

Madoodiswan as Sacred Maternal Pedagogy

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Maajitaadaa (An Introduction)

To begin, I want to talk about Anishinaabeg traditional ecological knowledge and its relationship to the women's sweatlodge ceremony. I also want to talk about a maternal ecological pedagogy that arises from the practice of the Anishinaabeg women's madoodiswan (sweatlodge ceremony). My hope is that we begin to see the connections between spiritual ecological knowledge, ceremony and pedagogical practice. The role of all three is the foundation of my identity as an Anishinaabe-kwe and mother. I share in this paper an Anishinaabeg story and recollections pertaining to a sweatlodge vision (*bawaajigan*) I had many years ago relating to womanhood and motherhood. The story of the vision acts as the foundation for exploring the dynamics and complexities of Anishinaabe-kwewag understandings of ecology in connection to land, ceremony, womanhood, motherhood, teaching, learning, and knowledge creation. This paper advocates for the reclamation and resurgence of Anishinaabeg women's traditional ecological knowledge in the face of hundreds of years of cultural genocide and colonization. Further, it opens a dialogue to share the nature of Indigenous women's traditional ecological knowledge, but also to nurture a generation of women that have the abilities, knowledge, and values of their ancestral grandmothers to reclaim women's ecological ways of living and being on the land.

Anishinaabekwe's Journey to the 'Other Side of the Stars'¹

Anishinaabekwe prepares for the *madoodiswan*.²

¹ The 'Other Side of the Stars' is a phrase or line that comes from a poem by Anishinaabeg scholar and Elder Basil Johnston-*ba*. *Ba* or *ban* meaning someone who has passed away. See, Basil Johnston. 1987. *Ojibway Ceremonies*, 1982. Toronto: McClelland Stewart, p. 51.

² *Madoodiswan* means sweat lodge.

It is *dagwaagin*.³

The evening air is cool, and the forest is dark.

*Aki*⁴ is cold on and damp on bare feet.

Anishinaabekwe stands waiting to enter the *madoodiswan*.

She listens to the stories of the first sweatlodge.

Then they usher her inside the doorway.

“*Boozhoo Gizhew-Manidoo!*” *Anishinaabekwe* greets the Creator

“*Boozhoo Aki!*” *Anishinaabekwe* greets the land.

“*Boozhoo anikoobijiganag!*” *Anishinaabekwe* greets the ancestors.

She enters the lodge.

It is dark.

Moving left around the perimeter of the inside she finds her spot and sits.

Crossed legs touching the knees of the two women on either side.

Forming a sacred circle of women.

A chain of relations.

The *nookomisag* and *mishoomisag* enter the lodge.

They are placed in a deep pit in the middle.

“*Boozhoo nookomisag*⁵!” *Anishinaabekwe* greets the grandmother stones.

“*Boozhoo mishoomisag*⁶!” *Anishinaabekwe* greets the grandfather stones.

We offer them the *mashkikiwan*⁷.

By the end of the ceremony, there will be seven *asiinig*⁸ brought into the lodge.

One for each of the directions, *waabanong*,⁹ *zhaawanong*,¹⁰ *ningaabii'anong*,¹¹ and *giiwedinong*,¹² one for the sky, one for the earth and one for the Creator.

³ *Dagwaagin* means autumn, fall.

⁴ *Aki* translates to the Earth.

⁵ *Nookomisag* means grandmothers.

⁶ *Mishoomisag* means grandfathers.

⁷ *Mashkikiwan* means plant medicines in this context.

⁸ *Asiinig* means stones.

⁹ *Waabanong* refers to the eastern direction.

¹⁰ *Zhaawanong* refers to the southern direction.

¹¹ *Ningaabii'anong* refers to the western direction.

¹² *Giiwedinong* refers to the northern direction.

The first round begins.
We honor and pray for the Grandfathers, Grandmothers and the Creator.
Waves of heat smash into her like waves on a shoreline; one after the other.
The sound of copper rattles fill the lodge. Clang! Clang! Clang!
The sound of voices raised in song.
The sound of the Little-Boy Water Drum sends a beat like a heart deep through time and space.
It calls out to the ancestors to come and join the circle.
“Join us! Join us!”

She feels them come into the lodge.
Wisps of light start to dance in.
They sit in between the women.
“Boozhoo, nindaanikoobijiganag¹³!” Anishinaabekwe calls out in greeting.
The lodge walls seem to expand outwards to accommodate the many visitors.

A star falls through the lodge ceiling towards her from above.
Then another.
And another.
Stars begin to pour in like water through a leaky hole in a roof.
Soon the whole lodge is filled with stars.
Anishinaabekwe can't see anything except stars now.

The lodge bends and morphs.
Anishinaabekwe reaches for the ground, trying to find an anchor.
The land begins to let go, but she hangs on to her like a child grasping for their mother's hand.
“Let go!” the ancestors whisper to her.
She lets go.
She does not feel the ground below her anymore.
Carried on a wave of stars falling from above, she is transformed and transported over the stars.

She is floating in a black lake of stars.

¹³ *Nindaanikoobijiganag* means my ancestors, but it can also mean my future descendants or those spirits yet to arrive on earth that still exist in the realm of the Spirits.

Anangoog.¹⁴

Stars above her.

Stars below her.

Stars behind her.

Stars in front of her.

Stars all around her.

She floats in peace and quiet.

She feels cool, a relief from the hot rocks.

She is an abinoojiinyens¹⁵ floating in mide-waaboo¹⁶.

She hears a drum beat, a heartbeat strong and steady.

Then she hears the women again.

Voices under water.

What are they saying? I don't understand.

Songs.

Women's songs calling me back.

They get louder.

The stars begin to fade.

On a rush of stars, Anishinaabekwe is transported back into the world and transformed back into a woman.

She is sent back from over the stars.

She is placed gently back in the arms of Aki.

Songs welcome her back.

She is soaked.

She doesn't remember how she got so wet.

She shivers.

All four rounds are done.

"Where did the time go?" She asks herself.

She missed the entire ceremony.

Or did she?

The eastern door is opened.

She is brought out.

She is wrapped in a blanket.

¹⁴ Anangoog means stars.

¹⁵ Abinoojiinyens is a baby or infant.

¹⁶ Mide-waaboo is sacred water, which is how Anishinaabeg refer to amniotic fluid in the womb.

She is given water to drink.

She is re-born.

She is Kwe.

Nanda-Gikendan (Seek Knowledge)

Boozhoo! Mazinegiizhigoo-kwe ndizhinikaaz. Greetings, my name is Painted Sky Woman.¹⁷ I am *Anishinaabe-kwe* (woman), a member of Dokis First Nation, on *Okikendawdt* (Island of the Kettle Pots/Cauldrons/Swirling Waters), in the province of Ontario, Canada. My people live along *Waabnoong Bemjwang*, which means the ‘place where the waters flow from the east’ or the French River, as it came to be called by European fur traders and settlers. I am *waabizheshi ndoodem* (Marten clan). My *Anishinaabeg*¹⁸ heritage is *Ojibweg*, *Nipissing* and *Omamiwininiwag*, along with my father’s French Canadian heritage. My ecological connections and knowledge are rooted in the territory of my *Anishinaabeg* mother, grandmother and those ancestral females who I am connected to through the *madjimadzuin* (maternal lifeline), or “chain of ancestors.”¹⁹

In the early twentieth century, the *Anishinaabeg* peoples of *Wasauksing* First Nation (Parry Island, Ontario) shared with anthropologist Diamond Jenness the teachings of *madjimadzuin* that connects one generation to the next. Jenness wrote that the *Anishinaabeg* of *Wasauksing* taught that “it is the chain of ancestors connecting those who have gone before with those who follow, the line of ancestors and descendants together with all the inheritance factors they carry with them.”²⁰ The *madjimadzuin* connections are encoded in maternal ecological teachings, stories and ceremonies that are used to educate our *Kwewag*²¹ (women) in their intellectual traditions: philosophies, cosmologies, epistemologies, axiologies, and pedagogies. As an *Anishinaabe-kwe*, I see, relate to, move through, and react to the world through this *madjimadzuin* centered

¹⁷ My name also means “Woman who paints like the sky.” I received this name from *Anishinaabeg* Elder Edna Manitowabi.

¹⁸ *Anishinaabeg* refers to a specific culturally-related group of Indigenous peoples living in both Canada and the United States of America. *Anishinaabeg* territory is central located in Ontario Canada, but also encompasses the southern area of the Great Lakes region, reaches as far west as the province of Saskatchewan, east into the province of Quebec, and intersects with the *Nêhiyawak* (Cree) of northern Ontario. The *Anishinaabeg* include the nations of the *Ojibweg*, *Odaawaag*, *Boodawaadamii*, *Mississauga*, *Saulteaux*, *Oji-Cree*, *Nipissing*, and *Omamiwininiwag*. Alliances have existed among the particular groups for thousands of years.

¹⁹ Jenness, D. 1935. *The Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island, Their Social and Religious Life*. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, p. 90.

²⁰ Jenness, p. 90.

²¹ In *Anishinaabeg* culture *Kwe* includes all individuals who identify as women, *Niizh-Manidoowag* (Two-Spirit), on the female gender spectrum, LGBTQIQ2SA+ or queer/trans.

paradigm. An *Anishinaabeg* maternal pedagogy is rooted in traditional maternal narratives concerning the wisdom of the ancestral mothers and grandmothers. Through the *madjimadzuin* we reach back through time and space, pulling their collective knowledge, traditions, and ways of being into our modern lives.

The story I shared above is a personal account of a vision that embodies my own ecologically centered relationship with the ecosystem of my *Anishinaabeg* ancestors. The story is mine to tell, but the knowledge contained in it does not belong solely to me, but to all *Anishinaabe-kwewag* (women). The *bawaajigan* is a gift from the spirits, land and stars to our people, so that we can build and restore some of the lost women's knowledge resulting from colonization. As *Anishinaabe-kwewag* we owe our gratitude to the teachings of the spirits, land and stars, along with returning this knowledge to our women. As long as we carry this knowledge, we will remember we belong to the land and we come from the stars. When *Anishinaabeg* talk about our traditional ecological knowledge we talk about where we come from. Elder Johnston shares in his book, *The Gift of the Stars: Anangoog Meegiwaewinan*, that the *Anishinaabeg* came from the stars and that when children are born they are gifts from the stars.²² In another one of his books, *Honour Earth Mother: Mino-audjaudauh Mizzu-Kummik-Quae*, Elder Johnston tell us that the earth then is our mother because she nourishes us and cares for us.²³

Acoma Pueblo scholar Simon J. Ortiz's poem "Land and Stars, The Only Knowledge" inspires me when he writes:

North, West, South, and East.
Above and Below and All around.
Within knowledge of the land.
We are existent.
Within knowledge of the stars,
We are existent...

We are Existent within knowledge of land.
We are Existent within knowledge of stars.
All Around and Below and Above.
East, South, West, and North.
This is our prayer. This is our knowledge.

²² Johnston, B. 2010. *The Gift of the Stars: Anangoog Meegiwaewinan*. Cape Croker First Nation: Kegedonce Press, pp.19-22.

²³ Johnston, B. 2003. *Honour Earth Mother: Mino-audjaudauh Mizzu-Kummik-Quae*. Cape Croker First Nation: Kegedonce Press, pp. xv-xvi.

This is our source. This is our existence.

Always the land is with us.

Always the stars are with us.

With our hands, we know the sacred earth.

With our spirits, we know the sacred sky.

We are with the land and stars.

We are with the stars and land.

With offering, all around outside.

With offering, all around inside.

This is the knowledge we have.

This is the existence we have.

In thankfulness, we give and we know.

In thankfulness, we receive and we know.²⁴

The poem is similar to many Anishinaabeg prayers of thankfulness and gratitude towards all that Creation²⁵ provides for our continued survival. Sharing my vision, my story, 'The Other Side of the Stars,' is an unusual action in an academic paper, but it is based in a larger movement in Canada for the revitalization and cultural resurgence of Indigenous ways of knowing. Further, *Anishinaabeg* do not usually share their visions and it is not encouraged to do so with outsiders, but there is a reason I do so here. *Anishinaabeg* do not share their visions because it strips our spirits naked and our visions carry with them spiritual power that can be dangerous to trap on a page. However, as an educator it has also become a natural tool through which I can teach both Indigenous students who have not had the opportunity to experience their own culture or long to identify with an educator that understands their lived experiences, and also, those non-Indigenous students who show a desire to learn how to understand the complexities of indigeneity, converse with us, and form ally-relationships with Indigenous peoples or communities. Experience is fundamental to Indigenous learning, but reading or listening to someone's thoughts put into words can also connect deeply with the human heart, spirit and mind.

Sharing my *bawaajigan* as a story is part of a larger movement to revitalize and rebuild Indigenous cultural sovereignty. Colonization policies and laws, such as the Indian

²⁴ Cajete, G. *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. Sante Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000, p. 311.

²⁵ When I refer to Creation, it means all life and those things throughout the earth and cosmos or universe.

Act (1876), were designed by the Canadian government to secure the extinguishment of Indigenous rights to land, resources, language, and culture. The Indian Act supported a cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada using laws that banned Indigenous spiritual ceremonies and other cultural practices, along with the Indian residential school system. The residential school system was designed to acculturate and assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream white hetero-patriarchal and hetero-normative Canadian culture. These re-education schools ran from the early 1800s right through until 1996. The government of Canada removed children directly from their families and communities on the threat of jail for the parents if they did not acquiesce. The children were then placed to mostly year-round residential education institutions where they were subjected to years of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, along with medical experimentation. Many children died due to the high rates of disease, such as tuberculosis and influenza. Those that managed to survive the schools were left stripped of their languages, cultural traditions and identity as Indigenous people.

Sharing my vision is important to *Anishinaabeg* people's journey towards cultural resurgence because it renews the ancestral maternal wisdom that was taken away from the women of my family and community who were indoctrinated into the Catholic faith by missionaries. They learned to fear practicing and sharing their traditional maternal wisdom, rituals, teachings, songs, prayers, language, and parenting strategies. I offer my story of this vision as a maternal pedagogy for *Anishinaabeg* maternal wisdom, intellectual thought, and ideology. Oneida scholar Pam Colorado notes that stories are powerful tools, that when shared:

have the ability to integrate and synthesize all the living relationships or events at any given moment in life. When we rely on a story to guide us we are not only integrated with the natural environment around us and our living relations, but also with the timeless past and culture of our ancestors."²⁶

Anishinaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson believes that Indigenous story can act as a "theoretical anchor whose meaning transforms over time and space within individual and collective Nishnaabeg consciousness."²⁷ The theories that live inside *Anishinaabeg* stories carry with them the spirits of our *aanikoobijiganag* (ancestors). *Anishinaabeg* believe that our stories are animate with the memories and spirits (*jiibayag*) of all those who have come before. When we share or re-enact those stories through ceremony we

²⁶ Colorado, Pam. 1988. Bridging Native and Western Science. *Convergence*, 11 (2, 3), 55.

²⁷ Simpson, L. 2014. Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3 (3): 7.

are visiting with the spirits of our ancestors and initiating opportunities for learning, experiencing and creating new knowledge. My own personal approach to revitalizing cultural knowledge is embodied by both a 'need' (*nandawendam*) to fill in the blank spaces in my own cultural traditions, but also a natural desire to 'seek to learn' or 'seek to know' (*nanda-gikendan*). When we have questions about our culture, *Anishinaabeg* turn to our stories to find knowledge and instruction.

Anishinaabeg spiritual knowledge is encoded in story so that we know how best to live on our traditional territories. Indigenous ecological knowledge contained in story represents explanations of the natural world and sources of life, encoded with instructional stories of a way of living that depicts a deep and abiding relationship with the ecology of their ancestral home. *Anishinaabeg* people are people of the land, and the nature of their relationship with the land is conveyed in their stories. Cajete acknowledges that:

story enables individual and community life and the life and process of the natural world to become primary vehicles for the transmission of Native culture. The culture's vitality is literally dependent on individuals, in community with the natural world. Indigenous cultures are really extensions of the story of the natural community of a place and evolve according to ecological dynamics and natural relationships.²⁸

The physical, spiritual and emotional orientation of *Anishinaabeg* ecological stories are cognitive maps (*inendamowin mazina'iganan*²⁹) that we carry and transfer from generation to generation and form the basis of our traditional knowledge systems. These cognitive maps are multi-dimensional and reflect the spiritual as well as the mythic geographies of a people that have journeyed to the worlds of spirit and back in order to live well on the land of our *indinawemaaganag* or our relatives in Creation.

The Sacred Maternal Ecology of the Anishinaabeg Sweat Lodge

²⁸ Cajete, p. 94.

²⁹ *Inendamowin mazina'iganan* means 'thinking map' or 'mind map.' To *Anishinaabeg* it is a map of the inner-space of the mind, our thoughts, and our feelings. *Inendamowin* is the way you think in a certain way or the way your mind works. It describes how person perceives something by thought and how it is felt in the mind. See, Inendam. *The Ojibwe People's Dictionary*. <https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/main-entry/inendam-vai2>. Accessed 29 Nov. 2020. *Mazina'iganan* refers to maps or something that guides.

The ecology of the sweatlodge is directly tied to the land and surrounding natural ecosystem. Everything we use for our ceremonies is taken directly from the landscape. We are thankful to the natural world and recognize that it is pivotal to the ceremonial process. *Anishinaabeg* build our lodges on our ancestral territories to continue the traditions and knowledge systems of our ancestors. To the *Anishinaabeg*, the land is recognized as our relative, who is animate and has several names, *Aki*,³⁰ *Shkaakaamikwe*³¹ and *Mazikaamikwe*.³² All her names relate to the earth and her role as the First-Mother-of-Creation; a place from which all life has arisen and is sustained. In our creation stories, *Gizhew-Manidoo* who is known as Creator-of-all-life in the cosmos, created *Aki* as the place where the sacred seeds of life would be placed, and they³³ gave to her the ability to generate new life and sustain that life from her body. As her descendants, women inherit her life-giving gifts and can exercise their choice to utilize their bodies to bring forth life, and ultimately, to become a mother.³⁴ The sweatlodge ceremony honours the path of womanhood and motherhood. The ecology of the sweatlodge mirrors the ecology of the woman's body, a mother's body. There is the womb (*abinoojiinh gaa-abid*³⁵) that can house and give life, along with the breasts (*doodooshimag*) that nourish and sustain life. *Anishinaabeg* women's sweatlodge ceremony, also known as the *madoodiswan* or the *madoodoowgamig*, symbolizes the woman as a sacred site of creation, creativity and life.

The term *madoodiswan* is translated as sweatlodge, but also has within it other meanings that connect it to maternal identity and cosmology. *Madoodiswan* has in it the words *doodooshim*, meaning breast and *doodom* which translates to breastfeeding mother. In *Anishinaabeg* cosmology and astronomy, the *madoodiswan* is a cluster of stars shaped like a dome, a womb or a breast. These constellations are also referred to in Latin as the Corona Borealis or 'northern crown.' These stars appear in the spring and are

³⁰ *Aki* means the earth, land, ground or territory.

³¹ *Shkaakaamikwe* translates to a 'Mother who creates life with her body, nourishes with her body and her breasts. According to *Anishinaabeg* singer and cultural knowledge holder Brenda MacIntyre it translates to "something is soft and damp." See, MacIntyre, B. *Shkaakaamikwe/Mazikaamikwe*, *Ezhi-ni'gikenimaanaan*. *Earth Day Conference*, 20 April 2007. Michigan State University, p. 3.

³² *Mazikaamikwe* means "she creates something new" or she creates life with her body. See, MacIntyre, B. *Shkaakaamikwe/Mazikaamikwe*, *Ezhi-ni'gikenimaanaan*, p. 3.

³³ The pronoun 'they' is used here to acknowledge that *Anishinaabeg* recognize that *Gizhew-Manidoo* has no gender and embodies both male and female creative energies.

³⁴ The concept of *Kwe* or woman is not solely defined by a woman's ability to conceive life or birth life. Womanhood is recognized as a spectrum and the *Anishinaabeg* acknowledge that there is multiple gender identities and that femininity and masculinity is a spectrum of knowing and being.

³⁵ *Abinoojiinh gaa-abid* refers to a baby's first home inside its mother. *Abinoojiinh* means home. *Gaa-* is past tense. *Abid* means she or he is home or dwells in a certain place.

connected to *Anishinaabeg ziigwan-gikinoo'amaagoowinan* or 'springtime teachings of the Anishinaabeg.' We teach and perform the sweatlodge ceremonies both in the spring and fall; honouring the east doorway that brings new life and the western doorway marks the end of life, which also corresponds to the end of summer and harvest time. The springtime sweatlodge is a very powerful ceremony because it mirrors the earth's springtime process of cleansing and purifying after a long winter. In the spring, the sap runs and the ground grows moist and full with water. The rivers, lakes, and streams swell with spring runoff. Springtime is when the earth bathes itself clean, but also nourishes the land like a mother's breast milk feeds her baby. Thus, the *madoodiswan* constellation hangs in the sky like an upside-down lodge or a mother's breast full with milk, to remind us of this time to cleanse, heal and start anew. It is a time to go out on the land and take part in the renewal of life.

Another name for the sweatlodge is *madoodoowgamig*, which also honours the mother's breast and breastfeeding as a source of life. The shape of the stars form a dome, mirroring the shape of the mother's breast, along with the womb of life. The term *madoodoowgamig* translates to 'a structure or lodge shaped like a mother's breast.' Doodoom honours that mother who breastfeeds her child and gamig translates to a structure, building or lodge. To Anishinaabeg, the mother's breast, the source of life-giving nutrients is primary to the survival of future generations, and thus, the nation. As a reminder of our origins in the womb or at the mother's breast, the shape of the sweatlodge allows for a re-connection with the first ecology of our origin: our mother's body, including her womb, her arms, and her breasts. We built the lodge directly on the maternal body of Mother-the-Earth. Both words, *madoodiswan* and *madoodoowgamig* tie the sweatlodge structure closely to the concepts of femininity, womanhood, motherhood, creation, and Aki.

Madoodiswan or *madoodoowgamig* are words that are deeply connected to the *nookomis gikinoo'amaagoowinan* or grandmother teachings shared with the *Oshki-Anishinaabeg-kwewag* (young women) of the community at the time of their puberty rites and again at motherhood. *Nookomis Gikinoo'amaagoowinan* introduces young women to their ecological connections, roles and responsibilities as relations to the land, the water and skyworld, using the sweatlodge as a method of teaching and learning about those ways of knowing. Annette S. Lee, William Wilson, Jeffrey Tibbetts, and Carl Gawboy write in their book *Ojibwe Giizhig Anang Masinaa'igan, Ojibwe Sky Star Map Constellation Guide: An Introduction to Ojibwe Star Knowledge*, that the Grandmother teachings on the sweatlodge describe it as:

a purification ceremony. It is about returning to the womb and remembering/renewing a person's spirit. The teaching is that human beings are made of body, mind, heart, and spirit. The spirit leads. The Sweat Lodge is seen overhead in late spring.³⁶

Through the sweatlodge ceremony, women reconnect with the sacred feminine and maternal energies of the natural world. We are all born from our mother's wombs and fed at our mother's breasts, which Mohawk Elder³⁷ Katsi Cook calls the "first environment"³⁸ in a child's life.

We teach our women, both young and adult, that when they go out on the land to experience the spring sweatlodge ceremony, we must place our lodges on the body of *Aki* in order to physically embody the womb or breast rising up off the earth. The feminine body of *Aki* and her fertility is made real through the sweatlodge space. Making the earth embody a woman allows participants to see her as the center of life in a complex ecology of the earth. Surrounding her are her children and our ecological relatives, including the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, those that fly, and those that swim. The poles used in the frame of the sweatlodge are embedded into the land, anchoring and fusing the womb-like structure to the body of the earth. When we enter the lodge, we are metaphorically (re)entering into the womb of our origins, the womb of the First-Mother-of-Creation.

The sweatlodge is spiritually transformed from a mere lodge into a space of creation, creativity, and a place to dream and vision knowledge into being. Through the ecology of the lodge and through the *bawaajiganan* (visions/dreams) evoked by the intense heated atmosphere of the sweatlodge ceremony, human beings go into the inner cognitive and spiritual spaces that open up to, and outwards towards, the metaphysical realms of spirit (*jiiibay-akiing*) to 'seek knowledge' or seek communion with the beings of the spirit realms on how best to live in balance and harmony with the universe. The land upon which the sweatlodge is constructed becomes a nexus of energies, like a doorway or bridge between our ecology on earth and the ecologies of other worlds where the

³⁶ Lee, A. S., William, W., Tibbetts, J., and Gawboy, C. 2014. *Ojibwe Giizhig Anang Masinaa'igan, Ojibwe Sky Star May Constellation Guide: An Introduction to Ojibwe Star Knowledge*. Cloquet: Avenue F Productions, p.13.

³⁷ The term Elder, with a capital E, is a term of honour given by Indigenous communities in Canada and the United States of America. They are those individuals who are recognized for their cultural work as older members of a community. Elders are the ones who work to uphold Indigenous traditional knowledge, including those who are considered language experts, ceremonial experts, storytellers, medicine women and men, oral history keepers, artists, traditional governance leaders, and other cultural knowledge holders. The title of Elder can be given and also rescinded by the community if the Elder does not meet the values and standards of ethical behaviour expected by those that awarded the title.

³⁸ Follet, J. 2005. *Voices of Feminism Oral History Project: Interview with KATSI COOK*. Northampton, MA: Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, p. 2.

spirits dwell. In this way, the earth becomes a vital link in the journey of learning. Cree Elder Willie Ermine proposes that, “those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology.”³⁹ Ermine contends that Indigenous epistemologies are developed through the use of Indigenous sources of learning, including our ceremonies.

The Anishinaabeg embrace the teachings of the land and its inherent creativity as the source for both our knowledge and as a site of education where we ‘seek life’ (*nanda-bimaadizi*) in balanced and harmonious ways. Gregory Cajete notes that the natural world is the “creative generative center of human life”⁴⁰ and the source of all knowledge of how to ‘seek life’ in a good way. He explains that:

Seeking life is the most basic of human motivations since it is connected to our natural instinct for survival and self-presentation. Ultimately, the universe is a creative expression at a magnitude beyond human recognition. Human life at all levels is wholly a creative activity and may be said to be an expression of the nature within us. We are, after all, a microcosm of the macrocosm. We are a part of a greater generative order of life that is ever evolving.⁴¹

In this way, the ecology of the sweatlodge embodies a site of human memory, relationships to the land, human creativity, discovery, research, or as a classroom (*gikinoo'amaagegamigong*) for learning.

The classroom space of the sweatlodge spans across multiple geographies in both this world and the realms of the spirits: sky realm (*giizhigoong*), land of the spirits (*jibay-akiing*), and the underworld (*anaamakamig*). *Anishinaabeg* believe these ecologies intersect, overlap and exist concurrently with other worlds and realities. *Anishinaabeg* Elder James Dumont explains that:

there is another level of reality which is concurrent with everyday reality and one of the ways we gain access to this “other reality” is through the dream. So it is, when we travel in dreams, we actually *do travel* [...] The levels of reality are

³⁹ Ermine, W. 1995. Aboriginal Epistemology. In M. Battiste and J. Barman. eds. *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*. Vancouver: UBC Press, p. 104.

⁴⁰ Cajete, p.15.

⁴¹ Cajete, p.15.

concurrent and have equal credibility They provide true experiences to which we must respond.⁴²

Anishinaabeg enter the realms of spirit through our *bawaajiganan* (visions/dreams). We believe in the concept of “gichi-apiitendaagwadoon bawaajiganan,” meaning that our dreams and visions are very important, greatly valued and honoured.⁴³ Ceremonies that allow us to travel across these sacred ecologies are critical teaching and learning spaces for *Anishinaabeg*. In this way, ceremonies act as the teaching methods that *Anishinaabeg* learned to utilize in order to access the field of learning and access the spaces where knowledge is generated.

Anishinaabeg sweatlodge ceremonies are conducted on the body of the earth in order to commune with her spirit. *Anishinaabeg* recognize that Mother-the-Earth is a living being and she has a *jiichag* (soul-spirit); upon which other living beings exist, move and thrive. In order to understand our place we will have to learn how to respect that the life that exists on the land is performing the great dance of life (*gchi-niimiwin bimaadizi*), which is in a state of flux, shifting, and moving creatively. Jicarilla Apache/Hispanic philosopher Viola F. Cordova explains that the “Native American world is a world in constant transition - the world, in other words, is not a thing made once and finished. It is always in the process of being. “Being,” for Native Americans is not a static state but one of motion and change.”⁴⁴ In order to understand our place in the ebb and flow of the *gchi-niimiwin bimaadizi* within our ecological environments, *Anishinaabeg* believe that we were given specific ceremonies by *Gizhew-Manidoo* and other *manidoowag* in order to receive life lessons, containing necessary knowledge and directions, needed to understand how to be *Anishinaabeg* in context with all of our relatives in creation. To understand what it means to be *Anishinaabeg*, we go into ceremony to integrate holistically (mind, body, spirit and emotions) with the ecologies we seek to reflect and respond to.

Cajete acknowledges that for Indigenous peoples, ceremonies are our “personal or communal “technologies” for accessing knowledge” and also a means through which we “remember key understandings of the natural world.”⁴⁵ The information obtained through Indigenous ceremonial practices is believed to supply knowledge directly “linked to the Spirit of Creation. *Anishinaabeg* scholar Darcy *Ishpemingenzaabid* Rheault states that for

⁴² Dumont, James. 1976. Journey to Daylight Land: Through Ojibwe Eyes. *Laurentian University Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2: 33.

⁴³ “Bawaajigan,” *The Ojibwe People’s Dictionary*. <https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/main-entry/bawaajigan-ni>. Accessed Oct. 1, 2020.

⁴⁴ Cordova, Viola F. “Ethics: From an Artist’s Point of View.” *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, edited by Anne Waters. Malden, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 253.

⁴⁵ Cajete, p. 65.

world.⁵⁴ Therefore, conducting ceremony “allows one to cross the seeming divide between physical and spiritual realms, whereby one can observe with a more complete perception.”⁵⁵ Ceremony becomes a tool to travel between both sides and communicate with relations in multi-realities in order to become better *Anishinaabeg*. The practice of repeated ceremonial communion with *manidoowag* and the *anikoobijiganag* is foundational to the survival of *Anishinaabeg* ecological ways of knowing and being.

Anishinaabeg Elder James *Onaubinisay* Dumont describes this pedagogical worldview as having “three-hundred-and-sixty-degree-vision.”⁵⁶ He notes that *Anishinaabeg* were given prophecies as warnings to us to follow a holistic path of living in accord with the spirits and through ceremony as a way of prioritizing a “total way of seeing the world.”⁵⁷ Elder Dumont teaches that, “This was a circular vision that sought to perceive and understand the whole nature of an object or event - its physical reality as well as its soul. Dumont states that “The Red Man chose this road and he has developed in this circular and holistic way ever since.”⁵⁸ The *Anishinaabeg* refer to this ‘Red Man’s’ road as *Anishinaabeg mino-miikana bimaadiziwin* (the good path of life as *Anishinaabeg*). Learning to live on this ‘good path’ required constant ‘checking in’ with the *manidoowag* through ceremony and prayer to gain guidance or directions on how best to live.

The necessity for ceremonies originates within the *Gchi-Inaakonigewinan* (Great Laws of Nature; Laws of Creation), which are the natural laws or original laws of *Gizhew-Manidoo* that bind everything together in a delicate state of *gwayahkooshkawin* (balance) and *ninoododadiwin* (harmony). *Anishinaabeg* scholar Basil Johnston explains that, “The Great Laws governed the place and movement of sun, moon, earth and stars; governed the powers of wind, water, fire, and rock; governed the rhythm and continuity of life, birth, growth, and decay. All things lived and worked by these laws.”⁵⁹ Cajete writes that “Native ceremony is associated with maintaining and restoring balance, renewal, cultivating relationship, and creative participation with nature.”⁶⁰ All things on the earth are bound in a delicate web of relationships or compacts; essentially treaties, which work to uphold the *inaakonigewinan* (laws) of Creation. Cajete explains that:

⁵⁴ Rheault, p. 83.

⁵⁵ Rheault, p. 101.

⁵⁶ Dumont, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Dumont, p. 31-32.

⁵⁸ Dumont, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Johnston, Basil, 2008. *Ojibway Heritage*. 1976. Toronto, McClelland Stewart, p. 13.

⁶⁰ Cajete, p. 70-71.

Traditionally, Indigenous peoples understood that compacts must be made between sources of life, the land, their place, and with the natural entities there. The key relationships they established are reflected in ceremonies [...] Ceremonies and rituals choreograph situations to bring people in contact with those compacts, the entities involved in relationships. The ceremonies themselves become ways of coming to know, of understanding. As compacts are never static and cyclic process exists even in their making and evolution, there are traditions of communal and environmental renewal.”⁶¹

Ceremonies, while highly choreographed for the needs of the living, are in fact controlled by other-than-human teachers working to educate human beings, generation after generation, on how to live *mino-bimaadiziwin* (well in a good way).

Aazhawe-Anangoong (The Other Side of the Stars)

Anishinaabeg scholar and linguist Basil Johnston wrote the following passage in his book *Ojibwe Ceremonies*:

N'daebaub auzhiwi-anungoong,
K'gah kikinowaezhigook anungook.
I can see to the other side of the stars,
The stars will guide you.

N'daebitum auzhiwi-anungoong,
K'gah noondaugook anungook.
I can hear the other side of the stars,
The stars will hear you.

Kaugigae n'gah daebitaugoos.
Timeless is my voice...

Ae-naubindumun dah izhi-waebat,
K'zhawaenimik Kitche Manitou.
What you dream will be,
The Great Mystery is generous with you.⁶²

⁶¹ Cajete, p. 81.

⁶² Johnston, *Ojibway Ceremonies*, p. 51.

Johnston's passage about the 'the other side of the stars' has always moved me because it embodies my experience and my vision from inside of the sweat lodge. At the time of my vision, I did not understand its meaning. It took me many years and two children to understand the teachings of the *nindaanikoobijigan* (my ancestors) and *manidoowag*. I came to understand that my vision was rooted in maternal ecological pedagogy and maternal ecological knowledge. The lessons I learned spoke to me of my womanhood and my future role as mother.

Madoodiswan Gikinoo'amaagoowin:

Teachings on Maternal Ecological Pedagogy from the Sweatlodge

The first teaching from the vision centered on the nature of maternal ecological pedagogy. The sweatlodge ceremony I undertook was designed and implemented within a Kwe (woman) centered ecological teaching and learning paradigm. Of significance to this pedagogy were the teachers, the support, and the classroom setting.

My teacher was the *Anishinaabe-kwe* Elder who conducted the ceremony, Edna Manitowabi (Wiikwemikong Unceded First Nation). For many years, she was my cultural mentor and teacher. She is also a mother and grandmother. Elder Manitowabi is a teacher in the Midewewiwin Lodge traditions and an educator in Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe language). For generations, the *nookomisag* (grandmothers) and *mindimooyenh* (old wise women) have been the ones to lead the *oshki-Anishinaabe-kwe* (young women) and *Anishinaabe-kwe* (adult women) through women's ceremonies. These *mindimooyenh*, or Elders as we call them today, still teach in the manner of the old ways, using the same practices and knowledge from thousands of years ago. Every Anishinaabeg sweatlodge has to have a knowledgeable and experienced Elder conducting the process so that the ceremony is safe and culturally appropriate. She created an environment where a vision could take place, where I felt supported, and then guided me into the vision and out of the vision safely. Her directions, voice, and sacred medicines made her my metaphysical anchor to this reality so that my *jichaag* (soul-spirit) did not get separated into just the *jiibay* (spirit) part and become lost. Having her as a teacher allowed me to have a ceremonial experience that was consistently aligned with the experiences of generations of *Kwewag* (women) that have come before me.

In conjunction with the support of the Elder, there was also the support and teachings of the network of women that formed the circle in the sweatlodge. Inside the lodge there were women all around me. They sang, prayed, drummed, and shook their rattles with me and for me. Working in unison, the women of the sweatlodge connected

spiritually together. Elder Manitowabi used her water-drum to connect us to Mother Earth and anchor us there with each drum beat. The Anishinaabeg translation of the drum is 'instrument for the sounds of the heart.' Drum in Anishinaabemowin is *ode'we'igan*. 'Ode' meaning heart, 'we' refers to the waves of sound as it travels, and lastly, 'igan' refers to the instrument. The drum acts as our remembrance and way to recall the conception of life in our universe, the first womb of Creation and first heart beat. We are told in our Creation story that out of the darkness came a wave of sound that expanded across the darkness, then a spark of light, and then finally the heartbeat of our universe as it was born into existence: thump, thump, thump, thump. Those heartbeat sounds are imbedded in all life and things throughout the universe. When women drummers drum in the sweatlodge and we shake our *zhiishiigwanag* (rattles) we honour those original sounds of creation; sounds that were born out of and from another time and place; products of energy, matter, and a great expanse of sound. The sounds of the *ode'we'igan* and *zhiishiigwan* are imitations of those first original waves of movement and sound that birthed a universe into existence. By re-creating that sound we can remember our origins and call forth the energies of Creation into the sweatlodge. Elder Mantiowabi and the other women in the circle of the lodge, metaphysically pulled those energies into the sweatlodge, so that the sound of Aki's heartbeat was heard as if we were babies in her womb.

As a network of women, they formed a circle of protection around me. In my vision, as I lay floating amongst the stars, I heard them drum, sing and shake their rattles. These women represented a metaphysical chain attached to an anchor of sound, holding me in place, so that I did not get lost amongst the spirit realms. Their voices tethered me to our everyday reality, so I knew my way back to the lodge. This sacred circle of women were my peers in the classroom of the lodge, but also my spiritual community.

Next, there were the teachings from the manidoowag, the ancestors and Gizhew-Manidoo. They came into the sweatlodge to take me into the realms of spirit. The spirits are the guides or facilitators for the visioning process and reveal knowledge through offering experiences that introduce a different way of coming-to-know information. They poured into the lodge like stars, transforming the space and myself, and taking me into the many realms and multi-realities of the spirit worlds. The teaching practice of the manidoowag prioritizes a direct and experiential learning experience that creates a unique congruence between the inner and outer realities. Cree/Métis scholar and Elder Joseph Couture offers that:

Reality is experienced by entering deeply into the inner being of the mind, and not by attempting to break through the outer world to a beyond. This positions

the Native person in 'communion' with the living reality of all things. His 'communion' is his experience of the ideas within, concentric with reality without. Thus, to 'know,' to cognize, is experiential, direct knowing.

In this exploration of spiritual ecology, the manidoowag pedagogy that I directly experienced centered on building connections between the earthly world and the spirit worlds to facilitate the flowing of information. Anishinaabeg Elder Herb Nabigon explains that the sweatlodge acts as a reminder of the harmonics of how we are and should be residing in our traditional ecologies, be those in the land or our own bodies.⁶³ Further, Elder Nabigon also suggests that it works to help our people to, "listen to themselves first and hear the voice of the Creator through the voices of the Grandmothers and Grandfathers, as well as their ancestors who are in [the] Spirit World [...] That is the essence of the sweatlodge."⁶⁴

Finally, came the the lessons of Aki, the land. First, we take all our resources for the sweatlodge from the land. We harvest poles from young saplings, plant medicines, and stones from the land. The death of those living things, including the trees and plant medicines are thanked and shown gratitude for their sacrifice. The land provides space for us to have the ceremony. We clean an area of trees and bushes to provide a space to construct the lodge for the sweat. The space is then surrounded by the life of the forest. When we construct the lodge we dig holes for the poles into the earth and put our *semaa* (sacred tobacco) into the holes, say prayers and thank the land for allowing us the space to conduct our ceremonies, for the sacrifices she makes and for taking part in our ceremony as the doorway through which we will enter our journey to the realms of spirit. When we enter her womb, we enter the earth and join with her. Just as a woman welcomes new life into her body, we must respect the role she provides as life-giver. Furthermore, from her body and upon her body we find a woman's centered space of learning (*Anishinaabe-kwewag gikinoo'amaagegamigong*).

Maternal Ecological Knowledge

Where is the other side of the stars? What is on the other side of the stars? It is the womb of Gizhew-Manidoo: waawiyekamig. The first and original womb of Creation. The reason I think I went there is because I am a woman and I have an ancestral link to that location via all the mothers and grandmothers who have come before me. Travelling through a

⁶³ Nabigon, H. 2006. *The Hollow Tree: Fighting Addiction with Traditional Native Healing*. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 83.

⁶⁴ Nabigon, p. 85.

river of stars to auzhiwi-anungoong was like travelling home again through a cosmic umbilical cord to the first lodge of Creation.

The maternal ecological knowledge I acquired has to do with understanding Kwe and her life-giving gifts, her gifts of female energy, fertility, pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. From the vision, I was witness to the ancient and abiding power of being Kwe (woman). Kwe was given the gifts of womanhood for her to choose to bring forth life into the universe: conception, pregnancy, birth, parenting. She was given female energy from Gizhew-Manidoo to balance the masculine energies. Those energies bring forth life, they nurture life, and they form a partnership with masculine energies to bring harmony to the universe. There is feminine energy in all living beings as there are also masculine energies. We all originate in a mother's womb, but we come from both the feminine and masculine coming together in unison to create life. In the original story of the creation of the universe, we learn that *waawiyekamig* is the original womb for life in our universe. The womb is the first ecology and Aki provided her own body for human life to be born. From the realm of spirit, a new soul-spirit is brought into the womb of a woman, then it moves through the birth canal, and out on a wave of water into the world through the first doorway of life. The vision showed me that being Kwe is coming-to-know and coming-to-understand these complex epistemological and ontological aspects of the multi-dimensional ecology of our bodies as Kwewag: doorways to the realm of spirits.

Additionally, I came to realize that my journey through the sweatlodge was a transformative rebirth. The process of the sweat lodge mirrors the process of birth. The sweat lodge sits on the land or lap of Mother the Earth. During the sweatlodge ceremony we greet her as mother and grandmother and acknowledge her body as the womb of the earth. The relevance of the land to this birth or re-birth is pivotal because Aki is the First Mother of all life on earth and our first teacher of how to mother in a good way as Anishinaabe-kwewag. The sweat lodge ceremony reconnects women to that original relationship. Similarly, when a woman labours she performs similar functions. When I was given labouring teachings from my Indigenous midwives for the pregnancy of my first daughter, they told me how important it is to plant my feet on the floor during labour to get myself as close to earth as possible. We need her ecological energy and her strength as our First-Mother in Creation. Their teachings also encouraged walking and sitting on the birthing stool with both feet touching the floor. They even discussed how I should envision our feet rooting into the ground and drawing energies up from the earth into my body to pull in those supportive energies from Mother Earth.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ I had two cesarean-sections with my daughters, so I never got to embody those teachings, but I share them with other Anishinaabeg women and will one day share them with my daughters.

As I floated in a lake of stars, I didn't know what I was seeing and experiencing, but years later when I had my children, I realized I was seeing from inside the womb. When I was floating, I heard the voices of the women in the lodge as if from underwater. I heard the drum beat of Elder Manitowabi's water-drum as if it was the heartbeat of my own mother. I was experiencing what it feels like to be a fetus in the womb, but also coming to understand what my own children would experience from inside my womb.

The sweat lodge is based on the same premise of rooting ourselves on the land. By sitting on the ground inside the sweatlodge we connect or link with her energies. The sweat lodge is run in rounds where new grandmother/grandfather rocks are brought into the lodge's central fire, which represents the womb of Mother Earth. The rounds are representative of the contractions that come during a woman's labour. The introduction of the rocks is the beginning of the contraction. The first round is relatively gentle like the beginning of labour. As the new rocks are placed in the center, water and sacred plant medicines are sprinkled over the rocks creating hot healing steam, which radiates outward towards the participants of the sweat. The reaction among participants is physically straining. Participants breath deep and laboured. They sweat and strain to control their breathing to ensure they do not pass out and allow themselves to talk, sing and pray along with each other. When the round is over, the door is opened and participants are offered fresh air and water if they require. It is a time to rest, recover, and prepare mentally for the next round. Similarly, when a labour contraction ebbs, a woman is offered water and encouraged to rest. With each round, the heat grows and the physical, emotional and spiritual rigor of the sweat increases. After each contraction, a woman's struggle becomes similarly more intense and challenging. Just as a labouring woman reaches out for her partner to brace themselves against the contractions and gain support, the sweatlodge participants will sometimes lean back against the poles, grasp onto the poles behind them or the earth below them, energetically rooting and fusing themselves to the land.

At the end of the labour the baby is born through the eastern doorway on a wave of mide-waaboo (amniotic fluid; sacred water). The mother is exhausted, spent, but also transformed from woman into mother. Similarly, at the end of the sweatlodge rounds, participants exit out the eastern doorway, forever changed. Like new mothers, they re-emerge into the world exhausted and spent. Covered in the waters of their own sweat that acts to purge and cleanse their bodies. Like Aki in the spring, the sweatlodge participants are reborn, transformed and renewed. The ecology of the land at ziigwan (spring) is mirrored in the ecology of the sweatlodge. Just as the land gives forth new life in spring with melting snow and running tree sap, so too does the woman on a surge of amniotic fluid, and so does the sweatlodge, with its participants soaked with their own

cleansing sweat. Again, understanding the complexity of the spiritual ecology of a woman's body was a key lesson from the sweatlodge.

When we exit the doorway of the sweatlodge, we are treated as if we are newborn babies. We are wrapped up in towels, given liquids to drink, talked softly to, and we are welcomed gently into this world as our mother's once did. We crawl and then walk out onto *Aki* as gently as a child trying to take its first steps. This process mirrors the way the first human being, known as "ani niisayi'ii naabe owe akiing (a human was lowered onto the earth),"⁶⁶ did in the Creation stories:

Seeing the strength and the beauty of all that was created on this earth, he [Original human being] too desired to be as this earth and as the creation. And so it is said that, as he approached the earth, he pointed his toes so that somehow, if at all possible, when he touched down on this earth, he would not stamp out or crush even the smallest blade of grass, the tiniest flower, the smallest living creature that crawled upon the earth. Rather, he would come down in and amidst the creation and be a living and loving, harmonious part of all that is. This is how Original Human Being touched down upon the Earth. That is how the First Human Being, Anishinaabe: the red colour of man, met his Mother the Earth for the first time.

We learn in this practice to respect our mothers and all women. Women and our mothers are our first teachers, our first nourishers, and the first to love us. The core ecological teaching of the women's sweatlodge are these words from Anishinaabeg Elder Art Solomon, which state that, "The women "were of the earth." They were connected to the Earth Mother and [...] whose work was to govern when all things were to be born, plants, animals, humans [...] The woman is the centre of everything."⁶⁷

From this vision from the sweatlodge and the experience of moving through the ecology of the sweatlodge, I take away a wealth of maternal ecological knowledge and understandings of both the pedagogy of the natural world and of women in my culture. Traditional ecological knowledge is not merely human theoretical musings, but is a living force that binds together the web of relations that exists between all living beings and non-living things within our universe. Anishinaabeg ecological knowledge will always

⁶⁶ Courchene, D. 2015. Language as the root of Ojibwe Knowledge. *Geez Magazine*. https://www.academia.edu/30414319/Language_as_the_root_of_Ojibwe_knowledge. Accessed 28 Nov. 2020, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Posluns, M. 1990. *Songs for the People: Teachings on the Natural Way, Poems and Essays of Arthur Solomon*. Toronto: NC Press Limited, p. 34-35.

reside first and foremost on the land of our ancestors and the traditions they left behind so that we can continue to access both old and new knowledge.

Concluding Thoughts

Anishinaabeg have no word for goodbye in our language, so I always use that as an excuse for why I feel uncomfortable with making conclusions. Conclusions, like exiting the sweatlodge, should be done gracefully, with care and without much fuss on the way out. My thoughts on the nature of Anishinaabeg traditional ecological knowledge are rooted in my relationship with the land. The land is my mother. The spirit of that earth is everything to my life and to the life of my people. My ties to the territory of my ancestors, my nation, my clan, and my family is dependent on the ecology of the French River and the island of Okikendawdt. Elder Edna Manitowabi always said to those she taught, that when you find you are lost, stressed, scared, overwhelmed, or need comfort, go sit on the lap of your mother the earth. That concept sums up Anishinaabeg traditional ecological maternal knowledge. In closing, I offer a prayer for Aki the land and the sacred ecology of the territory of the Anishinaabeg. The prayer is offered by the Elders Council of the United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnisiing, which include the First Nations communities of Aundeck Omni Kaning, M'Chigeeng, Sheguiandah, Sheshegawaning, White Fish River, and Zhiibaahaasing.⁶⁸ The prayer speaks to the Anishinaabeg connections to land, territory and all our relations in Creation. I do this so that the language and culture surge forward into the future, but also because it allows other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to see and learn to respect that the heart and spirit of the Anishinaabeg lies with Aki, the earth, our First Mother in Creation.

Mii maanda enweyiing

This is our land

Ngo dwe waangizid Anishinaabe

All tribes in our nation

Debenjiged gii'saan Anishinaaben akiing

Creator placed the Anishinaabe on the earth

⁶⁸ United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnisiing. "Mii manda enweyiing, ngo dwe waangizid Anishinaabe." 2001. <http://www.uccmm.ca/>. Accessed 1 Apr. 2021.

Giibi dgwon gaadeni mniidoo waadiziwin
Along with the gift of spirituality

Shkode, nibi, aki, noodin, giibi dgosdoonan wii naagdowendmang maanpii
Shkagmigaang.

Here on mother earth, there were gifts given to the Anishinaabe to look after,
fire, water, earth and wind.

Debenjiged gii miinaan gechtwaa wendaagog Anishinaaben waa naagdoonjin
ninda niizhwaaswi kino maadwinan

The Creator also gave the Anishinaabe seven sacred gifts to guide them. They
are:

Zaagidwin, Debwewin, Mnaadendmowin, Nbwaakaawin, Dbaadendiziwin,
Gwekwaadziwin miinwa Aakedhewin
Love, Truth, Respect, Wisdom, Humility, Honesty and Bravery

Debenjiged kiimiingona dedbinwe wi naagdowendiwin.
Creator gave us sovereignty to govern ourselves

Kaamnaadendanaa gaabi zhiwebag miinwaa nango megwaa ezhwebag,
Miinwaa geyaabi waa ni zhiwebag.
We respect and honour the past, present and future.

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