Chapter 1
CREATION
“We have been here since time began.”
—The late Anishinaabe Elder Mark Thompson

In the First Nations world-view, all creation stories are confirmed by the Elders’ language and teachings. Each Nation has creation stories, some are similar and some are quite different. All of them are about how we came into being and how we came to be where we are. They tell of our relationships to the earth, each other and to other beings.

Living Mother Earth

Many of our creation stories relay our special relationship with Mother Earth.


The oceans, the lakes, the rivers, it’s similar to a blood vein in your body. It’s like that. It’s like the water on Earth is its blood. And the plants like hair. Also, the ground is the same as your flesh.

—Anishinaabe Elder Francis Nepinak, Giiwedinanang

I remember about land, my grandmother right from the early times, said to me that I would always have to honour the land, she said because as Dakota people or Ikchewi-chashta, that means the common man or the common person meaning you are the same, nobody is above, that you are always the same. She said because we come from this land she says, you have different rules to live by is what she told me. The different rules were also related to our ceremonies and to our medicines.

—Dakota Elder Wendy Whitecloud

We have our own creation stories; we have our stories about flooding. Ana Wisahkanáhk he was always in a dilemma, tápiskók kániskipik ká-ácimt, t’-ácimicik ithithiwaik tká kwayaak t’-oci-isi-ayáčik.

We have our own creation stories, we have our own stories about flooding. That Wisahkanáhk was always in a dilemma, just like the story of the flood … people were out of balance then.

—Nehetho Elder D’Arcy Linklater
Sacred Gift of Communication

Our teachings show us that each and every people on the Earth were provided with a way to communicate with the Creator.

In the beginning, not right away but when the people started to [re-]multiply on this Earth, they were trying to be in control of the animals, plants; everything has got a spirit and that includes us too. He wanted to play boss, him. And the [animals] were not pleased with this. They had told the Eagle, this is what they are doing to us. Take this to the Creator and to see what will be done. So the eagle went to tell this to the Creator, and he came back. The Creator will come and settle this situation.

And the Creator took away that understanding; that voice of understanding to the animals. The people were prohibited from this gift. The Anishinaabe was bestowed to discover this. He was denied/forbidden of this gift and he no longer could communicate with the dog, horse, all things, the plant under-stands us but we can’t hear them. It’s only once in a while that one gets to understand, even with me it’s rare. And if I am looking for something, I look hard and then I sit down.

Sometimes I will sit there all day and suddenly what I am looking for will speak, sometimes within minutes. You will not be able to understand in twenty four hours, a day. This is what was taken away from us. And that’s a gift and I don’t really talk much about it. I’m glad I have it.

Aazha miinawaa ongwe gaagii inindwaa ji ganaweniamaawaad, owii waabamaawaan. Haaw maajaan miinawaa, nashke gosha endodaatriwaad.


—ANISHINAABE ELDER ROD MCKAY

That is what was taken away by the powers that be but was told to look after the people. The people started to multiply; they started accumulating. And then, they had their turn they started to fight amongst themselves; they mistreated each other.

And the ones that were told to look after them saw what was happening. Go again and see what they are doing to each other.

Then the eagle took flight again. Okay, the Creator will come and straighten them out. Then the Creator came and saw what the people were doing. Then he divided them; you will go there, Black people go that way. Whiteman goes this way. And us Anishinaabe people, this is where we were left. And here we are still using this land and the Anishinaabe is still using it.
Understanding Where We Come From

Our Creation stories tell about the places that we came from and how we came to be where we are, both geographically and culturally. They help us relate to each other, other beings, spirit and the Creator.

I will go back to the past. I heard from the Elders who talked about sacred stories and they talked about the ice. They talked about it, before the ice; this Earth was nice. Everything was here. This was where the Anishinaabe was placed, they said. In this Turtle Island. Then they said, suddenly the weather started to change; very different. Then the ice arrived. All summer, it was like the ice floated and it came from the North. Then it happened as though it happens like in the winter time that was what the weather was like. The ice arrived; the Anishinaabe retreated.

Some went to the West, some East and some to the South. Those ones that went to the South arrived on the mountain, high on the mountain. And those mountains as though the turtle was tied. The lakes were all together and the salt lake is in the big lake. In the West, they are across from each other to the East. And one more ocean; that is the mountain.

That is where the Anishinaabe moved to and that is where the ice went up to. Not further, as though it was blocked by the mountain. And the Anishinaabe stayed on top the mountain. Then the ice melted as the lake rose up. The Anishinaabe had to stay on the mountain. Or if he wanted to go South yet.

And they started to number there, many of them were there as the ice melted and didn’t become lakes. Then there were many Anishinaabeg. And that is where we came from where we are at now. Coming from the mountain. They called each other, ‘they came from the mountain.’ That is where the word came from, the Ojibwe, the Ojibweg. And that is where they got it from. The Anishinaabeg lived all over the place. It spread all over and lived differently. When the lakes dried up, they lived there, too. The Anishinaabeg lived all over the place. That is where that came from.


This is where the Anishinaabe was placed Earth was built/created. I wonder what you are to call ‘Manidoo’ (Spirit). The Creator was very mystical. It was said that the Creator made the Anishinaabe. He used the dirt. That is why the Anishinaabe is red, they said. And again another one was made someplace in the North. They called him the Whiteman that is where he was placed, across the Earth. That is what they said. There were five big islands; that are the Anishinaabe, the Whiteman, the Black people and the Asian People and the last one from the big island they said.

—The late Anishinaabe Elder Mark Thompson
The Dakota as sacred beings originate from the Little People. Where we come from as sacred beings, are the Little People. We call them Little People or we call them [Chanotina], living in the trees or the others living in the ground, that is where we come from, it was simple to understand that. I told that story to the world heritage group, in ’07 they had it in Montréal and ’08 they had it in Québec, that is were I told the story from the beginning of time about how we were. I told the people from all around the world that the Irish have the leprechaun, others have elves and dwarves. That is were you guys come from and those people accepted that story because it made sense to them, they still have those legends too in their books.

We even have songs about the Little People. If we need spiritual guidance or spiritual help we call on them, and they help us. Just like the way we’d ask Wanka Tanka to help us. But they are spiritual beings so that is why we ask them for help.

We were sacred beings at one time, during [the time of] creation, because the Creator was a holy thing and anything he created was sacred. We were sacred beings, spiritual beings; we were not yet human beings. At one time, the Creator asked us if we wanted to be human beings and they agreed, not all of them became human beings, but most of them became human beings. The Creator made [the ones who made the choice] the human beings and the rest remained the way they were.

In Wanka Tanka’s creation he always created the male and then creates a female, this ensures growth. If he only created a male that male would just die off. He created female. He created division between man and woman. From them come the children; the sacred ones.

When he made us, man and woman, he also gave us a language.
Along with the language, he said, “this is your whole life. This being will give you your house, your clothing, your moccasins, everything you need, the bedding, shields, bags, water containers, tools, everything. Also, you pray to this being that is going to be a part of your life.” It is the bison that he was talking about. “Wherever he roams,” he said. “That is your territory and he will never stray away from his territory because he is also sacred.” Wanka Tanka gave us the bison in a sacred manner, to survive with.

He also gave them a sacred song which was a reminder and told to use it when they needed something from the land, life. ‘All the things that grow on the land, Wanka Tanka created, and those things you’ll depend on.’ That is what is said in that song...some of these songs are from the BCE [before common era] time and these songs will live forever, I know that. That is the way it is, if Wanka Tanka created it then it will never go away. We [human beings] may go away but those will not.

He gave them the buffalo, the trees that have fruits, our fruits in our territory. When the people followed the guidelines on how to eat, followed our diet, they lived to be thousands of years old. Then thousands and thousands of years went by and eventually that changed. The thousand year lifespan was shortened to a lifespan of one hundred years. Today, [we don’t] reach the one hundred year lifespan and it is because of the diet. We don’t respect the Creator’s guidelines for our diet, but there are other reasons too.

—Dakota Elder Frank Brown, Wakanhdi Ohitika

Who We Are

We have different forms of organizing ourselves socially.

I’m just going to speak English—I was brought into the Waabinowin [Dawn Society], the Zhaawanogaawin [Southern Society], the Ogimaawiwin [Leader Society], and finally the Midewiwin [Good Heart Society] because in those days in order to go into the Midewiwin, you had to be a member of Ogimaawiwin, to be a member of Ogimaawiwin, you had to be a member of the Zhaawanogaawin and then you had to be first of all initiated into the Waabinowin. But there were other ways that preceded these four Societies of the Anishinaabeg. Each time in our history, every time our people met up with the people of the Waabanoo, the Wabanoo and they were very close to the people of the Zhaawanoo, the Zhaawanoo was a way of thinking and Waabano was a way of thinking and same with the Ogima was a way of thinking of the people, as is the Midewiwin. So in order for us to really understand—I think we need to understand, the words that are used in the language of the Midewiwin, the language of the Ogimaawiwin, the language of the Zhaawanogaaw, the language of the Waabinowin. We need to understand those. So, immediately there are at least four levels.

—The late Anishinaabe Elder Tobasonakwut Kinew
We Remember Our Stories

Our stories remind us of who we are and help others know more about us as people. As the late Anishinaabe Elder Tobasonakwut Kinew explains, the way we tell stories and what is required to hear them is part of our learning process.

Now [the time] when we talk about Nanaboozhoo.

*Ogowe niibinisag gii-maajaawaad, miinawaa ziigwang da-bagamibisowag, ogowe niibinisag.*

These summer flyers have left and they will return in Spring, they will fly, these summer flyers.

Summer flyers, in other words, we understood the migratory patterns of the birds, of the summer flyers, we understand that. So that when they left, it changed a very important mark in our seasons, the birds have left; we now go to a different mode. This means that this is the beginning of the storytelling season and when the crows return in the Spring that will be the end of the storytelling season.

In that period, that is the great instruction of our period so grandmother begins to talk, the first night she will tell you about Nanaboozhoo. Second night she will tell you another story and another story and another story on to the 27th night or 34th night and then she won’t talk anymore. Then you try and convince her she should talk. Then the old man says, she is not going to talk. Well I don’t know how to react to that, maybe he knew something why she wouldn’t talk. That’s a different thing. Then anyway, she doesn’t talk. He says, did you give her any tobacco, [the children reply]

*Giin osha gidayaawaa asemaa, gaawiin awiya niinawind.*

You’re the one that has tobacco, we don’t have any.

We do not have the tobacco, that is not our tobacco.
Well do you know the tobacco song is what he asked us. Well we don’t know tobacco song because [you] never showed us. I’ll show you. So it’s not a storytelling session. It’s now the night where we learned the ‘tobacco song’ and the tobacco spirit and the keeper of the tobacco.

All of the stories are connected. So it’s a diversion from the story of Nanaboozhoo. The point is she resumes her stories and then she goes back and says, so do you remember what happened the first night, do you remember what happened the second night and the seventh night and the thirteenth night and the thirty-second night and the eighth night, no. Well you better think it over. It’s easy to recall the first night, second night and we try to help each other on how everything is connected. Then after discussion, then you begin to discover, my God, this is connected with this in this way, in this way and this way and that way and this way. Yeah. Then you begin to find out the pattern.

—The late Anishinaabe Elder Tobasonakwut Kinew