participated, even children, and sometimes the dancing would go on late into the night. When the large gatherings were over, families scattered across the land again, making their way back to their own hunting and trapping territories, which could involve a yearly round of moving from camp to camp, covering huge distances, sometimes as many as 1,400 – 2,000 km.

Dene people highly valued self-reliance and individual autonomy. Although extended families had chiefs, leadership was also situational and distributed among the people. The best person to lead in any situation because of their knowledge and skills in that particular activity (hunting caribou, trapping beaver, catching fish, bush navigation over long distances, reading changing weather patterns, gathering and utilizing medicine plants, etc.) would take a leadership role. Decision-making was usually carried out by consultation and consensus. Everyone had a voice. Each individual Dene had to learn the knowledge and skills required for survival, and every individual carried on his/her shoulders the responsibility of working hard and never giving up, no matter how tough times got, because survival of the family and future generations depended on you.

With some minor variations, depending on territorial conditions, Athabaskan speaking people,



Photo: Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Archives of Manitoba, HBCA 1987/336-I-76/5

including Dene, Dene Tha, and Beaver, lived in very similar ways. The only Athabaskan speaking group that lived with any notable differences to this pattern was the Tsuu T'ina (who were once part of the Beaver people but eventually settled on the edge of the Rocky Mountains close to present-day Calgary.) The Tsuu T'ina learned to depend on the bison, and when they were gone, on elk, deer, moose, and small game in a very similar fashion to their Blackfoot (and later Cree) neighbors. Unlike their generally peaceful northern Dene cousins, Tsuu T'ina people became known as some of the most feared and dangerous warriors on the high plains.

Blackfoot Lifeways

What became known as the Blackfoot Confederacy consisted of three interrelated tribal groups: the Blood (also known as Kainai), the Peigans (or Pekani) and the Blackfoot (or Sik-sikah). All three groups spoke the same language, today known as Blackfoot. Traditionally, these people referred to themselves as Nitsitapi (real people) or Soyitapi (prairie people).

The Blackfoot people were known as formidable warriors and bison hunters. Before the arrival of the horse, Blackfoot people had traveled in small family bands using dogs to pull their belongings on travois (long poles pulled behind a dog or a horse upon which bundles were tied). At the time Europeans arrived in Alberta (roughly 1740), the Blackfoot people had recently acquired horses from further south, and controlled a vast territory that ranged from the North Saskatchewan River through present-day Montana all the way to the Missouri River.

Blackfoot society was both complex and highly structured on the one hand, but also extremely flexible and fluid, adapting to ever-changing environmental circumstances. These were bison people, and in many ways their collective lives reflected the patterns and life ways of the herds of bison that they followed and depended upon.



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In the wintertime, bison herds were small and scattered across the land, adapting to the availability of the food they required to survive. In the summertime, bison came together in vast herds numbering in the tens of thousands. Year round, the Blackfoot followed exactly the same pattern. During winter times, people lived in relatively small family groups called clans, and they followed the small bison herds to their winter feeding grounds. In the summertime, when the bison fed on the lush grass of the prairies and came together in their thousands, huge encampments of Blackfoot people gathered, and thrived on wild turnips, lush berries and the abundance of bison.

The Blackfoot developed ingenious methods of hunting and harvesting large numbers of bison. One of these was to construct Y-shaped corrals that were open on one end stretching several kilometers into the prairies. They would then drive a herd of bison into the wide mouth of the Y, toward the ever-narrowing point consisting of a closed circle trap, within which hunters would

use spears and arrows to slaughter many bison. The same technique was used to herd bison into swamps or over a cliff, again making it relatively easy to harvest many bison.

Like their Dene neighbors to the north, the Blackfoot were highly individualistic in the sense that coercive leadership was generally avoided in favour of consensus decision-making. But, unlike the Dene, Blackfoot people were extremely structured and complex in their social interactions. Everyone was a member of a clan. Clans had both male and female leaders, who led by virtue of their wisdom and knowledge, and their ability to guide people to a prosperous life. But, even within that framework, anyone who was good at something could be considered a leader or a kind of "chief " within a particular situation or context. In the larger social structure of the Blackfoot nation, the most influential clan chiefs came together to provide leadership for the nation, but they did so within a very defined philosophical framework and operational structure. That structure had two key elements: bundles and societies.

Bundles were a collection of sacred objects entrusted to a specially selected and trained bundle carrier, whose responsibility it was to provide spiritual guidance, wisdom teachings and education related to a specific set of responsibilities. In general, it could be said that bundles and those that carried them preserved, protected and passed on the accumulated spiritual knowledge and wisdom of the Blackfoot people, generation after generation. For example, one of the most important bundles was called the "Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle", and the person who carried this bundle had the spiritual power and authority to resolve conflicts and disputes, and to remain independent in carrying out this responsibility, just as lightning and thunder can never be controlled by any human being. These bundles and those who carried them were collectively a little like the sacred constitution of the Blackfoot people, carefully guarding and articulating the core principles and values of the nation, and interpreting how to apply them in specific circumstances over time.

Sacred societies implemented important responsibilities needed to keep the intricate social order in balance. There were as many as fifteen sacred societies, most named after totem animals that best symbolized the social functions played by the society. So, for example, members of the Brave Dog Society as well as the Crazy Dog Society were responsible for protecting and defending territory, and also for caring for those in need and helping the community to prosper. The Bumblebee Society modeled its services on the work of the bumblebee, which nurtured and supported the life of many plants, rarely bothered anyone unless attacked, but vigorously stung those who interrupted their work. The members of the society focused on the provision of social assistance for those who needed it, but also on "stinging" those who shirk their duties in performing collective work needed for the benefit of all.

The Blackfoot people also had a rich spiritual and ceremonial life, filled with teaching stories, sacred songs, and many ceremonies such as face painting, the sweat lodge and the sun dance. Within this intricate social order, everyone had responsibilities, and many developed specialized skills in fields such as military, trade, and healing needed for every aspect of social and economic life. No one was left out of this system. Everyone knew both their rights and their responsibilities, and the entire system was, in many ways, a perfect reflection of the interrelated connectivity of the natural world in which the Blackfoot people made their home.



Stoney Nakoda Lifeways

The name "Stoney" was given to the people who call themselves "Iyahe Nakoda" (meaning "Mountain People") by some of the first European visitors to Alberta to make contact with them. The name "Stoney" comes from the unique Iyahe Nakoda traditional method of cooking meat, which consisted of digging a shallow rectangular pit, lining the pit with rawhide, filling it with water, and then by using a forked stick to place stones that had been heated in a nearby fire into the water. In this manner the water would soon boil, and would then be used to cook meat. Both the meat and the broth would then be consumed.

According to Stoney Nakoda elders, the traditional territory of the Iyahe Nakoda encompasses the forests and foothills on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains from as far north as the Brazeau River near Rocky Mountain House and south to Chief Mountain near the present-day town of Cardston, Alberta. One version of Iyahe Nakoda oral history states unequivocally that "since time immemorial", the Iyahe Nakoda have always lived along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains.

The term "time immemorial" really means, "as far back as our collective memory can reach". Archaeological and historical evidence, as well as the testimony of various Stoney Nakoda, Dakota, Lakota, Cree and Blackfoot historians paint the following picture. The Stoney Nakoda language is a dialect of the Siouxan language (along with Dakota and Lakota). The Iyahe Nakoda are the descendants of several splinter groups of the Great Sioux Nation that migrated north into Canada or further westward across the Dakota Badlands around 1500 to escape a series of deadly pandemics that were decimating the people further south, originating from Europeans who had intruded into Indigenous territories.

Remnants of these people can still be found in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, but most of them joined forces with the Cree around 1700 as part of a westward expansion of the fur trade, and in search of new territories. The Nakoda were a welcome ally for the Cree because of their military prowess. By 1740, an intertribal military and trade alliance known as the Iron Confederacy had brought together Cree, Assiniboiné (present day Stoney Nakoda), Plains Ojibway (Saulteaux), along with a smattering of Mohawks and had begun to push westward into Alberta, claiming territory previously occupied by various Dene groups to the north (Beaver, Dene Tha, Chipewyan), and in the south by Blackfoot and Tsuu T'ina, another Athabascan-speaking Dene group that adopted the lifestyle of the Plains bison hunters, and were also known as incredibly

formidable warriors. The Tsuu T'ina became allies of the Blackfoot in defense of their shared bison hunting territory in southern Alberta. When the dust had settled from this territorial shakeup, the Iyahe Nakoda had firmly established themselves in what is now considered their traditional territory along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Another group of what are now called Stoney Nakoda (presumably the



group that had fled westward to escape European diseases) traveled up from Montana and became part of what is now known as the Stoney Nakoda Nation. The descendants of these migrations now live on the Alexis and Paul Band reserves west of Edmonton, the Big Horn Reserve near Nordegg, the three bands of the Stoney Reserve at Morley, and the Eden Valley reserve west of High River, Alberta. Because of intermarriage in the past, it is estimated that as much as 30% of Stoney Nakoda people today share some Cree ancestry.

What is not disputed is that the Iyahe Nakoda people were already firmly established in their traditional territory along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains by the time Europeans arrived in what is now present-day Alberta in 1752. It is also fairly clear that the Iyahe Nakoda were often at odds with the Blackfoot, who claimed some of the same territory, and had in fact successfully defended that territory from many intruders for many generations. There are numerous stories on both sides of great battles fought, won and lost.

The Iyahe Nakoda lived for most of the year in small extended family or clan-based camps along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Each clan had its own designated territories, sufficient to provide enough large and small game, including elk, deer and bison so that the people could prosper. It was necessary for the groups to remain small enough so that the land could support them. In fact, the Stoney Nakoda people lived in complete harmony with the land and all living creatures, and so the distribution of the animal population determined the distribution of human habitation. In most years, all the scattered bands of the Iyahe Nakoda Nation came together in one or several large encampments to hunt bison, hold ceremonies, consult on matters of importance to the whole tribe, or when necessary, to wage war.

In addition to big game, the Iyahe Nakoda also harvested ducks, geese and small game. Berries and wild fruits were gathered in season and dried for year-round consumption, along with wild turnips and onions, greens and medicine plants. The semi-nomadic lifestyle was made somewhat easier with the arrival of the horse in the early 1700s. The traditional dwelling of the Stoney Nakoda was the tepee, which could be made warm in winter, kept cool in summer and was easily transportable if the group needed to move to another location.

Like all Indigenous peoples, the Iyahe Nakoda had a rich and complex spiritual life rooted in a strong belief in the Creator and in the spirit world that gave life to everything on earth, the heavens and all that is. Every child was taught to pray, and to practice important values such as respect, reverence for all life, as well as honouring and respecting the protocols that guided important relationships with the spiritual world, the natural world, and the world of one's family and community.



Glenbow Archives NA-1700-84

Important times in a person's life, such as marriage, the birth of a child, coming-of-age, first hunt, preparing for battle, commitment to a path of service, acceptance of new spiritual responsibilities, and of course sickness, healing, dying and mourning the loss of loved ones, were marked and supported by special ceremonies. At the heart of Iyahe Nakoda religious life were ceremonies such as the sweat lodge, the sacred pipe, the sun dance, vision quest, and practices such as prayer and fasting as well as many other spiritual disciplines practiced on a

regular basis. The traditional knowledge and wisdom teachings of the people were preserved and passed on through ceremonies, stories, songs, sacred bundles and symbols such as the drum and the medicine wheel, as well as through a deep connection with the natural world and special teachers such as eagle, bear, wolf, mountain lion, mouse, beaver, muskrat, coyote, turtle, water, wind, earth and fire (to name only a few).

Every young boy and girl growing up in a traditional Iyaahe Nakoda family knew from a very young age that they were not just individuals free to do whatever they wanted. They were also valued and important contributors to the wellbeing of their families and community. It was, therefore, of the utmost importance that young people learned all the skills and knowledge necessary to be able to fulfill their responsibilities with honour, courage and dignity. (For more on Stoney Nakoda lifeways, see an additional section at the end of this Module.)

Cree Lifeways

There are two distinct groups of Cree living in Alberta: Woodland Cree and Plains Cree. In order to understand why there are two groups of Cree speaking people that are culturally quite distinct from one another in Alberta, it's necessary to understand something of the story of this great people and their expansion across the North American continent.

In the mid-to late 1600s, European fur traders first established themselves on the shores of Hudson Bay in northern Ontario. At that time, most of the Great Cree Nation's population was concentrated in the boreal forests that extended from James Bay to the far reaches of Lake Superior. A hundred years later, the Cree had expanded their territory to include parts of Ontario, Minnesota and Montana, as well as much of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and they had formed a powerful military and commercial trading alliance with the Assiniboine (later called Stoney Nakoda), Saulteaux (Plains Ojibway) and a small contingent of Mohawks



Poundmaker, a chief of the Plains Cree First Nation, Image courtesy of the National Archives of Canada, C-001875. Image levels adjusted and top and left cropped.

(Haudenosaunee), and they were poised to push into present day Alberta, where they were destined to take over and occupy a huge swath of territory from the southern reaches of the Great Slave Lake to present day Red Deer, and from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains all the way to Saskatchewan.

The Cree eventually became the largest Indigenous tribe in the whole of North America, occupying by far the largest territory. Part of the reason why they were able to achieve this is because they were incredibly flexible and adaptive to new situations. Traditionally, the Cree lived in small extended family groups or clans, and they were continually on the move, following the ever-changing fluctuations of food supply in a harsh and vast landscape. Usually, when the Cree encountered other tribes, they adapted and learned from them, and often intermarried. As a result, they built strong alliances wherever they went.

In less than 50 years after the beginning of the fur trade, the region surrounding Hudson Bay began to be depleted of furs. Because the Cree were so adaptable, many of them had begun to work harder on trapping furs for sale than they did on gathering

food for survival. This made them dependent on trade goods. As the supply of beaver, fox and other furbearing animals began to dwindle in their traditional territory, the Cree began to look to the south and to the west for new opportunities. At the same time common European diseases, against which the immune system of Indigenous people had no defense, were already decimating the Cree population in the north. Both to escape European diseases and to find more productive fur trapping areas, many of the Cree began to push westward.

There had always been distinctions in lifestyle and cultural adaptation between various groups of Cree living in the boreal forest (Mushkegowuk, or Moose Cree people living in and around Moose Factory and the southern end of James Bay; Atikamekw in north-central Québec; Naskapi and Montagnais (together referred to as Innu) in eastern Québec and Labrador; and Swampy Cree, living in northern Manitoba along the Hudson Bay coast and inland to eastern Saskatchewan around present-day Cumberland House).

As the Cree were moving into southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and eventually central Alberta, two important things happened. First, the Cree made a military and commercial alliance with the Assiniboine, in which the Cree were able to acquire iron tools and guns through their trade routes connected to Hudson Bay, and the Assiniboine were able to bring horses from further south. With these additional resources, the "Iron Confederacy" was formed and soon developed a trading monopoly. This powerful alliance acted as the middleman between many western tribes supplying fur and European fur traders. The alliance was soon joined by some Saulteaux (Plains Ojibway) and Mohawk people. Eventually, it pushed westward and gained control of much of central Alberta. The second important thing that happened during that same time period was that a large portion of Cree adapted to the life of high plains bison hunters, quickly learning from the Assiniboine and the Blackfoot. This portion of the Cree nation gradually adopted some of the religious beliefs and practices of high plains tribes, including large group ceremonies such as the sun dance and the sweat lodge. Those Cree that settled in the northern forests and the lake regions of Alberta were able to maintain much the same pattern of social organization and adaptation to territory as they had practiced for centuries as northern boreal hunters.

The Name "Cree" is not what these people have traditionally called themselves. The word "Cree" is an English adaptation of the French word "cri", which itself is a contraction of the name early French explorers recorded for the people living near James Bay, which was "Kiristinon". For centuries before European contact, and up to this day, most of this people have referred to themselves as "Nehiyaw" or "Nehiyawak" which simply means "the people".

Woodland Nehiyawak in Alberta

The Cree had been hunters and gatherers in northern boreal forests for thousands of years. Much as they had done since time immemorial, those Cree who chose to settle in the woodlands of central and northern Alberta were able to continue cultural patterns and a lifestyle that they had always known. Most of them lived in wigwams, which are dome-like structures fashioned from saplings and covered with birch bark or animal skins. Even in wooded areas, Cree people also used the teepee, which was much easier to take down, transport and put up again. As they had always done, Cree people lived in small extended family or clan groups, probably numbering no more than 50 to 80 people—enough for self-defense, but not so



many that they would use up available firewood and game in any given area too quickly.

Because of their vast knowledge of the forest and everything that lives within it, the Cree carried with them a virtual university of knowledge about each and every animal, fish and bird species they encountered, and thousands of uses for nearly every plant, bush and tree that grew in the forest.

Women were responsible for building shelters; gathering edible and medicinal plants and usable plant materials; checking trap lines; hauling firewood; hunting small game; making snowshoes and small tools; processing and preserving meat and fish harvested by the men; tanning hides; making, repairing and decorating clothing; raising children until they reached puberty; and maintaining the order and discipline of the camp. Women also did much of the work entailed in



moving from area to area, including breaking down the old camp, packing up, and carrying heavy loads of belongings on the journey to the new campsite assisted by dogs pulling travois¹ or toboggans.

Men hunted deer, elk, moose, woodland caribou, bison, bear, geese, and ducks and, as well, constructed nets and traps to catch many species of fish. Men also constructed canoes and paddles, and weapons such as

spears, clubs, knives, and bows and arrows, which also entailed carving the flint-tipped points ranging in sizes that were tiny and delicate for hunting birds, to large, razor-sharp and deadly for hunting big game, and for war. Men were also responsible for the defense of the people. The Cree had always been among the most formidable and relentless warriors in the Americas, and they had a fearsome reputation among other tribes.

Young Cree boys and girls grew up learning to value individual autonomy, hard work, self-reliance, and non-interference in the affairs of others. Respect for the land and all living things, the spirit world and one's elders, as well as devotion to the wellbeing of one's family and community were also highly valued.

The Woodland Cree people were intimately connected with the spiritual powers embedded in the natural world, and they believed that everything has a spirit that can guide you or hurt you, depending on the relationship you create with it. For this reason, there were special people among the Cree who were trained as shamans to mediate between the people and the spirits that animated the living world. It was believed that very strong sorcerers could cause the defeat of enemies, and assist hunters to achieve a very successful hunt, as well as to cause enemies to reconcile, a person to fall in love with another, a sickness to come upon an enemy or healing of sickness or injury to occur even when it seemed very unlikely. Even with the help of shamans, however, one always had to be careful in the forest, because "wendigo"¹ (disruptive and sometimes vengeful spirits) could always come upon you, sometimes making you see and do crazy things, or causing mishaps such as a fall, a tipped canoe, or scaring away of game during the hunt.

¹ A travois consists of 2 poles attached one on either side of an animal (traditionally dogs, but later horses) and dragged behind, across which a load of belongings, tools, meat, etc. could be attached for transport.

Religious and spiritual practices mostly focused on helping the individual, rather than on large group ceremonies as practiced by the Plains Cree and other bison hunting societies such as the sun dance, which has a very strong communal and collective purpose beyond helping individuals on their path of life. For instance, when a young girl was coming of age, she was taken into the care of other women and instructed in preparation for her transition into womanhood. Similarly, young boys were sent out on a "vision quest" where they prayed and fasted for several days, waiting for a spirit guide (usually in the form of an animal) to appear. Adult men also sometimes went on vision quests for specific purposes related to their path in life.

Indeed, all transitions and important processes and events in life came with religious observances. Whether it was marriage, the birth of a child, healing sickness, the passing of a loved one, preparation for hunting or war, supplicating the spirit world for assistance in hard times, or preparation for one's own death, the spiritual and religious life of Cree people had a rich heritage filled with thousands of spiritual stories, songs, wisdom teachings, symbols, rituals and daily practices such as smudging, bathing, fasting, keeping vigil and dreaming.

Much like their Dene neighbors to the north, Woodland Cree people moved from area to area, following the movement of the animals that they depended upon for food. Usually, about midsummer, larger gatherings that brought together many clans would be held at the mouths of rivers or on the shores of lakes where the fishing was good, and a refreshing breeze kept the mosquitoes and black flies to a manageable level. During these gatherings, marriages would be arranged, consultation about important topics affecting everyone in the Cree territories were discussed and important decisions were made. And, of course, the people would sing and dance and enjoy each other's company while they could, because soon enough, the summer would end and the people would again make the long journey back to their winter camps.

Alberta Plains Nehiyawak

The people we now know as Plains Cree are part of the Great Cree Nation that chose to adopt the bison hunting lifestyle of high plains tribes such as the Blackfoot. It is estimated that the Cree, along with the rest of the Iron Confederacy, were the single most powerful force shaping the fur trade in Western Canada from about 1740 - 1870.

The pattern of life adopted by the Plains Cree followed very similar patterns to those of their Blackfoot, Assiniboiné (i.e., Stoney Nakoda) and Sarcee counterparts. In winter, the Cree lived in relatively small clan-based camps, probably numbering somewhere between 80 and 150 people. This is a size that allowed for defense without compromising the carrying capacity of the land in terms of food supply and firewood. Cree were very much in tune with the land and the animals. Bison also wintered in smaller groups in sheltered valleys near water and sufficient food supply to sustain their smaller sized herd. Bison hunting tribes typically wintered within striking distance of these winter grazing grounds. There they would construct bison jumps and paddocks, and drive the herds into them for harvest.



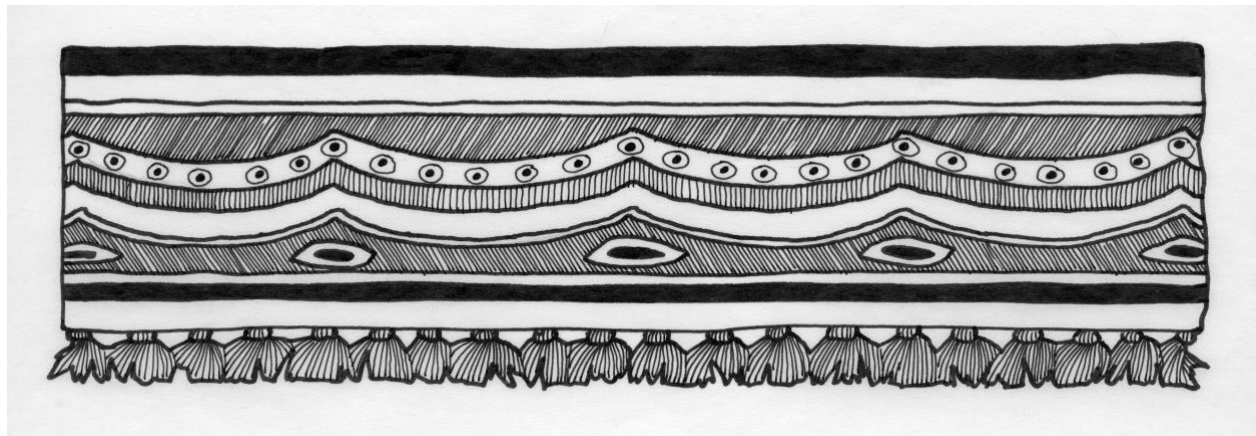
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In the summer, the bison gathered in tens of thousands on the vast plains, probably drawn by the abundance of nourishing grasses and herbs. Similarly, the Plains Cree gathered in large encampments to hunt the bison, as well as to hold ceremonies such as the sun dance, and to consult and make decisions concerning the affairs of the nation.

It's important to note that, despite the fact they had adapted some elements of high plains religious practices, the Plains Cree also still carried much of their ancient traditional knowledge, such as stories, songs, symbols and wisdom teachings, as well as important spiritual practices such as vision quests and fasting.

Artifacts

Both Woodland and Plains Cree people produced some of the most intricate and beautiful moose hair tufting, porcupine quill decoration and beadwork for clothing and accessories of any people in the Americas. See, for example, the beautiful photographs in "Nehiyawak: Traditions of the Cree People" produced by the Glenbow Museum in a series called "21st Century Learning: Links to Our Collection".



D. Why Learning about Indigenous Beliefs, Values and Spiritual Practices is Important

It's not enough to understand how people lived and survived in the physical sense. Underlying the relationships people had with each other and the natural world was the "software" of beliefs, values, wisdom teachings and spiritual practices. It was these critically important ways of knowing, seeing and interrelating that guided and shaped every aspect of the way Indigenous people lived in traditional times before European contact. And, indeed, it is this same "software" that has enabled Indigenous peoples to survive through as many as 500 years of culturally repressive and trauma-inducing political, economic, social, cultural and even spiritual domination, and still remember who they are and where they came from.

Understanding the importance of Indigenous values, wisdom teachings and spiritual practices makes it possible to gain a glimmer of understanding of who Indigenous people are today, in the 21st century. This understanding is particularly important for human service workers, or anyone engaged in some form of support or helping profession that serves Indigenous people and communities. And, it can be of the utmost importance for Indigenous learners, no matter what professional path they may choose. That is because this ancient "software" can help link Indigenous persons to their own roots and their own history, cultural heritage and identity. For many Indigenous people, making that link can be a critical and necessary step on their journey toward personal wellness and success in life.

For non-Indigenous human service workers, for example, having some basic understanding of traditional Indigenous values, beliefs, wisdom teachings and spiritual practices is essential for cultural competency in human service work with Indigenous individuals, families and communities. (For example, the Alberta Government reports that roughly 70% of all children in care in Alberta come from Indigenous families, and 40% of the prison population in Alberta is Indigenous [in Saskatchewan, it's 80%.]) Working effectively with these and other issues that are affecting Indigenous people today requires deep sensitivity to the cultural strengths and resources that have proven to be so powerful in helping many Indigenous people find their way to a healthy and sustainable life.

This following two sections introduce a range of traditional Indigenous thinking, values, beliefs and spiritual practices shared in whole or in part by most Indigenous groups in Alberta prior to European contact. It's important, however, to state at the outset, that there were many variations on the ideas and practices that will be presented in this segment, not only between distinct language and cultural groups, but also even within them. Spirituality for most Indigenous people is highly personal and individualized. Individuals receive guidance, dreams and visions that are theirs and theirs alone. These are often shared and sometimes even interpreted by elders or shaman who have been trained to mediate between their community and the spirit world, but almost all Indigenous people traditionally held a deep respect for the individual beliefs and experiences of others, no matter how different those beliefs and experiences were from one's own.

At the same time, all cultural communities shared common beliefs, values and practices that bound them together as a people, and provided them with the guidance, spiritual strength and "connective tissue" that made it possible for them to remain united and connected with one another as a people, even when they were separated over vast distances in their collective struggle to survive. Ceremonies such as the Tea Dance of northern Dene; the Sundance as practiced somewhat differently, but nevertheless similarly by the Blackfoot, the Stoney Nakoda and the Plains Cree; and cultural practices common to many groups such as the sacred pipe ceremony, giveaways and purification practices such as smudging or the Sweat Lodge—all of these need to be understood within the framework of Indigenous thinking and world view.

Some Key Concepts of an Indigenous Worldview

The following four statements, summarized from *The Sacred Tree* (Bopp et al, 1984), are intended to provide a window into the philosophical underpinnings of Indigenous thinking. Every cultural group would express these things somewhat differently, but these are ideas that appear in some form again and again in the sacred teachings and traditions of Indigenous peoples across Canada in general and in Alberta in particular.

Obviously, there are many other important ideas that could be highlighted such as change and flux as the only constant, and the inseparability of Indigenous thinking from the relationship any particular group of Indigenous people had with their natural environment. The ideas that were selected for consideration in this unit were chosen both because they are prominent ideas across many tribal groups, and also because they have relevance for contemporary Indigenous people in their community healing and recovery processes from the impact of intergenerational trauma, and in their processes of nation building and reconciliation with the rest of Canada.

- 1. *Everything is spiritual.*** All of creation is both material and spiritual in nature. Every part of the natural world, such as rocks and water, plants and animals, sky and earth, the sun the moon and stars—all of it is alive with spirit. The seen and the unseen worlds are part of one interconnected reality. In human beings, our material and spiritual nature are like the wings of one bird. Both wings must be strong in order for the bird to be able to fly. In all aspects of life, the spiritual and the material must be balanced, and proper respect and attention must be paid to both.
- 2. *All of life is interconnected.*** We are all in relationship with every part of nature and with all other human beings. These relationships can either be healthy or unhealthy. If our relationships with other human beings or with nature are unhealthy or out of balance, the result can bring catastrophe to the natural world and great suffering to human beings. The way to truly understand anything is to understand how it fits into the interconnected web of life, of which we are all a part. All people are really part of one human family. Everything is related to everything else.
- 3. *Four Sacred Responsibilities in Life:*** a) to know, deeply respect and honour the Creator of all life; b) to respect and care for oneself because within you is hidden a spark of the Spirit of all life; c) to show respect and to care for others, including one's family and community, and all other living things for they, too, reflect the One Spirit; and d) for communities to care for their members, especially those who cannot care for themselves. All of these responsibilities are interconnected.
- 4. *Every human being, without exception, was created noble, good and with tremendous potential.*** No one was a mistake or an accident. All of us were born with gifts from the Creator that were hidden within us, but these gifts are like seeds. They have great potential, but they have to be nurtured and cared for through willpower, discipline and struggle, sometimes over many years of hard work. This is why Indigenous people made prayers and offerings every day, listened to and learned from spiritual stories and wise teachings, learned and sang sacred songs and participated in the ceremonies and spiritual gatherings of the people. All of this was to nurture the seeds within us, so that we could become our own true self.

Some Important Cultural Practices

In this Section, five selected traditional Indigenous cultural practices will be briefly highlighted: 1) the role of Elders and how to approach them in a respectful manner; 2) the sacred pipe; 3) the sweat lodge; 4) feasting and the giveaway; and 5) the powwow.

The role of Elders and how to approach them in a respectful manner

The first challenge is to understand what an Elder is within an Indigenous cultural context. In English, the concept of "elder" simply means an older person or senior citizen. In Cree, for example, the word used for Elder is "kehteyak", and it describes a certain kind of person as these individuals play a very specific set of roles within traditional society. Kehteyak means "Old Ones", not just in the sense of chronological age, but also in the sense of having acquired knowledge, wisdom and competency after many years of hard work under the tutelage of their Elders. In other words, being an Elder is something that is earned as a result of tremendous effort and lifelong role model behavior. Authentic Elders seldom, if ever, promote themselves or even identify themselves as Elders. It is the community that identifies them as having the knowledge, wisdom and characteristics of an Elder.

There are many different kinds of Elders. Some are generalists, with knowledge about many aspects of traditional teachings and practices. Some play very specific roles, which they have prepared for over as many as 20 years under the careful supervision of their own "Old Ones". For example, there were (and still are) Medicine People who focus on healing work. They are the traditional physicians, and they often work in collaboration with herbalists, who are elders with special knowledge of medicine plants and how to use them. As well, there were midwives, ceremonial leaders, orators, and advisers who possess specific knowledge about important areas such as hunting, agriculture, the ecology of a certain area, politics, trade, war, peacemaking, governance and many other important topics.

This description is adapted from the "Elder Protocol and Guidelines" developed by the University of Alberta's Council on Aboriginal Initiatives in 2012,

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2001:4) describes an Elder as "someone who is considered exceptionally wise in the ways of their culture and the teachings of the Great Spirit. They are recognized for their wisdom, their stability, and their humor in their ability to know what is appropriate in a particular situation." Communities look to them for guidance and sound judgment. They are caring and are known to share the fruits of their labors and experience with others in the community."

In a report prepared for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Chansonneuve (2005) goes on to describe some of the essential qualities in an elder as follows:

- a. disciplined and committed to a lifetime of learning;*
- b. knows traditional teachings and is committed to helping people within this framework;*
- c. physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually healthy;*
- d. born with, or seeks the gift of healing in apprenticeship with a traditional healer;*
- e. walks his or her talk, i.e. lives a healthy lifestyle within the parameters of traditional values;*
- f. provides help when asked, although may not provide this immediately [sometimes will refer to another Elder with particular expertise];*
- g. able to bring traditional values and life ways into contemporary urban and living in a practical way;*
- h. treats his or her family, spouse, children, parents, Elders and other traditional healers in a respectful and caring manner [all people];*
- i. is a positive role model for Aboriginal people;*
- j. able to teach and correct behavior with kindness and respect without humiliating the*

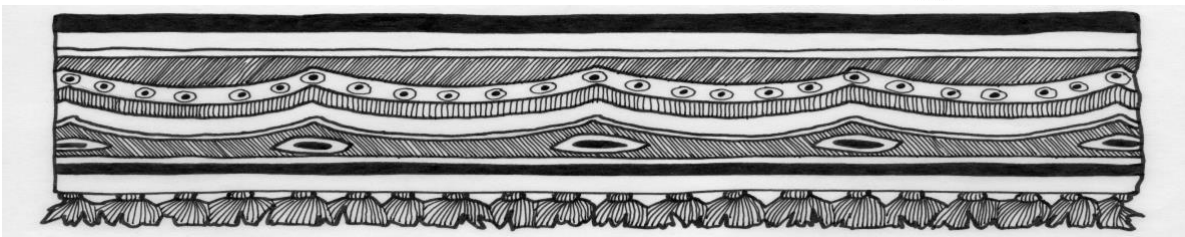
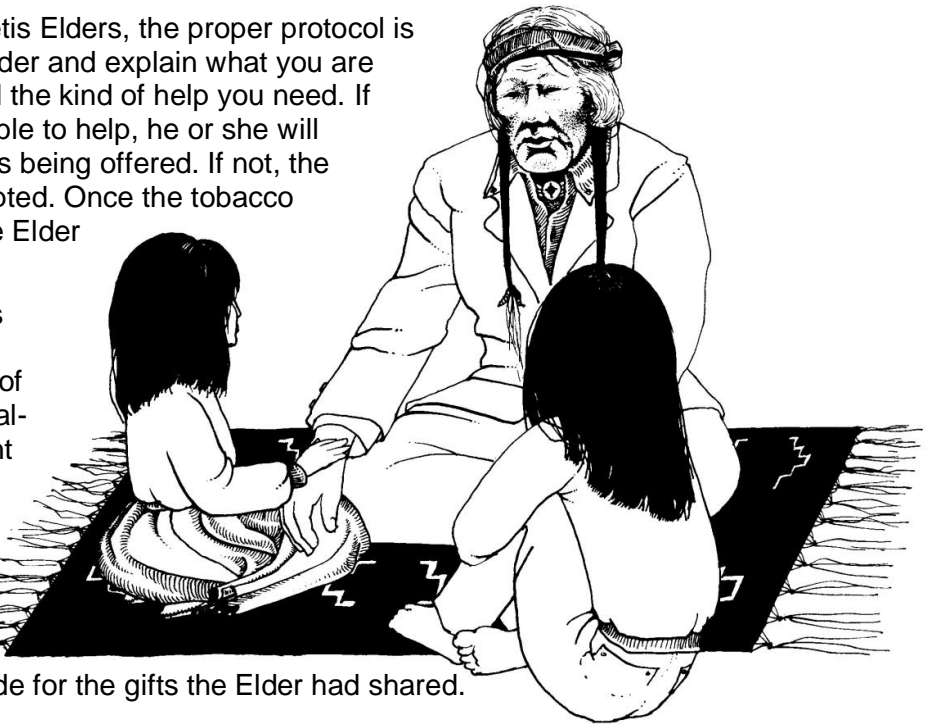
individual;

- k. always hopeful of people and able to see the goodness in people;*
- l. does not use alcohol or drugs or engage in other destructive addictive behavior;*
- m. does not set a fee for their healing service or request gifts in payment;*
- n. knows the medicines and ceremonies [has experience and participated in ceremonies]; and*
- o. [demonstrated] evidence of his or her success exists among the [Aboriginal] people and the [Aboriginal] communities.*

(Chansonneuve, 2005:70 – 71)

Proper protocol for asking help from an elder

- a. Be clear in your own mind on the purpose for which you seek help from the Elder.
- b. For First Nations and Métis Elders, the proper protocol is to offer tobacco to the Elder and explain what you are asking of him or her, and the kind of help you need. If the Elder is willing and able to help, he or she will accept the tobacco that is being offered. If not, the tobacco will not be accepted. Once the tobacco is accepted, it means the Elder has agreed to help.
- c. Traditionally, after Elders provided services, gifts were offered in the form of food, blankets or other valuable items. It's important to understand that this was not a fee charged for the services by the Elder. Rather it was a freely given gift, offered in the spirit of reciprocity and gratitude for the gifts the Elder had shared.



The Sacred Pipe

The following story of how the White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the Sacred Pipe to the Lakota people is helpful for understanding this sacred ceremony (see Crystalinks Metaphysical and Science Website, *White Buffalo Calf Woman*, retrieved from <http://www.crystalinks.com/buffalocalfwoman.html>).

The Story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman

There was a famine and the Lakota people were starving. They had not found buffalo in many months. The leaders sent scouts out in every direction. Two of them climbed a high hill so they could look out over the whole country. As they were climbing, they saw a figure coming towards them from a long ways away. The figure seemed to be floating rather than walking. From this they knew that whoever was coming must be wakan; i.e., holy.

When the person drew closer, they saw that it was a beautiful young woman dressed in white buckskin that shone as brightly as the sun. As she drew closer still, they could see that her clothes were decorated with mysterious and beautifully fashioned porcupine quill designs. One of the young men was completely overawed and humbled in the presence of this holy person. The other filled with lust and desire for her. He stretched out his hand to touch her, the story says, but she was so sacred that she could not be treated with disrespect. In some versions of the story, the young man is instantly struck by lightning and turns to ashes. In another, a strange cloud suddenly envelops him, as the cloud disappears there is only dust where he once stood.

The remaining scout was very frightened, but the holy visitor told him in a loving voice that neither he nor any of his people would be harmed. She instructed him to return to his people, and to prepare for her coming by putting up a large medicine lodge. After four days of waiting, the people saw her coming carrying a large bundle and a fan made out of buffalo sage.

The White Buffalo Calf Woman then instructed the people in the use and meaning of the Sacred Pipe and other sacred ceremonies. She held the stem of the pipe with her right hand and the bowl with her left, and that is traditionally how it is always held until this day. She filled the pipe with red willow bark tobacco and walked in a circle around the Lodge four times in the direction the sun travels, representing the great circle of life. She lit the pipe from a coal from the fire representing fire without end, to be passed on generation after generation. Then, she showed the people how to pray with the pipe, using the right words and the right movements. She taught them the pipe filling song and how to lift up the pipe to the sky, and down toward mother Earth, and then to the four directions of the universe.

She told them that their bodies form a bridge when they are holding the pipe between the sacred below and the sacred above, and how in this manner, they were connected to all living things—two-legged, four-legged, those that fly, those that swim, the trees and the grasses. She told them that they were all related, all members of one family. It is the Sacred Pipe that holds them all together.

She told them that the bowl of the pipe represents the Buffalo upon which the people depended for their livelihood, but also the blood of the people. She told them that the wooden stem of the pipe represents everything that grows upon the earth. She told them many other things that were to come and she concluded by telling them that the pipe is alive; that it is a red being showing you the good red road of a life that is lived in a sacred manner with deep respect in connection to all people and all living things.

Then the holy visitor walked away from them into the red ball of the setting sun. As she went, she stopped and rolled over four times. The first time, she turned into a black buffalo; the second time into a brown one; the third into a red one; and the fourth time she rolled over, she turned into a white buffalo calf. The White Buffalo is considered the most sacred being to be encountered on this earth.

As soon as the holy visitor disappeared over the horizon, buffalo in the thousands came and presented themselves as a sacrifice so that the people might live.

The Sweat Lodge

The Sweat Lodge is a very ancient purification ceremony that is practiced by almost all Indigenous people in North America in some form. Each Indigenous group has a slightly different way of building a Lodge and conducting a Sweat Lodge ceremony. In fact, there are variations in the way sweat lodge ceremonies are conducted even between various Sweat Lodge leaders from the same community. However, generally speaking in Alberta, the way "Sweats" are done is fairly similar among all the Indigenous groups.

The Lodge itself is a low, relatively small dome shaped structure constructed of branches (often red willow). The branches are covered these days with canvas, though traditionally people used birch bark or animal hides. A small hole is dug out, usually in the centre of the Lodge, and the dirt from the hole is usually piled up to form a mound in front of the Lodge entrance. The floor of the Lodge is often covered with buffalo sage or some other fragrant herb. A sacred fire is lit in front of the Lodge in which stones are heated.

Participants sit in a circle inside the Lodge around the stone pit, and hot rocks are brought in. The door of the lodge is closed until it's completely dark, except (sometimes) for the glow on the hot rocks. Cedar, sweetgrass or other medicinal plants are placed on the hot rocks; water is sprinkled or gently poured on the rocks to create steam.

The ceremony usually begins with songs and prayers, and is often preceded by the pipe ceremony. The actual sweat lodge ceremony usually has four segments called "rounds". Traditionally, each round has a specific purpose, depending on who is conducting the ceremony and the specific purposes for which the ceremony is being held. Each round usually begins and ends with a song and has prayers and, sometimes, participant offerings in between. At the end of each round, the door of the Lodge is opened and participants drink water and sometimes even step outside the Lodge for a touch of cool air.

Often, after the fourth round, participants share a symbolic feast (typically canned salmon and blueberries these days). After participants leave the Lodge, they often embrace one another because of the strong spiritual connection created by the ceremony.

Feasting and the Giveaway

Many Indigenous communities in Alberta practice the custom of putting on a traditional feast in recognition of the one-year anniversary of the passing of a loved one, to honour someone, or to celebrate an important event or holiday. A traditional feast might be put on by a family to celebrate the life of a loved one that has gone on to the Spirit World, the coming-of-age of one of their children, a graduation, or in thanksgiving for a blessing the family has received.

At such gatherings, people often sit in a big circle. Before people eat, tobacco is sometimes offered, prayers are said, usually by Elders and traditional food such as deer, elk, moose, bison, or further north, caribou meat, or more commonly stew and bannock are served. Before eating, there are always prayers, usually offered by an Elder. After eating, there may be speeches to explain the purpose of the gathering. Sometimes traditional songs are sung. In some communities, traditional fiddle music is played and people dance.

Sometimes, at the end of the gathering, a huge pile of gifts is brought out and distributed to the participants. Gifts can range from traditionally decorated moccasins, pouches or articles of clothing (a very traditional gift), to blankets and practical household items. Sometimes food left over from the feast is wrapped up and given to participants to take home. The giveaway part of the feast is a way of connecting the hearts of those putting on the feast with everyone who has come to help them give thanksgiving, celebrate or to honour their loved one.

The Powwow

The powwow is a traditional North American Indigenous people's social gathering, these days involving both social and competitive traditional dancing, drumming and singing, friendly intertribal rivalry, family socializing and a celebration of Indigenous culture and identity. It is a very old way for Indigenous people to get together and say "we are still here and we're still ourselves after all that's happened to us".

There are varying accounts about how the powwow tradition came into being. Everyone seems to agree that the word "powwow" comes from the Algonquin language and originally referred to a gathering of spiritual leaders, which was specifically outlawed by the Massachusetts General Court in 1646 in a decree that said "no Indian shall anytime pawpaw, or perform outward worship to their false gods, or to the devil..." (Source: Manatanka American Indian Council, How the Powwow Began, retrieved from <https://www.manataka.org/page1159.html>). Some speculate that the outlaw of spiritual gatherings had exactly the opposite effect than intended by those who made the law. Many such gatherings began to be held in secret, and the practice spread all over the country.

Others say that the practice comes from meetings of the traditional Grass Dance Society, which was an old tradition in which warriors could publicly tell the stories of their battles through oratory, song and dance. As Native American tribes were pushed together as a result of their being displaced from their traditional lands, people who had struggled over territory and been at odds each other for a long time suddenly had to learn how to get along together, so there began a mingling of traditions, one of them being the Grass Dance Society, which non-natives viewed as a social rather than a religious activity. Thus, inter-tribalism was born which gave rise to the sharing of customs, sounds, stories, dances, food and art. These intertribal gatherings had many older names, but since about the mid-20th century, they have been referred to as "Powwows".

By the 1980s, the powwow had become a huge intercultural as well as intertribal event. To some extent it became commercial, with big prize money for the dance competitions and entry fees and huge crowds of curious visitors who came to see the beautiful spectacle of people celebrating their identity and traditions. Recently, many communities and long-standing powwows have returned to a more traditional approach to these gatherings, which require that alcohol is not used, and that all visitors treat one another with respect, following traditional protocol and, thus, shifting from powwow as spectacle to powwow as a powerful healing and unifying activity.

All you have to do is Google "powwows in Alberta" to find a scheduled powwow being held every month of the year somewhere near you.



Dallas Powderface performs a men's traditional dance during an Aboriginal Day powwow on June 21 at Chiniki Cultural Centre. Photo credit: Amy Tucker, www.cochraneage.com

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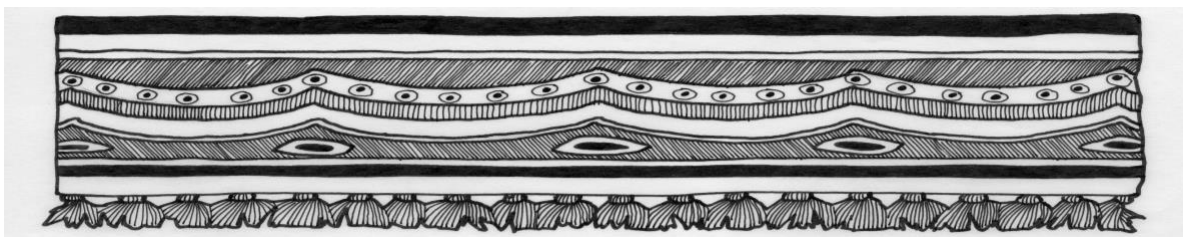
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E. A Deeper Look at Stoney Nakoda History and Lifeways before Contact

The Stoney call themselves *Iyethkabi*, meaning the people. Neighbouring tribes referred to them as “*Wapamaktha*” (or cut-heads) because of their reputation as fierce warriors. The Stoney people claim that they did not go out searching for war with others, but fiercely defended themselves when tribes such as the Cree, Blackfoot Crow, Sarcee, Flatheads, Shuswap or Kootenays came against them.

The most generally accepted version of the origin of the Stoney Nakoda people is that a group of Sioux (Dakota) moved north into present-day Ontario and eastern Manitoba during the seventeenth century. They were called Assiniboine by the first Europeans who came into contact with them, from the Cree words *as’-see-nee*, meaning stone and *Poituc*, meaning Indian. Because these people used to boil water by dropping heated stones into a container (made from animal skins) of cold water, they were called Stoney.² Some historians claim that the Stoney people moved westward through land occupied by the Blackfoot into the Rocky Mountains to flee from the smallpox epidemics of the early and mid-nineteenth centuries. On the other hand, some Stoney people maintain that their oral history proves that their people have lived along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains from “time immemorial”.

Adapting to this new environment, the Stoney people became nomadic woodland hunters, living off elk, moose, sheep, goats and some bison. They preferred to live in peace, fighting only when they were first attacked.

The people lived in small groups of between twenty to fifty families that comprised a camp. Since the Stoney relied on hunting, they moved their camps according to the availability of animals in different seasons of the year. A smaller family group from a “camp” might separate for a certain period of time to hunt, and then later join the main camp again. At certain times, a number of camps would come together to hold ceremonies, prepare food for the winter months, raid enemy camps, socialize and carry out large bison hunts.

Stoney people had a system of governance that consisted of Chiefs recognized for their personal qualities and abilities even if none of his male ancestors had been chiefs. Chiefs demonstrated their courage in battle, and also in leading the people so that they would have enough food, and would remain united. The very survival of the camp depended on the abilities of the Chief. The Chief needed to be honest and to be able to communicate with the members of his camp. His teepee was erected in the middle of the camp circle.

The Chief would also call together wise, older men to meet in his teepee to determine the course of action to be taken to restore harmony in the camp if laws were violated. Trusted leaders, including the Keeper of the Drum, Keeper of the Fork, Keeper of the Lance, Keeper of the Knife, Keeper of the Whip and Feather



Stoney Nakoda Indian Chief, name and date unknown, photo accessed from tintucmoi.pro

² Verne Dusenberry, 1960. *The Material Culture of the Assiniboine Indians*, reprinted from *Ethnos*, 1960:1-2, Calgary, AB: Glenbow Historical Library & Archives.

Belt dancers would carry out the prescribed punishment. Medicine men also held a position of authority within the tribe because of their role in treating illnesses and foreseeing future events.

Camps also had men who were chosen to guard the camp and protect the people throughout the night. Called Agichidebi (camp soldiers), these men would ride around the perimeter of the camp all night singing special songs of bravery. Another group of men were called Sûk-wîkto, or warriors, who would go to war to defend the people. A camp also had a “crier” who was responsible for letting others know what was happening or what was being planned. Everyone in the camp had responsibilities and everyone worked together for the wellbeing of the camp.

Although the Stoney Nakoda were a patriarchal society, there was a balance of roles between men and women. Men were providers and women took care of domestic responsibilities. In that role, women tanned animal hides to make teepees, clothes and moccasins. They gathered berries, roots and vegetables and prepared food every day. They maintained the camp and served as teachers to the children.

The family was a very important part of traditional Stoney Nakoda life. Parents wanted their daughters to marry a man who was dependable as a hunter and provider. The parents of the girl would arrange the marriage and the man’s parents would have to give presents to the girl’s family to arrange the marriage. The Elders would continue to guide the couple through their lives so that they would stay together. Sometimes a man who had demonstrated his capacity to provide would have more than one wife.

Children were loved and cared for by all the adults in the camp. The immediate family had the primary responsibility for educating the child, but other members of the camp also contributed. Nakoda children were educated from a very young age to be contributing members of their tribes. They learned through observation and by practicing skills under the guidance of their parents, aunts, uncles and mentors.

As mentioned above, teenage boys were sent into the wilderness to undertake their vision quest. Teenage girls were paired with a woman who was recognized for certain skills so she could take on those roles as she became a woman. Children also learned about their history through stories told by the Elders, who are considered knowledge keepers and respected teachers. Stories were also used to teach valuable life lessons. Stories were shared at many times, and especially when the women and children were picking berries (saskatoons, strawberries, raspberries and blueberries). One type of story features the trickster Îkomnî or Thichâyuski. A sample of this type of story is included on the following page.



Stoney Nakoda mother and child, Photo of a photo. Taken at the Whyte Museum of the Rockies, in Banff, Alberta.

Îktomnî Makes Nakoda, the First Stoney Man

(A retelling of an Îktomnî story recorded by Thomas T. Williams on the basis on narrations by various Stoney Elders)

When Îktomnî arrived on earth, he found all the animal people arguing among themselves. Each animal wanted to become the Chief over all the rest. So, Bear disagreed with Fisher; Elk pulled the tail of Longnose, Wold argued with Beaver, and Snake coiled himself around Hawk. Îktomnî was old and wise and the Great Spirit, Wakâ Tâga, had given him many special powers.

To restore peace, he called all the people together at a place-of-clay. There he mixed soil with clay and water and shaped it into a man, which he placed under the Great Star to dry. Îktomnî then summoned the Four Winds to blow the first life into the clay-earth man. The South Wind came forward and breathed life into the clay-earth figure. When the man began to move, Îktomnî saw that he had become black under the heat of the Great Star and so he sent him the way of the South Wind.

Îktomnî then made another clay-earth man and placed him to dry at a further distance from the Great Star. Once he is ready, the East Wind blew life into his nostrils. When this man begins to move, Îktomnî saw that he was a pale yellow, and so he sent him in the direction of the East Wind.



Iktomi depicted sitting by the fire, downloaded from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iktomi>

The third man that Îktomnî made was dried even further from the Great Star and when the North Wind awakened him, Îktomnî saw that he was even paler than the man who went to the East. And so, this man followed the North Wind in that direction.

The fourth man that Îktomnî made received the breath from the West Wind. This man was a tan colour and Îktomnî named him “Nakoda, First Stoney Man.” “Because the Great Star dried you out evenly on this flat boulder, you will be called ‘Stoney’”, Îktomnî said.

Then Îktomnî instructed Nakoda through song: “Stone is your birth. You are Stoney. Have no dispute among yourselves. For if you argue, then you will fight. And there is nothing uglier on all the earth than he who fights his own. If you fight, then your people will separate and break the hoop. If you divide your own, then you are the greatest enemy and opponent to yourself. If you ever break the hoop, you will want only the blood of your brothers and you will turn into stone animals. For Wakâ Tâga, Great Mystery, chooses you as a special nation. The Stoney people will one day bring together all their dark, yellow and white brothers.”

Nakoda, Stoney man of the West, stayed where he was and learned many secrets. He watched the animal people. He learned to run like Deer, track like wolf, hunt like Eagle, circle like Ferret, raid like Wolverine, trap like Cougar, disappear like Weasel and endure like Bear. The land spoke to Nakoda, releasing its medicine. The rivers showed him secrets and dangers. The animal people ended their dispute over chieftainship when they saw the wisdom of Nakoda. Many great suns passed. Nakoda did not get old.

Mother Earth provided all that sustained the Stoney Nakoda people. The Stoney Nakoda mostly lived in teepees covered with skins or bark³ that were set up in a meadow where they could defend themselves from attacks by their enemies. Not only were the skins of large animals such as moose, elk, deer and bison used for building these shelters, they were also used for clothing

³ Teepee is the English spelling for the Dakota word “tipi”, which means “a place where you live”. The Nakota word for teepee is “otibi”.

and other articles such as drums and rattles and baby moss bags. And, of course, animals were a primary food source, either fresh or dried. For example, the Nakoda prepared pemmican from dried meat, fat and berries such as choke-cherries for their own use and to be traded with other tribes. Soups were made with meat, wild onions, roots and herbs such as sage. Not only were plants used for food, they were also used as medicines.

The natural world also provided objects that were used to decorate clothing. For example, small bones were carved and polished to be used in the chest plates used by warriors. Porcupine quills were washed and dried, and then coloured by using dyes made from berries, bark, and other plants. These quills were used to decorate clothing and ceremonial objects. Porcupine hair was cleaned and dried and then used to make roaches, a part of the headgear worn by warriors.

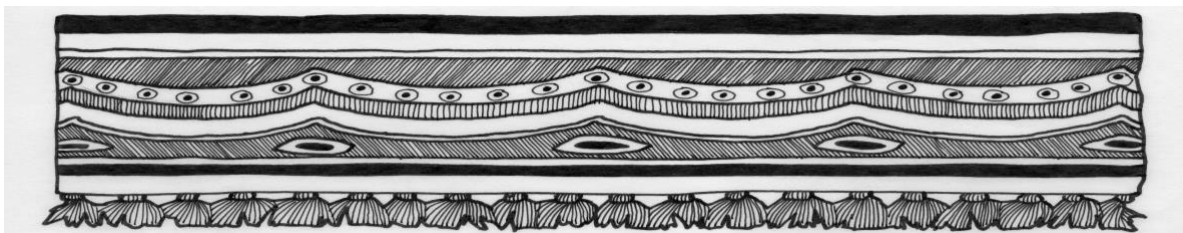
As explained above, the Nakoda were nomadic in order to hunt the game they needed for their daily life. They moved their belongings from camp to camp on a travois pulled by dogs before the horse was introduced to the Nakoda people.



Blue Bird, Nakoda Girl, image downloaded from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nakoda_\(Stoney\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nakoda_(Stoney))

Stoney people believed in a Great Spirit (Wakâ Tâga) Who is the Creator of all things and to whom they prayed. They also believed that everything in nature is alive and has a spirit and that all aspects of the spiritual and material worlds are inter-connected. The spirits that inhabited the natural world were commonly called Manitous and their aid was invoked for protection and success in ventures undertaken by individuals or groups. Vision quests, which included fasting while staying in a chosen, secluded place in the wilderness was a practice used to gain contact with a person's guardian spirit(s), which would help the individual overcome difficulties and achieve success in life. This practice was especially used as a rite of passage for young Nakoda men. Because all of nature is alive, it is important to show respect to all life. One way that respect is shown is to offer tobacco in thanks whenever an animal or plant is harvested. The medicine pipe (calumet), the right to which was granted only through personal sacrifice and prolonged apprenticeship in the traditional beliefs and teachings, was smoked at various gatherings. The Sun Dance was practiced by the Stoney Nakoda people, as well as a number of other Plains Indian tribes with slight variations. A special lodge was built under the supervision of a man who had gained the right to do so, and the gathering included prayers, especially for healing. The Stoney Nakoda people used drums made from skins as well as rattles made from deer hooves in the songs that accompanied these ceremonies.

The story on the following pages tells about the origin of the use of the Eagle Feather in traditional Stoney Nakoda cultural practices.



A Story about the Origin of the Eagle Feather in the Cultural Practices of the Stoney Nakoda People

(Narrated by Virgle Stevens at his home on December 28, 2018)

Today we still practice our religious ceremonies. Sometimes we have pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, sun dances, and ghost dances. Today it is an honour to present what I have learned.

This is an old story, back before the time of Columbus, that teaches us about the power of the Eagle Feather in our culture. To understand this story, it is important to know that we don't kill eagles just to get their feathers.

The feather is one of the most important items in our traditional cultural practices. One time back then, these two elderly persons had a dream about what to do with the Eagle feather. They also had a dream about a young man who was supposed to be given the task of getting an Eagle feather.

So, they approached the young man and discussed it with him. We didn't have any guns at that time, so they dug a hole in the ground and put rabbit meat for bait close to the top of the hole. The young man climbed into the hole and they covered the hole with the young man inside. He was told what to do. At that time, they knew that an eagle would be flying around; this was guidance they received through their visions. The Eagle was flying around, but it didn't come down right away. So, the young man waited. It's good to be patient. The eagle kept coming down in circles. When it did land to get the meat, the young man put out his hand to grab a piece of that one feather that they mentioned to him. Then the Eagle took off.

The elder persons who had asked the young man to get this feather were happy with what he had done, but afterwards the young man got disrespectful about what he had been taught. Sometimes that happens to all of us, and that gives us a teaching too. So, the young man started doing that—trapping and killing eagles. Three times he did that.

Then he got a surprise. On the fourth time when he went to grab the Eagle, it grabbed him on the wrist and started flying away. The eagle went so high that the young man fainted because of a lack of air. When he woke up, he saw that he was resting on the top of a very thin mountain ridge high above the world that was so thin that he was in danger of falling. He was very afraid and sat there crying. He was also very thirsty.

All of a sudden, the Eagle came back, picked him up and took him down to a cave that opened into a tunnel. "The reason I brought you here", the Eagle said, "is because you were acting in disrespectful ways. This is a lesson for you. Go back and tell your people what happened to you. This tunnel will take you back to your people, but there are going to be four obstacles in your way. If you get past the obstacles you will be able to rejoin your people, but if you don't you will perish in the tunnel." The Eagle then gave the young man instructions about overcoming the obstacles as well as an eagle feather.

The young man got past the first obstacle, and then the second one because he followed the instructions of the Eagle. He even got past the third obstacle and thought he could see the exit that would bring him to the way home. He thought he was going to make it, but then he saw two Red Eyes in front of him and he knew he was facing a dangerous demon.

Instead of backing down, the young man thought about what he was told to do. He knew that if he turned around he would be dead. He remembered what he had been told—that you must always face dangers





head on, even when you are scared. The Red Eyes charged at him, so he held out the eagle feather in front of him pointing straight at the Red Eyes.

Then when he looked up, he was on the other side. That was the power of the eagle feather, which is to give guidance and protection.

Now that he was on the other side, the Red Eyes called out to him and said, "My Child, who taught you this? No one ever gets past me, but you did. Who told you what to do?"

The young man answered and said, "An Eagle named Red Thunder gave me this feather and told me what to do. Now I am going back to my clan."

At that time, there were not too many people, so the young man had to travel south a long way to find his clan. No one knows exactly how long it took him, but when he saw a camp in the distance, he stopped for the night to watch before he went any further. He knew he shouldn't just walk right into a camp without first observing and being sure. Sometimes through our prayers and visions, we get guidance and are warned to face whatever is coming.

But the people knew that he was coming. They had guards stationed around the camp and they had seen him coming. In the early morning he walked toward the camp, and as he got closer he saw someone walking toward him. When they met, they greeted each other.

The young man walked back to the camp with his guide and the people greeted him. When he told the people what happened, that he had sat on that mountain for four days, they told him, "No, you have been gone for four years." Four years! The young man was very surprised.

He then told them the important lesson he learned, which was that the people must never abuse traditional practices. The Eagles are our eyes up ahead. That's how they guide us.

That young man who went through that ordeal, he was given a song too—the Red Thunder Song. To this day when me and my family are in ceremony, we use that Song. In that song we say that life is hard, and I have pulled through.

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Stoney Place Names

This is a small sampling of the over 100 place names collected by the Chiniki Research Team with the guidance of Stoney Elders, Rod Mark and Lazarus Wesley.

Îjathibe Wapta (the river where the bows were made); now known as the Bow River: There is a place along this river where Stoney braves selected saskatoon saplings to make bows.

Mini Thni (cold water); now known as Morley: This place is called cold water because it has always been known that Mother Nature has a fridge up in the mountains that keeps the water cold.

Horgatabi Mne (where fish were netted and trapped); now known as Spray Lakes: The Stoney built dikes to create pools; then they scooped up the fish by hand or in nets.

Ozadé îmne (the lakes at the end of the y-shaped fork); now known as Kananaskis Lakes: This refers to the fork between the Bow and Kananaskis Rivers.

Ozadé îmne Wapta (the river that flows from Ozade Lake); now known as the Kananaskis River.

Mnotha Wapta (crackling river); now known as the Elbow River: named this because of the sound the water makes going over the rapids.

Îmôtâga Mostagabi Waptun (where cougar was killed); now known as the Little Elbow River.

Kiska Wapta (big horn sheep river); now known as the Sheep River: This is the natural habitat of the Rocky Mountain Big Horn Sheep.

Châhâthka Wapta (tall trees river); now known as the Highwood River: named after the tall trees along the river's banks.



Îyâ Mnathka (Mount Yamnuska) across the Bow River at Whitefish in Bow Valley Provincial Park, Alberta, Canada photo credit: www.hikingwithbarry.com.