

WALKING TOGETHER

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Perspectives in Curriculum



FNMI Worldviews
**Compassionate Mind:
Implications of a
Text Written by
Elder Louis Sunchild**

by Walter C. Lightning

Government of Alberta ■



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Maskwachees Cultural College, Hobbema, Alberta

It is unusual for so respected an Elder as the late Louis Sunchild to commit a discourse to writing. For Walter Lightning he wrote a discourse in Cree on the nature of the mind, to use in teaching. The discussion of the Elder's text is prefaced with principles for understanding Cree Elders' discourse: it is assumed that there will be a meeting of minds, or mutual thinking, in discourse; the relationship between the Elder and the learner is always contextually specified with reference to the earth; metaphor is used in a specific way so that it is always more than metaphor; there are clearly defined systems of implicature involved in the discourse; and there is the assumption that the interaction and discourse are part of a larger whole, through which the interaction reverberates. The text always continues to unfold through layers of meaning, as one continues to ponder it. With reference to those principles, a first interpretation of the text shows that the Elder points out the unity of mental, biological, emotional, and spiritual domains. He implies a system of cycles of time in which we can maintain a balance. He specifically points out our connectedness with each other, and our responsibilities to self and others. Our minds were created for the exercise and manifestation of compassion in our behaviors, attitudes, dynamics, interactions with others, and with respect to our own and others' bodies.

Introduction

This work deals with some ideas about the nature of mind, as expressed by the late Elder Louis Sunchild. Those ideas are from a very old but vitally new

tradition. It has been my privilege to work with a number of respected Cree Elders, and the interpretation of the text that is presented here is a reflection of their contribution to my own insight. I would like the readers to know that I do not make any profession of extraordinary insight. Here is an example the frame of mind with which to approach this work.

Some time ago it was my privilege to have the responsibility to prepare the traditional protocol that is an initial step in some of the events in which Elders lead their people. In this case, I was in the company of the respected Elder Art Raining Bird, from Rocky Boy, Montana. At that point the setting was very informal. I looked at him and the realization of who was sitting there made me realize how little I knew. He was sitting in the room where I was preparing the protocol, his white hair down to his shoulders. I thought of the tremendous respect in which he was held by his own people, and of the profound and detailed knowledge he had of our culture. His stature as spiritual leader in the community was more like that of an institution than a person. He knew what I was doing, but was not watching me intrusively. It was as though he were just noticing but not noticing. I thought of how poorly I knew how to complete my task, and thought, “What am I doing, trying to prepare the protocol? I don’t know how to do this properly, and in the presence of a person who has seen this countless times and knows all its significance!”

I said to him in Cree, “Grandfather, I don’t know how to do these things. I am trying to prepare the protocol but I realize that basically I don’t know anything. As a matter of fact, I have no idea what I’m doing. Please, I implore you, have compassion for what I am doing.”

Elder Art Raining Bird, for all of his stature and knowledge, was a living example of humility. He looked at me and answered with a deep kindness and understanding, saying, “It’s nothing, my grandson. We don’t know anything.”

Holistic Understanding

Several years ago I felt a need to know my culture in a deeper, more meaningful way. I set out to approach an Elder using the protocol to obtain this information. That term, the protocol, refers to any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by ancient tradition, that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request. The protocols differ according to the nature of the request and the nature of the individuals involved. The actions and statements may be outwardly simple and straightforward, or they may be complex, involving preparation lasting a year or more. The protocols may often involve the presentation of something. It would be a mistake to say that what is presented is symbolic of whatever may be requested, or the relationship that it is hoped will be established, because it is much more than symbolic.

When I arrived at the doorstep of the Elder he invited me inside his home

and gave me some tea. After we were seated and had had a short exchange about how nice the weather was and so forth, he asked me if there was anything I wanted to say. I presented tobacco and said the appropriate protocol. After doing this I told him that I wanted to know myself, my people, my history, my culture.

He accepted my request and began to pray with deep emotion.

After his prayer he began to tell of how he had done the same thing that I was doing, to another Elder, when he was young. That Elder had told him that for one to approach knowledge one must understand the stages of knowledge.

The Elder then took a stick about 16 inches long from the ground a few feet away from where they were sitting on the grass. He scratched a notch at about the middle of the stick, and then, indicating one end of the stick and that notched mark said, “This is when you are born and this notch is 50 years old. In this area between being born up to 50 years of age, you do not know anything.” He then pointed from the notch at the middle of the stick to the other end and stated that from 50 years of age to 100 years of age you can say that you begin to have a hunch, an intuitive feeling, for knowledge. From 100 years of age and on, you have entered an area, a stage in your life, where you know something.

I do not remember much of the discussion after the Elder told me of his experience because that story had a strong impact within me and I have been intrigued by it ever since. I do know that it humbled me into having respect and awe within my culture, and certainly gave me a sense of pride and thankfulness in being an Indian.

Later in my life in my pursuit to know and to understand myself in relation to my culture I have come to realize—in part—the truth behind the story of the stick. It is as though every time I enter a doorway of information and knowledge, I discover that there are other doors that have to be entered. Upon entering those doors one sees that there are many new doors that have to be entered. I have also discovered that for every step in expanding my consciousness there has been growth that needed to occur.

In other words, for understanding to happen I needed to comprehend holistically. I not only had to learn something intellectually, I had to learn it emotionally as well. For this to happen, timing and synchronicity play a very important part in the regulation and realization of the entire process.

The Elder told me many other stories that were profound in the way he used metaphor to tell them. When I thought about the meaning of those stories and took into account that story of the stick, I knew that part of the mental and emotional work involved in understanding the complex systems of metaphor meant that I had to cut mentally across the barriers of time. The way that the Elder told the stories was a way of giving me information that would become knowledge if I thought about the stories in the right way. The stories were

structured in such a way that each story's meaning got more and more complex and rich as I thought about it. The Elder knew that I was not ready to understand

the deeper systems of meaning and could not take it all in at once, so he constructed the story so that its meaning would continue to unfold. It was not just the individual stories that did this, but the stories were all structurally related to each other, even though I did not necessarily realize that when each one was told. It is more than being "connected." As Jo-Ann Archibald points out (personal communication), in a fundamental way it is all the same story. Knowing full well that their time on Earth was limited and that they had the responsibility of passing on the culture and the knowledge to the best of their ability, the Elders would tell these stories in metaphor, because they knew that for us to understand them would take time.

In retrospect, I see that as I think about the stories and discourses I have heard, I have begun to uncover some new sense of meaning in the stories, even after some of the Elders who told them to me have passed on. As the stories and discourses unfold their metaphor, I am in awe at the way that those Elders speak of the love they had for us, the compassion they had for our continued existence. This, they said, was the reason they would tell us the stories and these teachings, these truths. For this I am forever thankful.

Elder Louis Sunchild and the Text

Since my first encounter with the Elder and his stick story, I have come to know and consult with many Elders. Though all the Elders were truly helpful in the influence they had on my life, none stood out more than the late Elder Louis Sunchild. Perhaps it is because he not only spoke and wrote about truths, he also lived those truths every day of his life.

This paper is focused upon a text written by the late Elder Sunchild. The text is about the need for people to understand the mind; it contains the imperatives that great care should be offered to it, that it must be understood that the source of existence is directly associated with the mind, that the achievement of balance and harmony, happiness and love, can be realized through the attainment of compassionate mind.

This may sound abstract or at least enigmatic, but the text is in fact about practical concerns, a prescription, if you will, of what to do and what not to do: the effects of substances and even thoughts that a person entertains, and how lifestyle affects mind and body. More important, and still in the realm of the practical, not the abstract, it is about how spiritual consideration of life itself interconnects with the compassionate mind.

The late Elder Sunchild wrote the text in the hope that it might truly help the people who read it and who read into it. This text is one part of a larger collection of writings the Elder undertook in the last years before he passed on. In

all of the Elder's writing a remarkable trait is the sincerity of his desire truly *to help* all people, and particularly Indian children. This aspect of his writing was a part of him: his sincerity and love of life spilled over to the people he came into contact with in everyday situations. He was not above giving people a bear hug.

Many times it seemed to those of us who were privileged to know him and to hear him that Elder Sunchild was filled with endless, detailed, and comprehensive information and knowledge about Cree culture and language. In my own relationship with him he was neither didactic nor authoritarian. He gave me the honor and respect of requesting my opinions and asking me to express my thoughts on particular issues that I knew that he was concerned about.

During a period in the late 1980s, Elder Sunchild worked at Maskwachees Cultural College in Hobbema (Maskwachees), Alberta, as a resident Elder and writer of Plains Cree Syllabics. At the time I had developed a thesis project that would involve a survey study of Cree language competence among young children of Samson Plains Cree. That is an important area for research, but there was a more compelling question in my mind. I took that question to the Elder at Maskwachees College. He was not familiar with the concept or purpose of writing a thesis, but readily understood its significance and place in university studies. He agreed to work with me on a thesis project. On different occasions, when asked a question, he would write out a response in Cree syllabics.

It was at the college one day that I asked him to write about the mind—to write about what, if anything, we should be concerned about in the understanding of the mind itself. My request was motivated by my desire from an educator's standpoint to find out what my culture says about the mind and the attainment of knowledge and information. I was hoping that the text that he agreed to write would help educators and that the way that we attempt to educate people might be influenced in a positive way by the premises and propositions that the Elder would incorporate in his text.

The Elder accepted my proposition and wrote a text about the mind, and perhaps because of the importance of the question, or its very basic-ness, he gave me the authority and responsibility of making it the foundation for a magisterial thesis, which contains a more detailed structural exposition than this paper.

Elder Sunchild did not read or write English, and he employed traditional Cree thinking to express old teachings about mind, body, and spirit. He wrote the text in Cree, using the Cree syllabic writing system. He also read from his prepared text and allowed me to make an audiotape-recording of him reading the text. I made a transcript in the Cree language, using both the tape-recording-and the written text. Then I made a literal translation from Cree to English, trying to the best of my ability to accommodate the Elder's teaching and lecturing style, as well as the stylistic expectations of English readers.

In the pursuit of knowledge, of understanding, of education, of learning, perhaps if we open our minds in a nonjudgmental way, a compassionate way, we

may move toward improving our views, our perception of what the mind is and how thought is processed and more importantly how anything and everything affects our consciousness as human beings. It would seem that the Elders of North American cultures have something that they want us to know for our survival not only physically, but more importantly spiritually as well.

How do we move toward a life of balance and harmony with all of life for our holistic survival? How do we become human once again? Perhaps some of those answers may be contained within this text by Elder Sunchild. Let us begin to look at what is being said in this text and, perhaps, at what is not being said.

The Syllabics Text

A transcription of the text, as written by the Elder in Cree syllabics, is presented in Figure 1. Amongst the older generations who used this system there was quite a bit of individual variation in the way they wrote. Within the past 20 years, Cree teachers have worked on the syllabics writing system to standardize it. Elder Sunchild's use of syllabics reflects his age and the purposes for which he used the system. Readers of syllabics will note some differences from current standard use; for example, he usually did not include /h/ sounds in his writing.

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L'ḥōfēb?

ḥō, ḥō-ḥ DL ḥō- ḥō-*, ḥō-ḥ/ḥ. ḥō ḥōḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ. ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ
ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥḥ. ḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ,
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ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ,
ḥḥ ḥḥḥ ḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ. ḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥ, ḥḥ ḥḥ, ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ.

ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ- ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ. ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ,
ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ. ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ. ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥ.
ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥ, ḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥ. ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ,
ḥḥ ḥḥ ḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ. ḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥ
ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ. ḥḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥ ḥḥḥḥḥḥḥḥ.

Figure 1.

Transcription of the Text in Cree Roman Orthography

This transcription was made initially from the syllabics text. Then it was checked and verified with the audiotape-recorded version of the Elder reading from the syllabics text. The Cree spoken at Sunchild, Hobbema, and Rocky Boy, Montana, is quite similar, with minor dialectal differences from other Plains Cree. When word endings used by the Elder, notably /h/ or /hk/, differ from standardized Plains Cree, I have included them in parentheses.

Haw, ewakôma newo kikway, e-witasih tamân.
Tânisi ehitwemakahki(hk) mîna ehitâpatahki(hk) ewakoni(h)
tanisitohtahk oskayâh ohci kehcinâ kânayawacikicik takakwe
nanistohtahkik tâpacikocik ôte nîkân.
Mâtçika(h) nîkân nikatasihten ôma mâmitonehicikan
e-pakâhkamisîmakâhk tâpatçikocik ôte nîkân.
Mâka kostam ayisîniw tamayisîciket ayisk mayisîcikecih
tahkîmisikipayikasiw, mîna namoya nanâtohkisih tamîyotôtâkoyan
ewakonih ôhi âpacihtâyini(h).
Mâcika nîkân kiyêtweyân ôma mâmitonehicikan ita kehcina(h) e-
ihtakohk mistikwânihk mîtihipihk.
Ewakwânima takakwe-kehcinâhohk iyikohk e-kaskîhtahk kweyask
paminamihk mîstikwân.
Ahpô ekaya osâm mistahi takawatihtahk mistikwân mîna taka kwe
e-âstehtatahk, kweyask tanipahk, têpakohp pîsimohkan.
Tanipâhk, pêyak tipiskaw, ewako nîstanaw-newosâp pîsimohkân piko
tanipâhk, namoya ayiwâk.
Tâpitawi ewakosîsi tôtamani(h), kânakâyâsken mîna kika-
mîyomahcihon, mîna kitâstehtin kiyaw, mîhko(h) mîna, mîna
kimamitonehicikan.
Mâka ayiwâk nipâyani(h), namoya misâwâc kakihtêpihk wâmin.
Tahkayiwâk katimîweyihten tanipâyan.
Âta pikwikohk nipayini(h), kika-sîmîhkwasin waniskayini(h) mîna
namoya kasâpamahcihon.
Maka wâhwîpac waniskayini(h), kweyask tapimakotew kimîhkoh.
Kite(h) ewako kweyask tâtoskêmakan namoya kôte-ahpinân.
Kimîhkohk ayisk ewako kôhpimakotek kitêh kweyaskisih.
Pêskis tawâwâskawihâyân tawîcihtayan tapimakotek kimîhkoh, êkwa
tesimanâcihtâyân kiwitihp mîna kitê(h).
Êka-âkwâskam takakwe kahkisowâsiyan, mîna êka-osâm mistahi
takakwe mayimamitonehitaman.
Êkatôtinaman tamâyitocikemakahki(h) kimâmitonecikanihk ewakoni
mistahi tamâyitotaman kimamitonehicikan.
Nîkan nikanîkanastân kîskwêpewin, mîna kâpihtwâhk, mîna kanihk
nanâtohk mêtâwêwna pêyakwan êkosi kika-tôtâkon.
Kika-macihtwân, kika-wâtakamisîn ahpo kâhki-kâkimotin, ahpo
kahkî-kakayêsîhaw tawayesihat kitôtêm.
Namoya kikâyamehiten takitimahat kiwâhkômâkan.
Ahpô pîyisk kika-nipahtâkân.

Ahpo kâkî-nipayisiw awiyak ewakoni(h) ôhi kêtisikâkot.
Mîna mistahi îyikohk isko tâhkîpîsikwâtisiw ayisîniw.
Mâka ôhi ewakoni(h) ôhi âpacihtâci(h) kâmâyâtahki(h) ewakoni(h)
ketisikâkot.
Namoya mîna takihceyihtam wîyaw, nayestaw tâpîsikwâtisiw, ahpo
pîyisk tatakohtahikow ewakonih ôhi mistahi âpacihtâcih
ta(h)mohcwâyâw.
Ahpo ta(h)wêpinew otawâsimisâh ewakonih ôhi nikotwâw tatotâkot
kâmâyâtahki(h) tâpacihtat.
Êkosi êkâya(h) takisiwiskâk ôhi kâmasinahikâteki(h).
Misâwâc ekosi ehîsipayik.
Konita tatôtahk tânwêtahk nêstaw ohci châpacihtât ewakoni(h)
kôhânwehtahk.
Mîna tahkîkîkosowâsiw ewakoni(h) mistahi kîkway ôma.
Mâmitonehicikan nanâtohk tesi-mîyo âpâcihtaw wîya tipiyawe ayisîniw.
Tamâmitonehitahk tânisi esoskeyâcihot.
Mîna takakwe miskwehitahk tanisi kîkway tesi kâhcitinahk, tanisi
tetatoskêt.
Mîna peyakwan ispihk isi(h) kâkîsimonihk tawîcihiwet.
Ayisk nîstam koh-osîhikoyahk ka-ayîsîniwîyahk ekosi êkî-isîhikoyahk
tapakwanawâsiyahk pâpakwanaw takâkîsimoyahk, kohtawînaw.
Nawac ewako kîsîskahtemakân kâpâ pakwanomohk.
Ita kâ-isipeyimototâkawîyan takâkîsimôstamâkeyin, nawac otehihk ohci
ekâkîsimot, ekâkîtimâkimot, eyohcikawâpistah okâkîsimowin, ewako
akihtew otêhihk ohci ekâkîsimot.
Ewako nawac kîhkahihtâhk manitowa(h).
Ekwa ôma ketwehk ahpo kâhki kwêskehtamâw ayisîniw ikohk
e-mamâhtawahk pîkîskwewin mâmitonehicikan.
Hâw kîya ekwa tâ-kakwe nîstohtaman oma mâmitonehicikan
katasîcikâtek.
Kîspin ewakoyikohk tanisitohtahk, awîyak mistahi tamiyotôtahk
misowîsîh tamiskowehitâmâsiw tahto kîsikaw opimâtisiwînihk, mîna
opimacîhowînihk, mîna têsîh manâcihtât.

The Translation

This translation was produced in several steps. First, I asked an Elder who has a knowledge of Plains Cree and a knowledge of the tradition to make a translation from the syllabics version. Elder Norman Yellowbird, who at the time was translator/transcriber for Maskwachees Cultural College, did this. Emma Lightning reviewed the text and produced the syllabics typescript. The next step was to audiotape another on-the-spot translation, which I made for the benefit of a non-Cree speaker. As an individual, it helps me to focus in on the precise

meanings and the correct translation if I am forced to make such a translation. As I made that translation I also made comments on the text, noting places where there was difficulty in the translation of Cree concepts. The final step in translation was to compare all the versions—syllabics, Cree Roman orthography, versions of the translations—and to refer back to the Roman orthography version and the audiotape-recording.

Right and left square brackets ([and]) enclose alternative translation terms in an attempt to provide a reader in English with the sense of the Cree meaning of the terms used. In order to reflect the fact that the third person is not marked for gender in Cree, I have used the plural (“they/them/their”).

Compassionate Mind

Hear ye; it is this: four things that I will be talking about, as to what they [say, mean] and how they are applied [used].

It is for the young [adolescents or younger] to understand, particularly [those at an age level at which they are beginning to understand abstractions and complexities], for them to try to understand, so that this understanding will benefit them in the future.

I will begin to talk first of all about the mind [consciousness], that possesses supreme awareness in a divine way; [it is pure intelligence].

The knowledge of this will benefit them in the future.

A person is afraid to do something wrong because if they do something wrong, they can be [jailed, locked away, detained, cut off for a long time].

As well, there is no life giving benefit for doing the things that I am going to point out.

But before I begin to identify these negative influences to the minds of individuals, I will first of all say that the mind, or the divine vehicle that processes and receives thought, is located within the brain.

It is therefore very important that great care should be given to the head area; the brain is divine and precious, and great care should be given to ensure that the head that houses the brain should be protected from the cold.

Also that care should be taken in giving proper rest to the mind. Out of a 24-hour period, seven hours should be sufficient for the proper amount of sleep for resting the mind.

If you are consistent and disciplined in having the proper amount of sleep, your body and mind will begin to adjust and to get used to this pattern.



This will result in good health; your body will be rejuvenated as well as your blood.

If you attempt to sleep longer than necessary, you will never have enough sleep.

This will only spoil your body as it will begin to like oversleeping.

When you wake up you will not be alert totally; you will dull your mind and senses.

You will feel slightly awkward physically as well.

In complying with this you have to rise early, usually before the sun rises.

Rising early has a profound effect on the heart and how it functions.

Your heart will beat properly, your blood will be [in proper condition].

You will not have heart disease.

It is the condition of your blood that affects the condition of the heart.

Also one must exercise for the purpose of helping your heart to beat well; this is attained through physical activity.

Again great care should be given to the head and the heart.

A person should not be constantly in an angry state, not to entertain bad thoughts.

Do not take anything internally that could do damage to your brain as well as to your mind.

I will start off by pointing out what will do harm to your brain and mind.

First, there is alcohol, and then marijuana, injected drugs and drugs ingested.

These substances will do your brain and mind harm.

As well as those, there are also activities such as gambling of all sorts, that will have the same effect.

You will be mean and angry, you will be easily agitated and difficult to deal with [stubborn, unwilling to listen to reason].

You might also begin to steal; you might also begin to be deceitful and manipulate your friends.

You will not have remorse in doing harm to your relative[s].

Eventually you may arrive at the point of killing another; even to the point of committing suicide—
all because of the effects of taking something into your system which effects your thinking, your perception.

Also another effect is that one may commit adultery because of the effects of exposing the mind to these things.

One will no longer possess the ability to respect and honor one's own body because that person will continue to commit adultery.

Eventually the person continuing to do these things that are harmful to one's consciousness will reach the point of being [mentally retarded or handicapped, crazy, in a disturbed state, institutionalized], unable to control their life, unable to control their mental functions; one who is owned by the things I am talking about, that person does not function as a human being [i.e., sick minds, as of the insane, not realizing what madness is, an individual who is not centered within [themselves]].

In other words they are no longer human because they do not possess the compassionate mind.

These individuals will throw away their children [family break ups]. All because of the effect of any one of these things that are not good.

So in saying these truths I urge that the person reading these written words not let [the reading of it] anger them.

Because it is just the way it is.

Should a person dispute what I am saying it is because that person is involved in any one of these things and is trying to justify their action.

A person has within the ability to use the mind in a good way. A person should try to be [be zealous to be] creative in their thinking in finding ways of getting a livelihood (bread and butter).

Equally important in this pursuit of a good life is having a strong spiritual life.

To involve oneself in prayer and ceremony.

However to pursue spirituality through a humble means, to exercise humility and compassionate mind.

Not to act or behave as if one is in possession of supernatural abilities.

It is better [to act] from the humble state of knowing nothing which really and truly benefits [is useful to] a person, rather than to possess supernatural abilities.

Because in the beginning when God created humanity, God intended us to be humble and to approach everything in a humble way.

*Elders say that what counts is the sincere prayer that is said
from the heart.
A prayer said with deep emotion where one will have tears.
Now this what we are saying concerning the mind which is life
[aliveness] and the spoken word which is life-giving, and
the both having divine life giving power; [they] can be
used in sharing the knowledge of these truths to others
and moving [inspiring] them to change their lives
because of it.
So now you should try to understand this compassionate mind.
Even if a person understands a portion of what was discussed,
then it is of benefit, that much more, to that person.
A person will entertain and process new thought and insights
into life every day, as well as in their own livelihood.
A person will do the self good if they respect their mind.
Just the realization of that miraculous nature of the mind is
something to think about.
Even the Creator used thought, mind consciousness, to create
all that is seen.
Because of the awesome nature and power of the mind, it is only
right that it be given the utmost respect and reverence.
If a person has something less than what is blessed in mind
potential to all, then that person cannot hope to survive
or at least to function effectively.
[There are modern means of helping addicted people, ultimately
hoping to dry out a patient long enough for that person to
pray in a sober state of mind.]
A person will benefit tremendously for the afterlife by following
these truths toward life.
When a person passes on in this life, they only die bodily.
The mind-and-spirit continues to exist and live.
As an individual, speaking on my own behalf, I do not have
anything to be considered better than others.
I am only a person who knows nothing.
There are other effects that I did not mention earlier that I will
mention.
This concern I have, of this being a global problem, is certainly
evident in the physical manifestations of the abuse of the
mind.
There are diseases that have developed because of this, and
some of them are diseases of the bones, loss of hearing,
insanity, blindness.*

One should not feel that these are meant for any specific individual but rather that this is a concern that affects all humanity

For generation upon generation since time immemorial our people have taught these human truths and principles for the holistic survival of everyone.

How to Deal With the Text

The objective is to discuss the meaning of the text. During the course of translation, some new meanings and new shades of meaning of what the Elder was saying began to emerge.

There are many ways of analyzing texts established in linguistics, anthropology, and literary criticism. Those kinds of analysis would be interesting, and it is possible that some aspect of the text that would otherwise be hard to see would be the product of those kinds of analysis. Several techniques were explored, to see if they would add to understanding of the text.

As interesting as it would be, I could not provide a linguistic analysis of the text, because that would focus on the structure, and my task is to focus on meaning. The linguistic structure is the foundation for the meaning, and sometimes it is necessary to point out how shades of meaning are based on syntactic structure. A related linguistics technique would have been analysis of discourse structure, or text structure. Once again, the level of explanation would stay at the structural level. One of the reasons I have provided the Cree versions in both syllabics and Roman orthography, and the translation, is so that others who have the competence and skills can find meaning in this text, but I would be wrong to profess that I have the skills to do that, and that is not the intent of the work.

The intent of the Elder was that this text be presented because some people might find it helpful as they work with other people, especially children, and especially in education. What I must do in that case is to let the text speak for itself for those who might find it helpful. My task is not to provide a structural analysis of the text, but to discuss the text itself in a way that helps people understand it, that contributes to meaning.

The technique that I settled upon was to take each Cree word (or sometimes word cluster) and provide an English translation for that term. Then I made a comment on the contextual meaning of each pair (the Cree word or cluster and the English translation).

It might be according to academic convention to say that I followed the same technique as Cruickshank (1991), but it is honest to say that I had this work entirely completed by the time I found reference to her work with Mrs. Gertie Thom, where she said they record Elders “in the Tutchone language, then carefully transcribing her tapes. Then she and I begin a scrupulous word-by-word

translation of the story, and when we have completed that we rework our verbatim translation into standard English” (Cruikshank, Sidney, Smith, & Ned, 1990, p. 17). That is exactly what I had done. I have also followed a convention in dealing with Elders’ texts, incorporated by Ahenakew and Wolfart (1992), in the presentation of the syllabics version, the roman orthographic version in Cree, and a translation. One other aspect of Cruickshank’s and her collaborators’ work has to be mentioned, and that is collaboration itself.

After the word-by-word translation was completed, I asked a knowledgeable friend to collaborate with me in discussion, and he and I went over the text many, many times, while he asked questions and I responded. Cruickshank says this about stories:

Our collaboration has been and continues to be a source of enormous enjoyment for all of us. Storytelling does not occur in a vacuum. Storytellers need an audience, a response, in order to make the telling a worthwhile experience. They have patiently trained me to understand conventional indigenous literary formulae so that I can *hear* stories told mostly in English sprinkled with place names, kinship terms, clan names, and personal names in Tagish, Tlingit, and Southern Tutchone. Telling stories in their own languages to someone who cannot understand the subtleties is like talking to a blank wall. Furthermore, they are excellent teachers, and when they tell me a story, they do so to explain something else to me. The whole rationale for telling them disappears if I cannot understand what they are trying to teach. (Cruikshank et al., 1990, pp. 16-67)

Cruikshank’s description of this aspect of collaboration reflects my own need in this case to collaborate. As in the translation into the tape- recorder, when I was in the position of having to explain to someone, and then to think with someone about the meaning of the text, it was much more productive.

That is not an accidental discovery. That kind of collaboration has a long history. The collaboration is in fact “the indigenous mind in action.” In Cree terms, this may be expressed “maskikiw māmtonehicikan,” which reflects that in thinking, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In fact, the conclusion of this paper relies on a dialogue. I gave my collaborator a list of topics in preparation for tape recording a relatively formal dialogue, which was transcribed and forms the last part of the paper.

Interpretation

There was little in the literature of the social sciences that spoke to the First Nations concepts that the Elder raised, with the notable exception of Hultkrantz's (1953) elaborated discussion of American Indian concepts of the soul.

The Elder's words speak for themselves.

The Elders teach in some ways that are unfamiliar to many people. In order for as many as possible to understand, I want to put forward some premises about how to listen to Elders (or to read texts, as Elder Louis Sunchild intended for this one). This is not put forward as ethnographic fact. These are principles that I have observed. Others may express them somewhat differently, or even have completely different insights into the way to interpret what Elders say.

Listening is a kind of active participation. In an unpublished manuscript that Wâpaskwan (1991) wrote for his own children at their request, he attempted to describe one of the principles of how to listen and to interpret. Though he discusses how to listen to "stories," many of the principles are the same.

The way to interpret those stories has never been clear to the literate, academic community until recently. The stories are not just "texts," or narratives that deal with sequences of events in a linear progression of events.

There are several classes of stories. For example, there are "sacred" stories as opposed to "historical" stories, and traditionally it has taken 40 years or so of apprenticeship for an individual to work to gain the authority to tell the sacred class of story. That length of time is not required just to learn the texts of the stories, nor how to perform them. It takes that long to acquire the principles for interpretation of the stories.

There is a "surface" story: the text, and the things one has to know about the performance of it for others. The stories are metaphoric, but there are several levels of metaphor involved. The text, combined with the performance, contains a "key" or a "clue" to unlock the metaphor. When a hearer has that story, and knows the narrative sequence of it, there is another story contained within that story, like a completely different embedded or implicit text.

The trick is this: that the implicit or embedded text, itself, contains clues, directions—better yet, specifications—for the interpretation of an implicit text embedded in it.

Many sacred stories have multiple levels of embedded texts. The elements of a story fit and are coherent as complete texts at each level. The relationships of each specific surface element of a story to its

manifestation (or interpretation) through various levels of embeddedness is also part of the structure of a story. It is an incredibly complex genre.

A person who speaks the “high” version of the language, knows the principles for “unfolding” the stories, and has some degree of skill in constructing and telling such stories. There are checks for validity of the story at each level and between levels. The stories have to fit, precisely, at all levels, to be coherent. At some levels there is *very* explicit and precise spatial and temporal information. [He *makes* reference to a specific story, a version of which is included in a classic ethnography of the Crow, and he refers to some of the narrative sequence.] At one level, that sequence of the story contains a very precise topological description of a stretch of the Missouri River and the basin around it, just south of its confluence with the Yellowstone. At another level, that same sequence contains a very precise set of principles for relationships between specific kin. A hearer isn’t meant to understand the story at all levels, immediately. It is as if it unfolds. (Wapaskwan, 1991, pp. 1-2)

Some of this same “unfolding” goes on when one listens to an Elder and ponders his or her teaching. I am going to discuss two assumptions and four structural principles that might help others see how Elder Louis Sunchild has intended his text to be read. The first assumption is the assumption of “thinking mutually.” Then four structural principles are described. Then the last assumption, that of “resonance” is discussed.

Assumptions and Structural Principles

The Assumption of Mutual Thinking

It is assumed that there will be effort to think mutually with the Elder. The assumption is that active attention, humility of the hearer, and respect for the Elder will put one in the frame of mind where the minds can meet. This is related to the first principle, discussed below.

The Structural Principles

The Relationship Between the Elder and the Hearer

The Elder is vulnerable and makes himself/herself open. An Elder may speak gruffly, and may criticize, but for a specific purpose. In other words, an Elder does not express the relationship of vulnerability and compassion by trying to win the favor of the person who listens. That vulnerability and compassion can be expressed with the word *love*. But the words of truth of the Elders are sharp. Sometimes they seem to cut.

There is a recognition of responsibility and authority. The authority is not an authority that can be physically enforced. It comes from the Elder's having expert knowledge about the context for knowledge, about the place that specific knowledge is appropriately brought out, and the readiness of the individual to perceive it. The interaction makes the Elder vulnerable because she or he has the responsibility to speak the truth; the ethos is self-enforcing, and a violation of it not only reflects that the Elder is wrong, but if the ethos is violated it can have resonant implications in other spheres of life.

These principles of the relationship between Elder and hearer are structural principles, because they affect the way that the Elder deals with the situation. It determines the degree of unfolding necessary, and so determines the kind of metaphor and the extent of metaphor. It means that Elders' teachings are *individualized*. With that said, it must be pointed out that there are *standard* systems of metaphor that apply to all as well.

In the text that forms the basis for this presentation, Elder Louis Sunchild has made himself very vulnerable. This text could go anywhere (physically), and it could be misinterpreted, criticized, or mocked. If it is not right, or if it does not reflect the truth, it could mislead others; it was a consistent and deep concern of his not to mislead others, but to set in place the proper circumstances for "truth to happen." That concern motivated this topic. He completed the text in the hope that it would help people— help people think, and perhaps act. It is an expression of the love he had for people. In the text, the reader should try to note where it is that the Elder makes explicit or implicit statements about the authority of the statements he makes, and his relationship to those statements. He will make specific reference to the reader.

The Use of Metaphor in Specification

Metaphor is used in a system of mnemonics (memory symbols), so that implications of the metaphor can be seen to be appropriate in several different spheres or domains. The metaphors fit at every level of interpretation.

This text is full of metaphor. It would be impossible to unfold them all. Instead, as you, the reader, go through the text, look for examples of the way that the Elder has used *heart*. Sometimes it means the physical heart that beats inside a live body. Sometimes it means something more than that. When it means more than the physical heart, it always means the physical heart as well. That is one of the bridges between levels of meaning.

The Specification of Location of Self and Interaction in Time and Space

An Elder almost always uses speech and nonverbal communication to point out, or establish, where the Elder, the hearer, and the conversation fit in time and place, to establish the temporal and spatial context for the interaction. The dialogue, in the way that the Elder uses speech or demonstration, often includes a

kind of implying two reference points, and the hearer more or less “takes a bearing” off those two reference points. This has the effect of immediacy. One of the feelings that seems to be created by an Elder is that hearers always feel that they know where they are, or ought to be, in relationship to the earth. The immediacy almost means that the content of a talk with an Elder cannot stay at a level of the abstract. There is an implicit statement that “this is empirical.” This sets a context for both interpretation and validity.

In this text, there are several ways in which the Elder draws the context for the text and the reader. An obvious place is his direct address to the reader. A not so obvious one, particularly to people who do not speak Cree, is the way he uses words that imply *location*.

One way in which the validity of the text is empirically tested is the extent to which the metaphors continue to unfold new meanings to the reader, meanings that the reader/hearer recognizes as true; meanings that are observed in experience.

The Use of Systems of Implication

Minds engage in mutual discourse; one of the structural ways this is effected is not to attempt to state everything categorically or specifically, but to state things in such a way that there is a continuing unfolding of the meaning, as the learner follows the implications of a statement, and then checks it for “internal coherence” to see if the learner is “putting it together” properly. It is based on engagement and attention between the Elder and the learner.

Its meaning depends on the cognitive act of grasping the meaning, realization, insight. It has this implication for learning and teaching: learning is not a product of transferring information between a teacher and a student. It is a product of creation and re-creation, in a mutual relationship of personal interaction, of information. It is not just a cognitive (mental) act, but an emotional—thus physical—act. Learning is felt. It is a sensation. It is something that involves emotions. And as the Elder here points out, learning is ideally a spiritual thing, because the compassionate mind is one that is spiritually centered.

Here is a simple example of “implication.” The Elder speaks of rising before dawn, that one should make a habit of doing that. He does not mention “prayer” in that connection, but that is what “rising before the sun comes up” implies.

The Assumption of Resonance/Reverberation

Description and language reference to many different domains and contexts. They are connected. Something spoken has an effect in multiple other domains. It resonates. That can be at the physical level, where spoken words physically vibrate the air, vibrate the eardrum, and resonate meaning.

In the same way, because domains are connected, because we are dealing

with things holistically, an *act* that we think of as being in one domain resonates in other domains. That means that when we think of something in one domain (e.g., “mental”) of having an effect in other domain (e.g., “physical”) it is not just that it has an “effect,” it is that *it exists* in that other domain as well.

The Elder is speaking of acts and mental states that resonate through the other domains than the one in which they are described.

Application of Structural Principles and Assumptions to the Text

The Elder’s words speak for themselves.

Yet, to illustrate the assumptions and structural principles, a commentary is provided. The Elder’s words are printed in italics, and the commentary is indented.

This is not an attempt to say exactly what the Elder means. It is just an attempt to demonstrate how one can think of those structural principles and assumptions and get a glimpse of some of the deeper meaning of the text. The implications and interpretations of the text can sometimes have a different focus, depending upon the occasion and context. One person who saw a version of the text not long after it was written thought that a major implication of this text was that “lying, or being deceptive, is not just a mental state, but that it has a negative, physical effect on the body.”

There are many things to discover here. This example is limited to two questions: (a) what does the Elder say and imply about the relationship between domains (mental, physical, spiritual, along with behavioral, emotional, and sensory)? and (b) what is implied about relationships between the self and others?

Hear ye; it is this: four things that I will be talking about, as to what they [say, mean] and how they are applied [used].

This is a formal introduction; “Raw, ewakoma” sets a more formal tone than conversation. The Elder does not count out the “four things” for us: it is for us to identify them and recognize them. He is clear that he is talking about both meaning and applications of meanings.

It is for the young (adolescents or younger] to understand, particularly (those at an age level where they are beginning to understand abstractions and complexities] for them to try to understand, so that this understanding will benefit them in the future.

The implication here is that those of us who work with young people should know these things, and be able to pass them on. By saying that “this understanding will benefit them in the future,” the Elder is indicating that this is a message that should “unfold”: that is, we are to look for the relationships and metaphors that he is going to specify. Remembering the metaphors and relationships, we will gain understanding as we develop.

I will begin to talk first of all about the mind [consciousness], that possesses supreme awareness in a divine way; [It is pure intelligence].

The concept of the mind is introduced, and thus we can think of a “mental domain.” By saying that it “possesses supreme awareness in a *divine* way” the Elder is making a connection between the mental domain and the spiritual domain. The mind is not just “ego” but has attributes that reflect the Creator.

The knowledge of this will benefit them in the future.

He repeats the proposition previously made.

A person is afraid to do something wrong because if they do something wrong, they can be [jailed, locked away, detained, cut off for a long time].

It could be said that here the Elder makes the first statement about the relationship of self to others. It might be paraphrased that human life is “connected” life: we are connected to others. The consequence of improper, immoral, or “wrong” behavior is isolation.

As well, there is no life giving benefit for doing the things that I am going to point out.

The paraphrase might be “wrong behavior is anti-life.”

But before I begin to identify these negative influences to the minds of individuals, I will first of all say that the mind, or the divine vehicle that processes and receives thought, is located within the brain.

The Elder explicitly connects the mental domain with the physical (bodily domain), in the context of the mental domain reflecting the Creator.

It is therefore very important that great care should be given to the head area; the brain is divine and precious and great care should be given to ensure that the head that houses the brain should be protected from the cold.

This reinforces the mind as being “physically connected.” It is a very clear reinforcement, because he uses the word “head” and “brain” and with the use of the term “cold” is contextualizing them in a wider environmental context. The development of the text to this point could almost be paraphrased like this: “There is a unity of the mental domain with the physical, bodily domain; mental things are not ‘purely’ mental; far from it. The physical domain and behavior within the physical domain are so closely identified with the mental domain that they are in a practical and behavioral sense the same.”

Also that care should be taken in giving proper rest to the mind.

This reinforces the foregoing and introduces a new thread:

Out of a 24 hour period, seven hours should be sufficient for the proper amount of sleep for resting the mind.

There are two things (at least) to consider here. He says again, “physical behavior has an effect on the mind.” But he goes on to be very explicit, even specifying seven hours within a 24-hour cycle. Note that he introduces implicitly the idea of a cycle, with a definite phase.

If you are consistent and disciplined in having the proper amount of sleep your body and mind will begin to adjust and to get used to this pattern. If the idea of a cycle has been established in the preceding statement, just look at how it is expanded here. You could say that one of the things he raises is a kind of “rhythm” of mind-body harmony (and implied, because of all the foregoing, in the context of a harmony with the wider environment).

This will result in good health; your body will be rejuvenated as well as your blood.

The paraphrase and extension: physical well-being is the result of behaviors that reflect mind-body harmony.

If you attempt to sleep longer than necessary, you will never have enough sleep.

This will only spoil your body as it will begin to like oversleeping.

When you wake up you will not be alert totally; you will dull your mind and senses.

You will feel slightly awkward physically as well.

Just look at the cycle of consequence here: behavioral-physical-emotional-mental-physical. (We might even discuss of “sensory” domain here, as well.)

In complying with this you have to rise early, usually before the sun rises.

Rising early has a profound effect on the heart and how it functions.

Your heart will beat properly, your blood will be (in proper condition.

You will not have heart disease.

It is the condition of your blood that affects the condition of the heart.

For anyone who has spent any time listening to Elders, to be told to rise early has a specific implication: that time before the sun rises is a time to prepare oneself for prayer, and dawn is a particularly appropriate time for prayer. It is not necessary to “read” that into the text, however. There is a certain trust that if a person is “in harmony,” and rises early, the prayer is an automatic outcome.

The “heartbeat” introduces a “smaller” rhythm in the context of the rhythm of behavior that is established with the “sleep cycle.” This is one of those principles of “resonance.” Here is an extension: the sleep cycle involves volition; an individual exercises willpower and discretion in determining to get enough sleep. The heartbeat is automatic. If a person exercises appropriate discretion in the things that a person has discretion over, the things that a person cannot control will fall into the appropriate phase or place.

The “heart” is a well-established metaphor that requires no explanation, but if one is forced to be explicit, it would be appropriate to say that “emotion” is a domain that is introduced here.

Cycles of consequence and unity—physical, emotional, and spiritual—are reinforced here.

Also one must exercise for the purpose of helping your heart to beat well; this is attained through physical activity.

The part of the cycle, behavioral-physical is reinforced.

Again great care should be given to the head and the heart.

The metaphor of head and heart, as a unity, are put together in the context of individual volition.

Do not take anything internally that could do damage to your brain as well as your mind.

The second, inclusive category of prohibitions is introduced here. The connection of the physical and mental domains is again reinforced, and the prohibition is a physical one that relates to inappropriate physical connection with substances in the environment, affected by behavior.

I will start off by pointing out what will do harm to your brain and mind.

First, there is alcohol, and then marijuana, injected drugs and drugs ingested.

These substances will do your brain and mind harm.

The Elder has already introduced the idea of “discipline” and “consistency,”

and put them together as what might be called “habituation.” Here he talks about substances that “habituate” as well. He does not talk about them here as addictions, habituated behavior, but as single instances. And of course, by saying “brain” and “mind” he reinforces that unity of domains.

As well as this, there are also activities such as gambling of all sorts, that will have the same effect.

Here is another “addiction,” not noted as one here; just a statement that gambling (a behavior) has the same effect as drugs and alcohol (physical substances).

You will be mean and angry, you will be easily agitated and difficult to deal with [stubborn, unwilling to listen to reason].

You might also begin to steal; you might also begin to be deceitful and manipulate your friends.

You will not have remorse in doing harm to your relative[s].

Eventually you may arrive at the point of killing another; even to the point of committing suicide - all because of the effects of taking something into your system which effects your thinking, your perception.

The consequences are emotional and behavioral. The victim is a person “out of (self) control.” But refer back to the introduction, “a person is afraid to do something wrong ...” and the implication that the consequence is individual isolation. When the relationship of self with others is considered, the picture here is definitely isolation of self. The “natural” state, the harmonious state, of human beings is one of connectedness with others, friends and relatives.

Also another effect is that one may commit adultery because of the effects of exposing the mind to these things.

One will no longer possess the ability to respect and honor one’s own body because that person will continue to commit adultery.

It is explicit here that a kind of causal chain, behavior (doing physical things) affects the mind, which affects behavior. The mind is not so much the mediator of these things as the location for the interplay or dynamics of these things: volition is gone; deceit within the close relationship of marriage is a form of abuse of self.

Eventually the person continuing to do these things that are harmful to one's consciousness will reach the point of being [mentally retarded or handicapped, crazy, in a disturbed state, institutionalized], unable to control their life, unable to control their mental functions; one who is owned by the things lam talking about, that person does not function as a human being [i.e., sick minds, as of the insane, not realizing what madness is, an individual who is not centered within himself or herself].

The effect is cumulative; the “natural” state of harmony depends on one's volition and will, but seemingly unrelated “mental” or “behavioral” things deprive one of the true human nature.

In other words they are no longer human because they do not possess the compassionate mind.

The statement is explicit: the human mind is meant to be connected to others in compassion; love.

These individuals will throw away their children [family break ups].

The self-other relationship is shown again in the context of the sacred relationship of parenthood.

All because of the effect of any one of these things that are not good.

Here again is the idea of consequence; any one of the things that “are not good” will violate harmony and throw one off center.

So in saying these truths I urge that the person reading these written words not let [the reading of it] anger them.

Because it is just the way it is.

Should a person dispute what lam saying it is because that person is involved in any one of these things [is trying to justify their action].

The Elder contextualizes this discourse, this written text, in terms of its readers. He anticipates “this time” and “this place” (as you and I read his writing) and personifies us as readers. He also makes the statement that what he has described is absolute.

A person has within the ability to use the mind in a good way.

A person should try to be [be zealous to be] creative in their thinking in finding was of getting a livelihood (bread and butter).

This might be paraphrased as “a human has the ability to do good, in terms of physical things.”

Equally important in this pursuit of a good life is having a strong spiritual life.

To involve oneself in prayer and ceremony

However to pursue spirituality through a humble means, to exercise humility and compassionate mind.

Not to act or behave as if one is in possession of supernatural abilities.

It is better [to act] from the humble state of knowing nothing which really and truly benefits [is useful to] a person, rather than to possess supernatural abilities.

And here is the spiritual domain again, which he raises as being of equal importance in the conduct of a “good life.”

It is important to note that he includes both “prayer” and “ceremony,” because “ceremony” is the physical, behavioral, even “ritual” participation in prayer, not simply a “mental state.” It is in that context that he implies, again, a relationship with others, because the demonstration of “supernatural” abilities is for others to observe.

“Self-centeredness” is a word that might be used to describe the frame of mind he says is best for prayer, but meaning something quite different from its usual meaning. This “self” should center on self in a way that recognizes that power is from outside oneself, from the Creator; to recognize what we do not know, rather than to profess what we know.

Because in the beginning when God created humanity, God intended us to be humble and to approach everything in a humble way.

Elders say that what counts is the sincere prayer that is said from the heart.

A prayer said with deep emotion where one will have tears.

This establishes the “natural” state of humans, and goes for authority to what the “Elders” say.

Now this what we are saying concerning the mind which is life [aliveness] and the spoken word which is life-giving, and the both having divine life giving power; [they] can be used in sharing the knowledge of these truths to others and moving [inspiring] them to change their lives because of it.

Here is a new set of relationships. Mind is life. The spoken word is life-giving. “Both [have] divine life-giving power.” We have the opportunity to be in a mental state, and to use words in such a way that others have *life*.



So now you should try to understand this compassionate mind.

So now you should try to understand this compassionate mind.

Even if a person understands a portion of what was discussed, then it is of benefit, that much more, to that person.

A person will entertain and process new thought and insights into life every day, as well as in their own livelihood.

A person will do themselves good if they respect their mind.

Just the realization of that miraculous nature of the mind is something to think about.

This speaks for itself.

Even the Creator used thought, mind consciousness, in the process of creation itself, in all that is seen.

It is fairly clear that the “divine principle” spoken of throughout this text is the human capacity to use the mind. This is how humans are made “in God’s image,” to use the Judeo-Christian concept.

Because of the awesome nature and power of the mind, it is only right that it be given the utmost respect and reverence.

If a person had something less than what is blessed in mind potential to all, then that person cannot hope to survive or at least to function effectively.

[There are modern means of helping addicted people, ultimately hoping to dry out a patient long enough for that patient to pray in a sober state of mind.] These statements, as well, are self-evident. In them the Elder is making a summary statement of what he said before.

A person will benefit tremendously for the afterlife by following these truths toward life.

When a person passes on in this life, he only dies bodily.

The mind and spirit continues to exist and live.

After having stated the unity of the domains (mental, spiritual, physical, along with behavioral, emotional, and sensory) the Elder notes that the body “drops out” of the system upon passing away. It is mind and spirit that

endure. Note that there is nothing to say that mind and spirit are less “physical” than before, just that the body has died.

As an individual, speaking on my own behalf, I do not have anything to be considered better than others.

I am only a person who knows nothing.

This is a claim for the authority of the teaching, not for the authority of the Elder. It is not a “ritual disclaimer” of authority. It is an implicit claim that the ethos is the origin of these teachings.

There are other effects that I did not mention earlier that I will mention.

This concern I have, of this being a global problem, is certainly evident in the physical manifestations of the abuse of the mind.

There is disease that developed because of this, and some of these are diseases of the bones, loss of hearing, insanity, blindness.

One should not feel that these are meant for any specific individual but rather that this is a concern that affects all humanity.

Here is a statement of large-scale connectedness. When one person violates that potential, or abuses self or others, or denies himself or herself the possession and practice of the compassionate mind, all suffer the consequences.

For generation upon generation since time immemorial our people have taught these human truths and principles for the holistic survival of everyone.

The larger connectedness is explicit and goes beyond just the cultural group: First Nations peoples have known these truths, but they are not applicable for only First Nations people.

Dialogue and Epilogue

Dialogue

I could not write a summary called a “conclusion” without violating the principles of interpretation of text for the culture in which it was written, because the interpretation is never concluded.

The Elder’s text reminds me of my connectedness to others. My description of some of the principles involved in teaching things of this nature tells me that there is an advantage in thinking mutually with another learner or

teacher. Because of that, I follow the direction in the text as I create a preliminary statement of synthesis of the ideas in the text, by collaborating with another inquirer.

As a step toward synthesis, after translation and interpretation had been completed, I began a series of discussions with my collaborator, who had read and discussed all of the work to that point. A series of meetings for discussion followed, over a period of several months. Finally, we were prepared to make a summary of our discussion, but it could not be done in isolation. I asked my collaborator to agree to engage in a dialogue that could be recorded and transcribed, so that readers of this paper could see the progression of topic through the discourse. It was important that the dialogue not be “staged,” but that it be a real event of dialogue.

Reviewing all the material to that point, I made a list of eight topics, key terms, and questions that were essential to be covered, gave that to my collaborator and asked him to think of those topics but to formulate his own questions, so that it would be as spontaneous as possible.

Several days later I audiotape-recorded a meeting in which my collaborator interviewed me, with questions and comments based on the topics I had provided him. I made a transcript of that interview, and then edited it. It is presented here. In editing, hesitations, repetitions, and so forth, were taken out, and in some cases where reference to ideas was clear in the context of conversation but not in transcript form, phrases have been expanded to make the reference clear.

The questions are shown indented and in italics.

The old man that wrote this script knew that you were going to deal with it in this way. He gave you permission to do it, along with the responsibility of doing it in the right way. He put a burden of trust on you, trust that you would know not to violate certain knowledge that might be misinterpreted out of context, and trust that you would honour the proper protocols as you completed your own work with this text. We know that if the protocols are violated, it reflects not on the ethos itself, but on ourselves, because the ethos protects itself. One of the ways we begin this kind of discussion is with that knowledge. I wonder if you could explain what it means when we say that the ethos protects itself.

I once asked the Elder who wrote this text about that; actually, I did not ask him formally, but it came out during a dialogue. We used to have long visits together. Once we were talking about certain things related to what you and I are talking about here—the ethos, its inviolability, and the requirement to have respect for

it—and I recall his saying this: he said that it is important that protocols be respected because of the divinity behind the ethos.

It is difficult to find a way to express that statement properly; maybe what I should do is just to repeat exactly what he said. He said that it is important to perform the appropriate protocols because an individual can hear truths being talked about publicly. That was the example he used and this is what it means: perhaps at a public gathering, or even a small one, where some truths are being expressed by Elders, the Elders will express those truths and the truths will have the impact that they are supposed to have in that context. An individual can take those same truths and say them at another gathering some time later. The effect of that truth will last in those who hear it—maybe a year or two years—and then they will forget it; they do not stay with the truth, and the effect of the truth does not stay with them. However, if one follows the protocols, in all of their explicitness, those truths remain forever.

The Elder was in his late 70s and he still remembered word for word some of the things that he had heard when he was a young man, because of the protocols that he followed. He followed the protocols and he said those things and they remained.

He consistently told me that. He would always want to say, “Look at me as the example of what I’m doing. It seems that it is impossible that this could occur [verbatim memory] but I’m the living example: *because of the things that I say, the certain things that I keep in my mind stay there.*”

He said that the retention and expression are almost automatic, as if it did not even require “thought,” as we usually think of thought in the standard sense of “planning what you are going to say.” It is more of *centeredness* for what you are going to say (though “centeredness” is more my comment and not so much his); but that is what I understand him to say: more of a centeredness. And it is automatic if the protocols are followed.

That discussion suggests something very closely related to the protocols: the Elder had the authority to deal with these things and to express them in a way that was consistent with the ethos.

Absolutely; that is the authority, the protocol.

If someone says these things—teaches another, attempts to define the truth, or in fact describes “the culture”—without the authority to do so, it has no meaning?

It has no meaning and it doesn’t sustain itself.

Without authority it doesn’t sustain itself; and the thing that determines how it sustains itself, the aliveness of its sustaining itself, is time. The Elders use

time as the example: how long will a teaching last before it “powers out,” before it loses its energy.

You might want to express the endurance of it as “spiritual energy.” When I hear the term *ethos* and I try to think in my language of a way to make it understandable to me—to understand how the concept *feels*—I have to define it as *truth*. That is the definition I feel most comfortable with.

One cannot reach truth through the vehicle of deception. That is like taking a short cut. Deception in that sense is going against the authority to use something without protocols. I think that can be defined as deception, because one is bypassing the path to get to the truth. When the path itself is part of the ceremony or ritual, you are forced to function within the confines, within the domain, of truth.

Now if you’re forced to do that, then the process has to start within you. For you to grow in terms of love and spirit and feeling, you have to be true to yourself for that growth to have some sort of starting point. When one is true to oneself, through the acceptance of self, then acceptance of oneself begins to happen; it automatically occurs. Thus we get to the level of acceptance of oneself and from that point on it is an outward growth. When that begins to occur, realization of humility, being humble, manifests itself. Then and only then does the *ethos*, quietly, in purity and divinity, move within our lives.

It sustains itself; the *ethos* simply goes along. When we have got ourselves to a level where we can see the preciousness of it, we want to protect it; we have a natural tendency to do so.

We want to keep the *ethos* and our relationship with it—our living in it—precious. If one does that, one sees the limitations one possesses, one’s shortcomings, in relationship to the preciousness of the *ethos*, but the *human nature* of that relationship, and the realization that our shortcomings are included as part of the relationship. Because the Elders realize that, realize their own human natures, when they teach others they very often begin by quoting the authority of the Elders who have gone before. They do not state the authority as coming from themselves. They will say things like “This is what they used to say,” or “This is what they said.”

That is probably why Elders, the forefathers, the ancients, were and are quoted this way: “This is what has been said.” The acknowledgment of humility in the face of the power of the *ethos* reflects the natural tendency, automatically and unconsciously, to want to keep the teachings about the *ethos* in its pure state. The Elder once told me never to say that it was because of me that anything good happens. Even with that Elder it was important for him to try to remain in that one state of humility and humbleness. It is so important to stay there. They want you to remain in that place, or state of mind.

So, the Elder would imply that it wasn't because of him, it is because you and he were in the right place, in the right frame of mind, for the ethos to work.

Yes, and if anyone takes any benefit from this work, we have been vehicles for the expression of the power of the ethos.

It is not easy to try to stay at that level of humbleness and humility, particularly when one is young. In my case, I don't profess to know anything at this level, especially with something like this expression of traditional teaching which is so precious. The difficulty in trying to remain humble points to the need for prayer, the need for people to stay within prayer. Prayer is ultimately the thing we have to keep going back to.

That is what keeps us in line with the ethos in a humble way?

Yes. I am not sure, but it seems to me that perhaps the state of having a compassionate mind is making oneself a part of the ethos, or to put it more modestly, less ambitiously, and more safely, having a compassionate mind may be a movement toward it.

It is the important thing the way that you approach the ethos, the state in which you approach the ethos?

I think our discussion points to the realization that no matter what we do or what we say, the ethos will remain protected because a person has to be humble. We have no choice. Elders tell us—I've heard many times—that we are not perfect (though actually they do not use the concept of perfection), but that we can achieve the total centeredness of remaining on that path that they talk about. Because we are human beings with certain limitations. They say in Cree: *kkway eakihtek kkwayah anima eakihtek*: what really counts is the effort. That means effort in terms of being as truthful as possible, to remain in truth as much as possible. They usually end many of the talks about these teachings of humbleness, centeredness, remaining on the path, and maintaining oneself as a searcher for, and professor of, the truth, by saying, "It will take you far," or literally "Far, it will take you."

One of the principles that is evident in this text is something that the Elder consistently reiterates, but in an implicit way: the unity of the heart and mind. Because he discusses the mind as a physical thing and the heart as a physical thing, and twice he talks about the heart and mind being together, that unity must be related to the ethos too.

Absolutely. In the text he is trying to stress the importance of a learning

process that is *total*, a process of internalization and actualization within oneself in a total way. That means that a learning process is something that is felt. It is like saying of your teacher, at that state of realization that you have learned something, “I hear and feel you at the same time.”

That is another way of saying that learning must be experienced in its total sense, that when something is intellectualized it cannot be only intellectualized, but that we have to rely for learning on our total self, our whole self, our mental capacities as well as our emotional capacities.

Can you separate the mental and cognitive from the emotional in learning? Is there a distinction in the process? Isn't the process itself a single process?

The distinction is only a useful analytical distinction. The unity of the process is not just cognitive and emotional, but physical and spiritual: the total, the unity, includes all of those.

I used to hear people a generation or two older than I was talking about how things were a long time ago, and they used to say that Elders would “be afraid” of something specific that was under discussion. The specific things, in their totality, gave me the impression that the Elders were concerned about the influences of negative things penetrating the *total* consciousness of individuals. In light of what the Elder has said in this text, when I use the term *consciousness* I mean the whole thing: the conscious and subconscious mind, spatial perception, the physical, the mind, the brain and the heart; all of it. The Elders were concerned about the totality of those things and the connectedness of those things, and the fact that the domains do not exist independently, so that a negative influence existed in all domains. Here is an illustration of that connection among domains. Recently one of the Elders—an uncle of mine—and I were talking about the raising of children and the loss of the Cree language. Our discussion had begun when we both expressed concern about the many problems young people face, social problems and such things. He implied that unity of domains and the possibility of effecting change when he said that it is not hard *physically* to get up, *physically* walk a few steps, and *physically* to turn the knob on the television set to “off.”

That is all he said but it had an impact in how he said it. That told me that anything and everything has an effect on us. We have to be careful how much exposure we give to our being, to things, to environments, to situations, to circumstances. I think that is what the Elders were afraid of.

The things we give ourselves to, we become a part of and they can own us.

Yes, once those things penetrate we might get a taste for them. And the taste for them provides a false sense of security. Then we get into the addictions.

In the text the Elder talks about that. In the text he was giving a prescription for what one should do to try to be as close to compassionate mind as possible, to do the things that prepare and move an individual consistently toward that objective. Once those simple things are done consistently they become disciplined within. The doing of them does not become a burden, because you become that way; you take on that nature. You have balanced your being in terms of character. Your foundation is solid.

Refer back to the comment about the Elders being afraid of certain things: one of the ways to express what they were afraid of was, as you stated, people being owned by something. Ownership and control refer to addictions, and not just to substances but to gambling as well. An addiction is like being owned by something. Addictions are not just to substances and activities, but can also be to concepts, ideas, or issues; it could be to anything.

The text is about trying to be free and about the achievement of freedom. Perhaps compassionate mind is a free mind.

The Elder seems to be giving us that kind of direction. So am I right in summarizing that compassionate mind is both a physical and a spiritual concept, that you cannot separate the physical from the spiritual, and that there are physical ways of achieving compassionate mind or violating it? And he tells some of the negative things that a persons does. The positive methods he mentions are ceremony and prayer, and those are physical things and spiritual things at the same time?

Yes, absolutely at the same time, there is no separation between physical and spiritual. The Elder keeps going back and forth between physical and spiritual domains, and does not make a distinction or separation between the two. If a person really looks at the text, she or he will begin to see that: the Elder seems to keep going back and forth in his reference to physical and spiritual domains.

That may appear simple, but it is preface to a great deal of complexity. In order to understand the complexity, one has to attempt to approach the very state of mind the Elder is talking about. I recall one of the Elders talking to students about the Cree culture's perspective on life itself, how one should conduct one's life, and seeing the students realize the awesome nature of the amount of information that is there to try to understand. The Elder saw this and expressed it in Cree, "epskwa, pskwan." That means that there is a lot to it, that it is very detailed, immense. To talk about it would have taken a considerable amount of time because he would have to break at every point, until the students saw the elements in the context of the whole picture and then be able to get understanding. The difficulty, the immensity, was compounded because many of those students have not done the things that the Elder prescribes in the text that you and I are

considering. That means that they are already ill equipped as students. Had they come in the frame of mind prescribed in the text, they would have been equipped to learn and the complex concepts would have been much easier to grasp.

One of the things the students asked of the Elder was, “Can you make a statement or a general rule, a teaching that would really help us try to bring ourselves into focus, to try to bring ourselves in line with what you are saying, to begin to move toward being strong culturally?” And the Elder responded by saying, “Yes, live for spirit, not for flesh,” and left it at that. That is one of the ways the present text may be interpreted. You know it is interesting that many of these Elders make these statements with somewhat different emphases, and sometimes different metaphors, but they are all pointing to the same thing, to the same focal point of ethos.

People may focus on simply physical things even if those physical things have a spiritual aspect. The ceremonies may be considered to be physical things, because one can engage in the physical practice of a ceremony, or physically put oneself into a posture of prayer. Is that enough to separate it, ceremony, from how one conducts the daily life? A ceremony cannot be just physical, can it? Doesn't participation in a ceremony have to involve honest connection of heart and mind, along with the physical practice? Is that in the text?

One of the people back home was sharing an experience he had with an Elder. The Elder told him that if one does the things that all the Elders are talking about, including the positive things that are mentioned in the text that we are dealing with, the individual will *feel* it. A person will feel what might be called a divine presence in the joining of the mind and the heart as one. The point is that you will actually feel it. I heard this a long time ago and I often ponder what it means. After reading the text that the Elder has written it begins to make sense.

So far it seems as though we have been talking about implications for the way an individual deals with himself or herself. TA/hat is the implication in the text for the person's relationship with others?

I think the best way to answer that is to say that you are I and I am you. It has to do with unity and indivisibility as a principle. That can apply to unity and indivisibility amongst people.

I used to hear this when I was growing up. My grandmother began raising me when I was 11 years old. Because my grandmother was an Elder I was exposed to many of those teachings. She not only counseled and taught me, she

would also be counseling and teaching my uncles and aunts, and I would hear those teachings. I recall that she would say not to harm people, not to harm another person, because in a sense it would be harming yourself. She said that it always comes back to you anyway. That might be expressed in the Western saying, “what goes around comes around.” The teaching is based on the observation that relationships between people are inevitably reciprocal in the large scheme of things. We were small and young so the way of explaining this had to be simplified for us. I think that at the time it would have been difficult to understand that whole concept of oneness and unity of people. In an ideal situation, that concept would be taught to us in more detail later on, but when you are young the teachings are based on practicality.

Even when you are old, though, you see people that you feel a particular inclination to be one with, and others with whom you do not. Isn't the teaching “practical” for those of us who are old(er), because it is hard to conceive of “unity” with some people, isn't it?

It really is hard. But it is a principle that is observed in other traditions, isn't it? There are certainly Christian teachings associated with that as well. An example of that principle in action is the story of Jesus being struck on the face and not responding to it.

That reinforces what the Elder wrote at the end of his text, where he talks about conditions that come upon all of us, such as blindness, loss of hearing, and diseases of bones, that are the results of individual imbalance but affect us all, collectively, because of failure to follow these ways. When one individual is out of balance, we are all out of balance. That is a reinforcement of this statement of unity between people.

There is another aspect to this collectivity. Some Elders say that doing things collectively is very easy. Traditionally, many of the ceremonies that they used to hold were conducted by a large group of people. There was a requirement for unity in having to perform a ceremony in a collective way. The Elders would always say that it is much easier that way, rather than doing it oneself. The mutual help in the performance of the ceremony is a manifestation of unity, an acknowledgment that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. When one looks at Cree culture in terms of individuality and unity, one of the things that is particularly impressive is the idea and practice of connectedness, the “belonging” nature of the culture. Individuality and unity are not opposites. The whole is figured in terms of the family, not only as in the immediate family or extended

family, but as universal family, with God as the father. When that is elaborated in all its complexity there is an identity with creation. We can speak of Nature as being us.

Are there other things that follow from the text that we might have missed?

Other implications or ideas that follow from it?

I would like to share some observations that I have made as I have dealt with the text.

During the past few years I have been fortunate to have been involved in various ways in education in my own community, and I have been fortunate to learn some things, sometimes unexpectedly, in the course of my work. One of those involvements has been as a translator—though I don't consider myself to be a good translator, but there are not that many around so sometimes they have no choice but to use my services. One of the occasions for which I was translating was at a meeting of non-Indian social workers. They were discussing some of the difficult issues around foster parenting and related matters. Those issues are complex, but there was a statement made by an Elder at that meeting that, though it is very straightforward, sticks in my mind. He said "A child needs love, growing up. In all the discussions we have at this meeting we shouldn't forget that. They have to have love."

Another statement that Elders make is about the Path road. Life is often described as a path. Where does this path lead? Perhaps it is a path to enlightenment. The Elders keep telling us to keep on the path, to try to stay on the path, and they say that it is a difficult path to follow.

The Elder in this text does not use the term *path* at all, but it is there. It is implied, at least. I do not want to put words or notions in the Elder's text, but in the context of a discussion of "limitations," and in the context of all else that I have learned from Elders, I think of the limitations in connection with the path.

Sometimes when we think of the path, we think that we should have a map for it, instead of just a light that illuminates the one next step.

The path is through a training ground, perhaps; perhaps physical life on this earth is a training ground, and it is important to only go one step at a time, that we get sufficient light to take us to the next step, rather than seeing the whole road as it goes along. Perhaps that has something to do with the way we discuss the ethos, and its self-protection.

*Because we would violate the ethos, and thus ourselves in the end,
if we tried to have the whole consciousness, knowledge of the
whole path.*

We are not equipped, yet, to be able to deal with the knowledge of the whole path. I think it is because of that, when one aligns oneself in respect of compassionate mind in the doing of the physical things, a person moves that much more toward spiritual growth. So what is spiritual growth? Perhaps it is a feeling, an emotion, but one that has a physical, interactional, mental complement: perhaps the ultimate goal is for one to function totally with unconditional love.

Throughout the history of humanity, in all cultures, there have been individuals who have been able to attain that state. For one to be truly “connected,” in the domains which we have been discussing, and in a state to recognize the unity and indivisibility of humans, one has to love.

The reciprocal nature of naturally ordained relationships about the giving of love means that it comes back. Our human unity can be expressed, “I love you because you are all members of my family.”

What a tall order.

One last question about the text: the Elder says that he is going to discuss four things. Why does he say four? He doesn't point out what those four things are. It is possible to go through the text and identify four main topics, four things, but I can find no confirmation of the four things. (Note that in keeping with the principles of resonance and the structural principles involved in metaphor, the interpretation of a text such as this is not a matter that relies only on intuition. The metaphor is a system. That means that intuitions are checked and constrained by a requirement that they be coherent within the system. An idea is tentative until it is confirmed. That is the “confirmation” referred to here.)

It is interesting that he said that. I have to qualify this by prefacing my statement with “I think, and it's a big ‘I think,’” that the four things he is referring to must be more than what we can fathom right now. I think it is one of those cases in which the metaphor has to be uncovered and may take years before we actually begin to truly feel what he is saying.

What I would venture to say is that he is saying all of the things he needs to say with respect to the protocols. That is, it may have something to do with dimensional understanding that, for now in our history, we are not at the level of being able to understand. If you look at the Cree term for Cree people is “Nehyaw, Nehyawak” (singular and plural). The word “Nehyaw” can be broken down into its sound components to find root words. “Newo,” means four and “-

yaw” or “myaw” means “body.” That means “People of the four body.” Four is a metaphor of tremendous sacred significance. I suspect that it also has to do with the psyche, the subconscious, spiritual consideration, and more importantly the sacred significance of our being human beings. That is the best I can do with that question.

Does that also mean “four dimensions” or perhaps “four domains”? After the Elder introduces this idea of four, he begins by focusing on physical things; could it be that he refers to four dimensions such as physical, spiritual, mental, and—what else? I don’t know but maybe that is in there to find out at a later time.

The fourth category may be “emotional,” because he stresses the need to be in a humble state and to act in a heart-felt manner: to rely on our feelings as human beings, the feelings of compassion and love.

That may be it. But I suspect there is still more.

Epilogue

When all participants assist in a ceremony in all its aspects, what is it that motivates them to work together? It seems obvious to me that they are all functioning in that process called “mutual thinking.” Although the motivation for involvement may vary in degree, it basically comes to one focal point, *life*.

Is it, perhaps, that the reason for ceremony is necessary for the practice of collective thought? I have no answer and do not know. Perhaps at one level that is so, but I think that there is much more to it, which must involve multiple domains and multiple contexts and dimensions.

Even to keep a focus on the domain of the practice of mutual thinking, or collective thought, would create a universe of discourse. I would suspect that such a universe would include the physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional faculties involved in the human experience individually and collectively. In the text, the Elder’s reference to the “four things” that he was going to talk about is perhaps an allusion to this multidimensionality

Several years ago there was an Elder who often said profound things in his answer to questions that I posed to him. One question was not so much “a question” as a whole series of ambitious inquiries that reflected my desire to know and to understand life, and to understand how our culture looks at life and the human condition and purpose. His response was that for me to truly understand, to grow in awareness of all, my mind must be like the plume of an Eagle. (The plume is the soft downy part of the feather.)

It may be many years before I begin to comprehend the meaning of that statement, and maybe the statement is designed to effect precisely the kind of inquiry to which it has led me. Maybe the Elder knows that it may be years after

his passing on that meaning will develop and grow from life experience, study, and observation.

One thing that I am beginning to comprehend is that, in basic terms, all Elders are saying the same thing. The message is all one and the same, but expressed from many different perspectives and from multiple angles. I am sure that the stories have this same unity.

From my own experience, based on my perception and the thoughts that represent the accumulation of my involvement with a number of Elders, their teachings, and the forms that their teachings take, I would like to share some thoughts and ideas related to the text. The first is to point out that the more information and knowledge I come upon, the more obvious it has been how little, if anything, I know. The knowledge seems to be layered, like an onion.

Many years ago I assisted an Elder in some things that he wanted to do that were ceremonial in nature. He needed the assistance of a number of Elders one day and asked if I would go and see three Elders and present them with material for protocol. The Elder never told me what the protocol was, he only gave me the things to be used in the protocol. I did not realize that I was about to learn something important, useful, and beneficial for my own development and growth.

I don't remember the other events of the day but I do remember very well one Elder and what he said to me. I found that Elder sitting in his parked vehicle with his wife, directly in front of the main store in Hobbema. It was about 11:00 a.m. on a Saturday and many people were there milling around, shopping, and visiting. I parked my vehicle next to the Elder's and got out of mine. I walked over to his window and tapped on it lightly. He rolled his window down and looked at me with no expression on his face. I proceeded to give him the things I had been given to present to him and told him he was needed. He looked directly at me with a very angry expression and intense eyes, and said that I did not follow the protocol, that young people do not respect the protocols today, and that I did not know anything. By that time I felt smaller than an ant looking for a hole to crawl into because we had attracted a lot of attention.

My initial reaction was one of total embarrassment and then anger. There was no escape, as I would look even more sillier and more ridiculous if I had run or walked away. Besides, something within seemed to want to stay to experience the situation to its end. He proceeded in a loud and forceful way—yet almost lovingly as well—to tell me the protocol in its entirety. When he had finished what took only five minutes, but which seemed like two hours, his wife gave him the elbow-to-his-side gesture and angrily told him to give me a break, that I was young and naive in the ways of proper protocols.

I do not remember much of the events of that day except for that, but I do remember the protocol and have used it more times that I can remember. In many ways and in practical terms it has been the most useful information I have come upon.

Last year that Elder passed away. Reflecting then, and pondering what he had said to me at the time, I came to realize that in fact he loved me enough, in consideration for my own well-being and future, to tell me something that would benefit me beyond measure. The benefit has had a resonant effect, in that I have shared the information of protocol to very many young people who have probably needed it very much. Perhaps we will never fully realize how beneficial it has become for many people. In retrospect I am thankful to the Elder in a loving way for his compassion.

Protocol is very, very important. The transfer of authority comes with responsibility. It may take a person until he or she is at an advanced age to master the ability to assess others who are in pursuit of authority, to have “paid their dues,” so to speak, through life experience and observation. Perhaps that is why authority lies with the Elders.

Elders are truly amazing in their ability to look at an individual and determine how much that person can retain, the level at which it must be expressed, and the content that is appropriate for that person. Many times I’ve seen that glimmer in their eye, the compassionate smile or laugh that told me that they knew exactly where I was, and how I thought as an individual. They knew how far I have developed and how far—a long way—I need to go to grow and learn. Although they did tell me certain things that I could not comprehend at the time, they knew that I would eventually arrive at a point of comprehension.

During the time when I was involved with the Elder who told me about my mind and the plume of the Eagle, there was a pattern that we followed for those sessions. The Elder stayed at my home for about two weeks and every day at approximately noon, or shortly after, we would have a session that lasted approximately two to three hours. He would always end our session by saying, “That is all for now.” Those sessions were always meaningful and extremely interesting, and I would always be left feeling that I wanted more. In respect though, I would decline an extension of the session. It was during one of these very interesting and fascinating sessions that I simply could not contain myself. I asked the Elder if he would kindly continue the session. I wanted more. The Elder declined my request and said that it was too much information for my system, that I would get confused or I would later forget the valuable knowledge and it would not be useful or beneficial to me. I agreed, but went on to ask clarification of a detail he had discussed earlier. He agreed to that and began to elaborate. I then asked for clarification on that, hoping he would go back to what we were originally talking about. Before I realized it, we had spent another one hour and a half. I was elated by the experience and we ended the session for the day.

Several months later, while reflecting on our sessions, I realized that I did not remember a thing from that extended session. The Elder had been absolutely right.

Though I have had many interesting sessions with a number of Elders, none so moved me, to bring me to development in life as a Cree person, as the late Elder Louis Sunchild of the Sunchild Band. Elder Sunchild came to be more than just my Grandfather, and more than just my mentor, more than just my teacher, and more than just my friend. To talk about the person and his life I would need volumes. My involvement with this Elder was a mere eight years and in that time I have seen and I have felt.

Elder Sunchild was in his 80s when he passed on. He resided on the Sunchild Reserve just west of Rocky Mountain House. He was responsible for the creation of the reserve. It is named after him because he gathered his people together and asked the government to give him the reserve in order to provide a home for them. He selected the area and walked around the land to establish the boundaries of the reserve. His Treaty number was Treaty Number 1. Elder Sunchild had many children and a large number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Physically he was fit, strong, and trim. He consistently rose early in the morning, usually before 5 a.m. When he would spend the night at my home, I would always ask him, before we went to sleep, at what time he wanted me to wake him up. He would always laugh.

When he arrived to visit, the Elder would kiss and hug all the children and then come and give me a bear hug. On many occasions he would stroke my hair and my face and shoulders, and give me baby talk. I remember feeling very small, very loved, by this act. Many hours were spent talking together about many things. He would tell me about old times as he was growing up, what was said and what was done. Winter nights were spent telling the stories that are told only during that season.

In everything that we did he would always pray, and encourage me to do likewise.

Elder Sunchild worked at Maskwachees Cultural College for a number of years as the resident Elder. He always felt that education was a vehicle that could be used to provide knowledge of culture and language to the younger generation and to generations to come. Many considered him to be one of the best, if not the best, syllabic writer and syllabics teacher in the area.

In providing the text to me, he was focused on his concern for the transfer of knowledge to succeeding generations. The text on compassionate mind is certainly indicative of his desire for the happiness, balance, and well-being of all people.

Perhaps if we as educators, administrators, leaders, and parents were to begin seriously to consider and then to introduce a philosophy of educating for

balance, harmony, and well-being for the human condition, we would be doing something that would truly have meaning in our lives.

I believe our survival as people depends on it. We certainly have the responsibility for seeing to it, because what we do today will affect generations to come.

I think the present resident Elder at Maskwachees Cultural College put it well when he gave a talk to some university students. He said, "Close your eyes so that you can see further."

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