

The Creation

Example of “Salmon Goes Up River”

A. *Amotqn* “the one who sits at the head mountain” (Coeur d’Alene) - *Akbaatatdia* “the maker of all things first (Crow) - the Creator, and the *Titwa-tityáá-ya* “animal peoples” (Nez Perce) - the Animal/First Peoples. The world was brought forth and prepared by the Creator and the Animal/First Peoples, such as Coyote, Crane, Salmon, etc., for “the coming of the human peoples.” They rid the world of most of its “monsters” and embedded within it the “gifts” the human peoples would need to prosper. The “**gifts**” include the water of the rivers and foods of the earth that nourish bodies, such as camas, huckleberries, salmon, deer, buffalo; the teachings and values that properly guide behavior, the *mi’yup*; and the transformative power to ensure vitality and life itself, the *súumesh*.

And it was Coyote who created the **human peoples**, either from the soil of the earth (as with the Crow), or the body and blood of one of the “monsters” (as with the Coeur d’Alene and Nez Perce). Along with the other created beings, such as deer and salmon, as well as camas and trees, human peoples are thus considered a part of the landscape, and not separate from it. Nevertheless, human peoples are distinguished from the other beings by their incompleteness and vulnerability; they are in need of guidance and spiritual vitality.

While the *Amotqn* is omnipotent and omnipresent, it is nevertheless illusive and mysterious. It is through the specific actions of the Animal Peoples that the will of the Creator and the creation itself were brought forth. The Creator may not be encountered directly, but its intentions continue to be expressed today through the Animal Peoples.

The world created is not a world without “**monsters**”; not all were slain at the time of creation by the First Peoples. Among the “monsters” that continue to roam the landscape and challenge the human peoples are certain monovalent beings and spirits, as well as such antagonists as “illness” and “suffering,” and “ignorance,” “greed,” “anger,” “jealously” and “laziness.” It is with the “gifts,” when properly applied, that these “monsters” can be abated.

The accounts of the creation, and the deeds and misdeeds of the First Peoples continue to be conveyed in the **oral traditions**. In the act of re-telling the sacred stories, the “teachings” conveyed within them are disseminated and taught, and the world itself and all its entities and beings are revitalized and perpetuated. (See L.)

Though the creation is acknowledged as derived from and credited to the Creator and the actions of the Animal/First Peoples, “the creation” can never be fully comprehensible, nor knowable, by humans. There is always an element of “mystery” to the creation, and humans approach the creation, the Creator, and the Animals Peoples with great humility, deference, and respect.

Theme: acknowledge the supremacy of the Creator, and the power and role of Animal/First Peoples, though humble and self-deferent toward them (akin to Hindu *Brahman* and multiple expressions of the Divinity). It is they who created the world, preparing it for the human peoples, embedding it with “gifts,” yet a landscape upon which “monsters” roam.

Contrast: acknowledge only a secular world of no god, or a polytheistic world of many gods; full knowledge of the origin and workings of the universe is obtainable by humans

B. *Snq-hepi-wes* - “where the spirit lives, from horizon to horizon” (Coeur d’Alene). What is brought forth by the Creator and Animal/First Peoples is a spiritual world, that pervades and unifies all entities and beings, in their souls as well as their bodies, in their transcendent as well as material essences. It is out of the transcendent that the spiritual meanings and guidance (the *mi’yup* or “teachings”), as well as spiritual vitality and power (the *súumesh* or “medicine”) emerge and manifest themselves in the overt, material landscape. The spiritual world of significance and vitality is thus a part of and not separate from the entire creation, though not readily apparent and revealed to the human peoples.

The primacy of the spiritual world is exemplified in the Navajo prayer phrase, *Saah Naghai Bikeh Hoozhoo*, “continual re-occurring long-life in an environment of beauty and

harmony,” and its associated notion of first “thinking” (*Saah Naghai*) and then “speaking” (*Bikeh Hoozhoo*) the world into existence. It is from the internal, spiritual world (*Saah Naghai*) of archetypal meanings and spiritual force that all behavioral actions and material forms (*Bikeh Hoozhoo*) are derived and manifested, and that is thus ultimately more “real” than the overt, material world. Nevertheless, this understanding is not a denial of the importance of the material world, and of the pragmatic need to work within its circumstances to obtain access to what is needed for life and to the higher, transcendent meanings in life.

Theme: seek to access and travel the spiritual world. The world of Indigenous peoples is a Platonic world as represented in the “allegory of the Cave,” and akin to Hindu worlds of *Brahman - Trimurti* and *Jivas - Atman*, and to the Taoist world of the *Tao*

Contrast: acknowledge and travel only the material, secular world, akin to only traveling the Hindu world of *maya* or the Buddhist world of *anicca*

The Gifts

C. *Baaxpée* (Crow) - *Súumesh* (Coeur d’Alene) - *Wéyekin* (Nez Perce) - “medicine” - spiritual power and vitality, one of the “gifts” embedded in the landscape, along with food, water, shelter, there are other life-giving gifts. The landscape, and all its forms, entities and beings are endowed with spiritual power and a life force. From the Wolf and Eagle, to the Tree and Root, to the River and Water, to the Mountain and Rock, each are endowed with *súumesh*. It was with *wéyekin* that the Animal/First Peoples were able to bring forth and transform an entire world at the time of creation. And it is *súumesh* that continues to bring life to a salmon, a bird, a human being, even a rock. But as *wéyekin* can nurture life, it can also withhold it.

A world animated with *baaxpée* does not suggest a fatalistic, deterministic world. Humans have **agency and choice**; they can elect to seek and travel the spiritual world or not.

The Source: The Creator - *Akbaatatdia* (The One Who Makes Everything - Crow), *Amotqn* (The One Who Sits at the Head of the Mountain - Coeur d'Alene). Medicine is ultimately derived from the **Creator**; the Creator is the recipient of one's prayers and vows; the Creator is the ultimate source of vision and cure, of transformative power of life. As in the instance of the Crow, there are varied images of the Creator: *Akbaatatdia* "The One Who Makes Everything," *Ichihkbaaleesh* "First Doer," *Baakukule* "One Above," *Isaahka* "Old Man," *Isaahkawuattee* "Old Man Coyote." The Creator is not an anthropomorphic nor monotheistic per se, and does not project a morality, does not seek supremacy over nor retribution for transgression. It is diffused and pervasive throughout all the landscape, omnipresent, within all phenomena – land forms, animal, bird, plant, human, and rock.

The Link and Character: The Animal People - *Iilapxe* (medicine father). While derived from the Creator, medicine is mediated through a "Medicine Father," the **Animal People**. They are not so much distinct from the Creator, as extensions of it – the arms, legs, ears, voice and eyes – the linkage and channel to the Creator. One prays to and through Medicine Fathers, (story e.g., "young man's visit from Eagle, Meadowlark, Elk"). The Medicine Fathers can be expressed as an Eagle, Elk, Buffalo, Snake, Meadowlark, Otter, Mole, etc. The quality associated with the natural phenomena is expressed in parallel fashion with the particular character/abilities of the medicine – (Story Texts: The Mole's Earth, Squirrel Medicine, Eagle Medicine). Medicine Fathers can also be the *Awakkule* "Little People," (Story Text: Visit to John's Home). It will be the Medicine Fathers that instruct a one in the proper care of and for medicine, and sets "taboos of respect," (Story Text: Stick-game and Right to Guess). One is always cautioned never to use *aannutche*, "to take by the arm," "bad medicine," "to curse someone," (Story Texts: The Fancy Dancer). "It will come back to you." (NOTE: consider the parallelism between the creation time and the present time regarding the roles of the Creator and the Animal People.)

The Nature: *Baaxpee* (spiritual power). While medicine can involve a physical agent or property, it always entails a transcendent, **spiritual power**, the life force. (Story Texts, e.g., "the brew and diabetes" and "gift of the eagle feathers"). The efficacy of medicine resides in its spiritual power, and not its physical attributes.

The Effect: *Baalía* (to doctor). Medicine alters peoples' lives, **bringing health and well-being** (Story Text: Nurse's Guilt and Sun Dance, Vietnam Medicine Bundle). It is understood as a very real and true power, and not imaginary, nor psychologically based, and not based in belief (Story Text: The White Woman at Sun Dance).

Theme: acknowledge the spiritual forces embedded within the landscape; akin to Taoist notion of *ch'i* and *wu wei*

Contrast: the world is devoid of spiritual power and forces

D. *Mi'yep* - “teachings from all things” (Coeur d’Alene), also one of the “gifts” embedded in the landscape. Perennial archetypes, moral and ethical codes, and significant meanings permeate all entities and beings, such as rock formations, rivers, mountains, animals, endowed within them by the Animal/First Peoples at the time of creation. The “teachings” were already in the landscape prior to the arrival of the human peoples. If one “listens attentively,” the “teachings” are accessible. The landscape is not void and meaningless. As well as being embedded in the contours of the landscape, the *mi'yep* are also transmitted and conveyed through the oral traditions, and the *súumesh* songs and dances of the Sun Dance (Crow) and Jump Dance (Coeur d’Alene), all of which are understood as “textbooks.” As the world is not human-created, neither are the “teachings” and values that guide human behavior socially constructed and derived.

Theme: acknowledge the teachings and meanings embedded in the landscape; akin to Taoist notion of *wu wei*

Contrast: the world is devoid of spiritual and archetypal meanings

E. *Ashammaléaxia* - “as driftwood lodges” (Crow), and primacy of the “**family**,” one of the *mi'yep*. The world is characterized by an inherent spatial and temporal connectivity, integration and kinship of all entities and beings - human, Animal, Fish, Plant, Water, Rock and Landscape,

as well as Spiritual “Peoples,” such as the Ancestors, and Spirit Guardians, as well as Animal Peoples and Creator itself. All “Peoples” are unequivocal “participants” in the world, living as a part of and not apart from the world. This notion of “kinship” is expressed in the idea of the “**family**,” which is defined in terms and **inclusive** of not only its human “relatives,” but also its animal, fish and plant, and spirit “relatives.”

As the kinship is spatially inclusive of the Animal Peoples and Landscape, so too is it temporarily inclusive of the First Peoples of the Creation. Time itself is not lineally defined in terms of a past, present and future, i.e., a past separated from the present and “dead,” but time is cyclical, with a “past” within which you can participate. You can continue to travel with the First Peoples at the moment of Creation.

Theme: acknowledge the kinship and interrelationship with all beings, and seek to participate in the world of the “family;” akin to Taoist notion of the *Tao*

Contrast: the human is an autonomous agent, and the world is based upon the Cartesian Duality of a “mind-body and “I-it” separation and objectification

F. *Unshat-qn* - “eye to eye” (Coeur d’Alene), one of the *mi’yep*. **Equality** characterizes the structural relations among all the members of the “family,” be they human, Animal, Plant or Spirit. For the Coeur d’Alene the “deer is a brother,” as Animals have souls, volition and intelligence. In the example of a hunter, he or she does not “take” a deer, as if conquering and dominating it. But in the hunter offering respect to the deer as a “brother” and in demonstrating the need of others for its nourishment, the deer voluntarily offers its body, its meat, to its “relative.” In so doing, the soul of the deer is not violated and desecrated, but continues, to be refurbished by a new material body. The notion of equality is often expressed in the term *pute-nts* (Coeur d’Alene), “**respect**” for all things and beings.

Theme: respect all the members of the “family” as equals; akin to Taoist notions of “moderation” and “humility” (two of the Three Jewels)

Contrast: the human has supremacy over all other life forms, with an hierarchical ranking of dominant-subordinate relationships with other entities

G. *Ammaakée* - “give away” (Crow), *Té·k’e* - “to give and share [with others]” (Nez Perce), one of the *mi’yep*. Compassion for all others in need of assistance, an **ethic of sharing**, characterizes the dynamics of all “family” relationships. It is the “glue” that holds the kinship together. One gives unselfishly, without anticipation of reciprocity, to help others in need. This notion is exemplified in the act of the Creator and Animal Peoples preparing the world for the coming of human peoples, in the animal, fish and plant peoples offering themselves to the human hunters, fishermen and gatherers, in the humans in whatever capacity they can giving to others in need of help, and in the deceased preparing a camp for those yet to come. A “wealthy” person maybe “poor” in “possessions,” having given them to those in need, but “rich” in the number of “relatives.”

Theme: seek to give to and help the others within the “family” who are in need; akin to Taoist notion of “compassion” (one of the Three Jewels)

Contrast: is selfish and greedy, expressing the self-serving trickster Coyote, and seeks to accumulate material possessions

H. Other *mi’yep* include *tuk’ukí* - “honesty” (Nez Perce) and integrity toward others, *diakaashik* “doing it with determination” (Crow) and sincerity in all interactions with others, and *ciká’w* “brave” (Nez Perce) and courageous in the defense of others and in the face of adversity.

Theme: adhere to honesty and courage in support of the “family”

Contrast: deception, dishonesty, cowardliness

I. *Isáahkawattee* “old man coyote” (Crow) - *Smiyaw* “coyote” (Coeur d’Alene) - *‘Iceyéeye* “coyote” (Nez Perce) - the way of the “Coyote,” also one of the *mi’yep*. Nevertheless, there are those considered outside the “family,” and who may in turn seek to harm it’s members, such as an adversarial grizzly bear, a Blackfoot warrior, a U S military general, or a corrupt government agent. One must be aware of and prepared for encounters with competitive and adversarial individuals outside the “family.”

In relations with “**adversaries**,” members of the “family” apply the example and skills of the trickster Coyote, including intelligence and strategic foresight, physical prowess and agility, deception, wit and cunning, an **ethic of competition**. While the example of Coyote’s trickster and deceptive behavior is inappropriate when applied to members of the “family,” the very same behavior can be appropriate when applied outside the “family” against an opponent. Being “coyote” is only appropriate when it is self-effacing and serves the needs of other family members, and is not self-serving. Hence the demarcation of “family” and its associated ethic of sharing, from “adversary” and its associated Coyote’s ethic of competition.

Theme: act as “Coyote” only toward one’s “adversary” and opponent

Contrast: act as “Coyote” toward one’s “family” members, as well as toward strangers

Primary Spiritual Goal

J. So that the **primary goal** in one’s life is that of protecting and preserving the health and well-being of the “**family**,” of maintaining the harmony and vitality of the whole, inclusive of all its human, Animal, Plant and Spirit People members. It is a goal extended to all “family” members. The health and harmony of the human individual, of the human family, and of the ecological landscape of the Animal and Plant Peoples, of the entire “family,” are all in correspondence and synonymous with each other. When one “relative” is threatened or ill all others in the “family” are potentially threatened or ill.

Theme: the primary goal in life is that of enhancing the well-being of the “family”

Contrast: the primary goal in life is self-reliance, autonomy, or ego enhancement; or the primary goal is personal redemption and salvation (as in Judaism, Christianity or Islam), or Oneness, Self-realization, moksha, or nirvana (as in Hinduism or Theravada Buddhism)

The Means to the Goal

K. The **means** to the goal of preserving the “family” is to fully adhere to the values of the *mi'yep* and especially that of the ethic of sharing (to unselfishly help others in need), and to obtain and apply *súumesh* for the well-being of others. The responsibility of the entire “family’s” health is on the shoulders of those who have the ability to give.

Along with espousing the lessons of the *mi'yep*, the transformative power of *súumesh* is sought and applied to welfare of the “family.” When successfully traveling the spiritual world, and through the help and agency of the Animal Peoples, an individual will seek to acquire and apply its life-giving power and guidance, “**medicine.**” In turn, “medicine” is directed at benefitting and instilling health in other Peoples, be they human (healing sickness and providing defense) or animal, fish or plant (helping insure prosperity, health and well-being). Medicine can bring forth life and confer health, as well as can relinquish it, bringing illness and death.

Theme: seek to espouse the *mi'yup* teachings, and acquire and apply the *súumesh* life forces, all for the benefit of others in the “family”

Contrast: espousing “Coyote” toward “family” members, or use “medicine” for selfish, self-serving purposes, to make “bad medicine”

Unlike other beings (such as Animal Peoples), humans must **quest** for spiritual guidance and power. Humans must demonstrate their willingness, as well as worthiness to give of

themselves in order to receive “medicine.” In the quest, a faster may journey to a sacred mountain and **offers** his or her “sincerity,” as well as gives up food and water, what is necessary for life. If judged worthy by the Creator and an Animal Person, such as a Buffalo or Eagle, he or she may **receive** a vision and *súumesh* song. The quester has been “adopted” by a Animal Person, and has received a guardian spirit. It is important to be noted that the First Peoples of the creation time are one and the same as the Animal Peoples that adopt and guide a quester of today.

It is during the vision experience that what is the unique and distinctive in the human individual is dissolved, merged and rendered apart of the spiritual world, a transitory state of **Oneness** with the sacred, of what can be called Self-realization, Enlightenment, Awakening. But the human does not remain in this state of bliss, returning to the world of his or her family in order to apply any insights, guidance and “medicine” gained for the benefit of the those in need.

Among the **applications** of *súumesh* are the good blessing that comes from the confirming of an “Indian name,” the protection in the face of an enemy the comes from “medicine pouch” worn about the neck, the cure from an illness that comes from a healing ceremony, or the bountiful harvest of camas or huckleberries that comes from the prayers of those in the Jump Dancers.

Theme: the seeking, acquisition (Oneness), and application of “medicine” is a means to the higher goal of helping preserve the health of others

Contrast: the seeking and becoming a state of Oneness or Self-realization is the goal of life (as in Hinduism or Theravada Buddhism)

The task of protecting and preserving the health of the “family” is attempted only during **the course of one’s lifetime**. Each human gets only one shot, during his or her own lifetime in this world, at fully adhering to the *mi’yep* teachings, and seeking and acquiring “medicine,” and thus of helping maintain the health of the “family.”

Correspondingly, the “**after world**” is understood as simply “a camp across the waters,” where all the deceased, the ancestors, go to prepare the way to those yet to come (reiterating an

ethic of sharing), a camp surrounded by green pastures for the horses, great berry patches and camas fields, and good hunting and fishing areas.

Adherence to the *mi'yep* values is **socially invoked** through the advice and guidance rendered from an elder, the application of public joking and ridicule, and ultimately, through the enforcement of social ostracism and banishment. Hence the motivation for embracing any of the values and seeking to preserve the “family” is not the possibility of personal spiritual reward, nor the threat of spiritual punishment.

Theme: in pursuit of preserving the health of the “family,” you have only during the course of your lifetime in this world to adhere to the values of *mi'yep*, and seek and apply the power of *súumesh*; the values are enforced through social persuasion.

Contrast: you get many opportunities to get it right, via accumulated “karma” and “reincarnation” into a higher or lower state of being (as in Hinduism and Buddhism); given the condition of “original sin,” either eternal salvation in “heaven,” or damnation in “hell,” await you on “judgement day” (as in Judaism, Christianity and Islam); enforce adherence to values via threat and actualization of corporal punishment, beatings, imprisonment, or killing. (All these constructs are alien to Indigenous peoples)

Yet it is a **very personal quest** into the spiritual world of *súumesh*, a path individualized to each person’s needs and disposition. There are multiple paths to the Creator and Animal Peoples, all equally valid and potentially effective. As exemplified in the Crow “wagon wheel” metaphor (representative of the ancient rock medicine wheels which dot the northern plains and the structure of the Sun Dance lodge), the paths to the Creator are like the spokes of a “wagon wheel.” As there are many separate spokes in the wheel, there are many “religions” in the world, each distinct, with its own unique path. Yet as all spokes are of the same length, all religions are equal. If some spokes were shortened and others lengthened, or if some spokes were eliminated all together, the wheel would no longer turn, but fall flat. Nevertheless, as all spokes are

anchored to the hub of the wheel, so too are all religions linked to the common Creator, each religion simply calling it by a different name.

Theme: acknowledge multiple paths to the spiritual world (akin to Hinduism)

Contrast: there is but a singular, exclusive path to the spiritual, denying the validity of all others spiritual paths to the Creator (as is typically the case in the monotheistic religions of Judaism and Christianity)

The quest for spiritual guidance and power, and all its associated rituals and ceremonies, the “religion” of the Indigenous peoples, is thus understood as a “path” or “**way of life,**” **comprehensive** of all one’s actions and thoughts, and not a compartmentalized segment of one’s life. As an experiential “way of life,” it is not predicated on a testament of faith to a specific doctrine, creed, or set of theological beliefs. The spiritual is directly **encountered** and engaged, not philosophically discussed and talked about. Such ceremonies at the Sweat House, Sun Dance and Jump Dance, medicine bundle opening, naming ceremony, wake and funeral ritual, first fruits ceremonies associated with the roots, fish and game animals, healing ritual, pipe ceremony, and vision quest and fasting address the needs and concerns of virtually every aspect of life, from birth to death. And it is a “path” that necessitates accessing and knowing the world through one’s heart, one’s intuition, one’s spirit, though “**heart knowledge.**” While “heart knowledge” is primary, “head knowledge,” accessing and knowing the world through the intellect and mind, is not to be neglected and is supplemental to “heart knowing.”

Theme: the spiritual quest is a “way of life” dependent on “heart knowledge”

Contrast: religion is based upon a doctrinal set of beliefs and articles of faith; approach the world relying only on “head knowledge”

L. **Baaechichiwaau** - “re-telling one’s own” (Crow, referring to the act of telling a story). The continuation of the Indian way of life and of heart knowledge for the future generations is through the sharing of the oral traditions, “re-telling one’s own.” As the place to begin is with the Creator and the Animal Peoples, so too is the place of continuance. (See A.) The oral traditions are inclusive of the stories of the Animal Peoples, along with their songs, dances, and other aesthetic and spiritual expressions. The oral traditions are at once didactic, passing on pragmatic skills, teaching values, and disseminating identities, as well as entertaining, bringing a smile or a tear and rendering the difficult times less so. As all phenomena is spatially and temporarily interconnected (see E.) and potentially endowed with “medicine” (see C.), when the expressions (symbols) of the Creator and Animal Peoples are properly brought forth, so too is their inherent transformative power. Hence, in the act of telling Coyote’s story, donning dance regalia, sitting upon a dry painting, or singing a *súumesh* song, the oral traditions also perpetuate the world, reinvigorating life and meaning into the landscape and all of its varied beings. The Creation time is traveled, a camas field nurtured, and an illness healed. Reality and the oral traditions are one and the same. Stories make the world.

The oral traditions, however, are not fundamentally explanatory in nature. Because Coyote did such and such, that is why ! Such would presuppose that the stories were inventions of human curiosity, created by man to explain what he could not understand, and thus not be creations of the First Peoples, i.e., accounts of their actions. Such would presuppose that the stories are earnest but feeble attempts by pre-scientific minds to understand the world, but are inevitably fantasies and false, and certainly not what is most real and true. And such would presuppose a separate world out there (Cartesian dualism) that needed explaining, and certainly not an interconnected phenomenal world within which one is a part.

Theme: what is most meaningful and real exists in the act of participating in the oral traditions

Contrast: stories are fantasy, suspending disbelief in what is real.

Conclusion

M. Run with the Coyote and Crane, and Sharing the Gifts, conclusion. In the act of re-telling an oral tradition of the Coyote or Crane, in the act of singing the *súumesh* song, in the act of dancing in a Jump Dance, or even a powwow, in the act of gathering camas roots or huckleberries and sharing them with those in need, in the act of hunting the deer or fishing the salmon and sharing the meat with those in need, the world is re-created, re-newed and perpetuated, and all its “family” members are nourished and healed. “You run with the Coyote and Crane” (and the other Animal/First Peoples), and in so doing their Gifts of *mi’yep* and *súumesh* are re-invested and re-distributed back into the landscape, for the benefit of all the Peoples, all the “relatives.” The Gifts continue to be shared. The world traveled in the act of storytelling, in act of singing, in act of dancing is the very world traveled by the Creator, Coyote and Crane, and of the archetypical teachings (*mi’yep*) and transformative power (*súumesh*) of the creation time. It is the world traveled by the vision quester under the guidance of the Elk or Eagle. It is the world traveled by the ancestors as they prepare they camp for those yet to come. All are indistinguishable, one and the same. The worldview of the Indigenous peoples of the Plateau corresponds to the Australian Aboriginal idea of the “Dreamtime.”

Hence, the implicit, **perennial desire** is to “**run with the Coyote and Crane.**” In so doing, the health, harmony and well-being of the “family” are preserved.