

Anishinaabe Bizindamoo Makak

Episode 5: November 18, 2021

Erik Redix (ER): Boozhoo Anishinaabedoog. Gibizindaan *Anishinaabe Bizindamoo Makak*. Miskwaa Anang indizhinikaaz. Migizi indoodem. Odaawaa zaaga'iganing indonjibaa. Gichi Onigamiing indaa. Ingikino'amaage Ojibwemowin Oshki Ogimaag Gikino'amaadiwigamigong.

Welcome to *Anishinaabe Bizindamoo Makak*, a program featuring Ojibwe first speakers telling stories in English and Ojibwemowin, the Ojibwe language. I'm your host, Erik Redix, and I am the Anishinaabe language Director at Oshki Ogimaag Community School on the Grand Portage Reservation. In episode five, we talk again with Maajiigwaneyaash, Dr. Gordon Jourdain, Ojibwe Language Specialist for the Fond du Lac Reservation.

So in our last interview, you mentioned how different Ojibwe communities have different teachings, different ways of doing things, and how, you know, that's, that's okay, and you know we're not supposed to think that one way is right and another way is wrong. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about that.

Gordon Jourdain (GJ): Mii sa aa'aa niin Maajiigoneyaash, Zhaawanigoneyaash, Menewekamiginang, Giiwita'aategoneb, Ba'ojanimwewidang, Biiwaapikogoneb, Bizhiw indoodem. Aya'a dash a nookomisiban...aa...ingii-waawiindamaag apane gegoo ingii nitaawigi'ig a, ingii-ombi'igo igo gaye, ingii-ombigi'ig gii-abinoojiinyiwiyaan biinash igo gii ani-kichi-ayaa'aawiyaan.

Mii dash apane gaa-kagwejimag gegoo, gegoo naanaagadawendamaan geniin. Weweni sa go ingii-waawiindamaag apane kina gegoo. Mii dash gaa-ikidod a maanaji'idid aw anishinaabe manaaji'aad ini wii-anishinaabeman, kina gegoo sa go manaajitood a'aw anishinaabe, omanaaji'igoon gewiin gakina gegoo bemiging omaa akiikaang. Gaan shnaa weweni ogii-ozhitoon a manidoo kina gegoo ge-onji-noojimoying omaa babaa-, megwaa imaa babaa-ayaaying, megwaa baa-bimaadiziying omaa akiikaang.

Niiwinoon gaana gibimaadiziiwinaan giinawand. Mii dash i gaa-ikido owe, "Weweni ogii ozhi'aan, ogii-ozhiitaa'aan iniw odanishinaabeman a'a manidoo," gii-ikido. Kina gegoo ogii miinaan epiichi-zhawenimaad. Gakina gegoo gebi-gagiiniid imaa nakake wiipi-bimaadiziniid imaa akiikaang. Mii dash iwe nakake gaa-ikidod he'ii dibishkoo go mashkimod ogii-ozhitaa-, ogii-miinaan iniw anishinaaben. Kina gegoo imaa ogii-piina'aan imaa omashkimodaang ezhi-baabezhiogoying anishinaabewiying.

Kina gegoo ogii-miinaan ge-, enendang a manidoo ge-aabajitoonid imaa nakake. Gaan shnaa ogikenimaan ezhinikaazonid manidoo, manidoo-wiinzowin odayaan jibwaa bimaajaad awiya. Ogikenimaan e-, ge-inaadiziniid imaa, mii imaa wenji-kikendand a manidoo ezhinikaazoying iye nakake manidoo-wiinzowin ayaaying: ezhi-manidoo-bimaadiziying, ezhi-manidoowaadiziying. Mii go naasaab enaadiziying a manidoo enaadizid gewiin.

Mii dash i'iw ezhi-ozhiitaa'aad iniw waapi-ayaanid imaa mii imaa dash miinawaa megwaa go imaa bi-ayaad he'ing abisaaning a gimaamaanaan bi'yaaying mii ge imaa bi-ozhiitaa'inangid a manidoo. Kina gegoo, kina gegoo ogii-, omikwendaan nakake ge

gagiiying imaa nakake bizaagijiiying imaa, bi-binabaaweg iwe nakake he-ii ge-bi-onji zhaaposhkaaying wiipi-bimaadiziying, wiipi-bagidanaamoying maamawi-nitam.

Mii dash gaa-ikidod nookomis, “Wenen giin eyaawiyamban, anishinaabewiyin, ji aanawenimad a giij-anishinaabe. Minik gagii-izhi-miigoowizid, gagii-izhi-miinigod ini anishinaaben. Gaawiin ganage bezhig anishinaabe ayaasii ge-dibenimaapan iniw, ge inaakonaapan aaniin nakake ge-izhi-bimaadizinid ini wiij-anishinaaben.

And from that, from that teaching there with my grandmother, and it's a synopsis of all the things that I've, I've heard our elders say in different lodges, the Creator loved each and every one of us, individually and the Creator, the only Creator, the one and only Creator, knew us as our spirit, long before we became a physical human being, long before our spirit occupied this vessel that we are in. The spirit loved us so much, and the analogy that my grandmother used was a *maskimod*, which would be like a sack, that the Creator, *kina imaa eta go*, placed everything inside that that sack for the Spirit. The Spirit knew that it would be, it would manifest itself inside a physical vessel where it would be able to carry those things that the Spirit gave, or the *manidoo* gave, the spirit entity. And because the Spirit knows us, *manidoo* knows us as a spirit, the *manidoo* knows exactly what our purpose in life is going to be when we come to this, to this existence that we know as our reality as human beings. So it prepares us for that, and places all the things that it the *manidoo* feels are necessary for us to accomplish and have a fulfilled and meaningful life as a human being.

In our teachings, we are told that the Spirit can never, ever, cannot ever, ever feel what it's like to be a human being, but it will know that feeling through us as we live a positive and healthy life. If we love ourselves as the Spirit loved us, the spirit will have the same experience that we do as we walk this Earth. So, we are also being programmed by the Spirit when we are inside the wombs of our of our mothers. It never, ever stops teaching us these things, until we take our, of course, we go back to where the spirits live. But it prepares us when we are in the wombs of our mothers, and then prepares that canal with the sacred water of the *ikwewag* that they carry and their teachings. And then we finally take our first breath, and we arrive as a human being with a spirit and a physical essence.

So my grandmother used to say, “Who are we as a human, to pass judgment on another human or any other life form when it was prepared by the Creator itself, fully prepared?” Each and every one of us are fully prepared to experience life and enjoy life on this Earth. And when I think about that, you know, it's more of an overarching theme on how we conduct ourselves, and being placed in different parts of the Earth is just not a mistake, but it's arbitrary. It doesn't mean too much. It doesn't mean as much as it is in knowing who we are and how we need to treat each other But geographically, and I can, I can use the analogy of language, Ojibwe language, which is a beautiful, descriptive and action oriented language. It describes who we are as Anishinaabe people generally, about 80% of the time.

And this, this is just my opinion, maybe 70% using the idea that our Earth is made out of 70% water and 30% land mass, it should follow that our language is generic, or are common to all of us. As an Ojibwe speaking community, 70% of the language would be

common amongst everybody, whereas the 20 to 30% is geographically located.

It's important to know that to our elders and the people who we come into contact with, they ask us our name, they know right away what our purpose in life is. They ask us our clan. They know what that is and where we come from. So those, those three things, right there, are critical in establishing a commonality to the person that we would call a *biwide*. We don't call each other strangers, because, as Anishinaabe, doesn't have that idea of having another human life form, or even any biological life form as being different or strange to us, because we are all interconnected and related that way. So when, when you are fully prepared by for life, and *Anishinaabe Gikendaasowin*, you recognize these things. And luckily, I was formally trained, of course, first by our Creator, and then my grandmother, and all the women that I ever came in contact with in my life as a child, my grandmothers, my aunts, my mother, my sisters and other siblings and cousins that lived in the community where I grew up, they shaped me as to be the person that I am right now, and each one of those ones that I came into contact with is, I believe, was sent by the Creator to kind of form and shape who I am.

So when you go to other communities, you have to respect that, at least I do. I respect that very much, because you are a visitor there. Even though we share 70% of the common Anishinaabe traits or characteristics or community understanding of common life experience, we still have to respect the other 20 to 30% of the language, *gikendaasowin*, or that shapes the place where you are from. So we are also recognizing our Mother Earth that way it's recognizing that the people that live in this area and have lived there for a long time, have a special relationship with our mother, the Earth, in that place, and that is what informs their language, their customs, the way they do ceremonies, and the things that they do during the ceremonies that they do, and who are we as a mere human to come and suggest that there's only one way to do something?

ER (12:08): I wonder, though, if, as an educator, if there's a little bit of a challenge where you're coming into places, or you've worked with places in different communities, where the community that you're coming to doesn't have necessarily the same strong cohort of language first speakers or people who do these ceremonies, is there a little bit of a challenge there?

GJ: I'd have to say, yes, it is a challenge at times, but I also want to say that other shades of people were challenged when they when they came to our country and noticed that we were a vibrant and rich and powerful people, that they in their wisdom, tried to institute a lot of different institutions, like education, government, churches, law and order, even going as far as suggesting that, you know, our sacred ceremonies are not to be anymore, we

are not to practice those anymore. But there was a time that Anishinaabe spoke the language very, very strongly. And I mean, Ojibwe, Anishinaabe. We are all Anishinaabe as a human species. We are all Anishinaabe people. We're just, we just speak differently. Our languages are the only things that differentiate all the Anishinaabe from one another. I'm an Ojibwe speaking Anishinaabe, there's a French speaking Anishinaabe, there's Swahili

speaking Anishinaabe. We're all Anishinaabe because we don't come from anywhere else. And I really, really, truly believe that, because that's in the teachings of our old ones in the Midwewin lodges.

But that didn't stop our people from learning to speak English as a medium, to be able to communicate to and to be able to survive in the more, I guess, Western economy, for us to be able to survive now, because most of our economy that we knew as Anishinaabe people was destroyed in the same vein to destroy us. So we had to learn that, and we did, we did very, very well. Our mothers, our sisters, our grandmothers, our great grandmothers, had to speak to us in English, but they were still informed by an Anishinaabe mind. I say that strongly because a friend of mine went through life changing experiences with doctors working on his brain to the point where he was not able to communicate with anybody and the people who know all about the body, the doctors, were contemplating and discussing whether they should unplug him or not, and there was no way that he could communicate. But he could still think in Ojibwe, he thought, "*Gego bakojibidooken!*" So our language is kept somewhere different in our brain. Our language, my grandmother always said, was a spirit. It lives inside of you, and when you speak, *ezhi-maajaamagak*, it leaves and goes somewhere else.

So even though the English language was very, very shallow, our thinking of the ones who taught us in that language was very, very deep and phenomenal. So when I go to those communities that don't have the language, they still know how to do those ceremonies, but in English, right? Their ceremonies and the way they do things, their protocol is in English. And the person that comes there that knows Ojibwemowin, when all he has to do, or she has to do is give these people the opportunity to share the teachings with, this is what I do, I know a lot of people that went to the lodge that I go to, and they've been there for 30 years, and they were given the teachings in English. When I go to the lodge, I hear it directly in Ojibwe because the one that's telling these things or sharing this knowledge is a first language of Ojibwe speaker, and I'm a first language Ojibwe speaker too, so I hear it directly. But do you think I'll remember all those 30 years? No, those ones that were there 30 years ago will remember the sequence of all those teachings, and all I have to do is go and talk to them, and they can tell me what to do, and I'll say it in Ojibwe. So if I went there, I'd be prescribing something, and Anishinaabe had, traditionally, would not do such a thing.

ER (17:30): So we're starting the new show, and I thought we'd kind of go back to a good Anishinaabe 101 type topic: the importance of *asemaa*, of our tobacco. I wonder if you could touch on that.

GJ: Our Mide Lodge is one of our formal educational institutions that kept our Ojibwe Nation strong, and a lot of our, actually all of our teachings that inform us as a democratic nation, because democracy, the idea of democracy, was taken from our clan teachings. So I was set on a journey by my mother, who was getting ready for third degree mide. And up to that point, I was raised, unknowingly, raised in a mide family with my grandmother and my mother, because they never talked about that stuff. Those were the kinds of things that, you know, the governments and the police and the laws and all those kinds of institutions were

taken away from us, taking away from us as Anishinaabe people. So they never talked about those publicly. They would do it secretly, like I could overhear them talking sometimes about that. I was always curious, but I didn't know that I grew up in a midewiwin informed family. And this is why I use the analogy that even though our mothers and grandmothers and fathers and uncles didn't speak Ojibwe, they still had that Anishinaabe philosophy of thinking and even though my mother and grandmother didn't formally talk or directly talk about Midewin with me, they lived that way and they still taught me indirectly how to be that type of *inini*.

It wasn't until my mother's last breath that she gave me her last breath and her last two tears from her body that I told her before that I was going to go find somebody to help her finish her mide, and I didn't realize that she sent me to go and find mide for myself. So I saw these I met these people in northern Minnesota, northern Wisconsin, very, very eloquent speakers in the rights of midewin, and all first language speakers, none of them were second language speakers. And I gave my tobacco to them to formally learn what the teachings were, and that is when I found out about the importance of tobacco. As a child, my grandmother would always say, "*Daga Maajiigwaneyaash, biindaakoojigen*," every time, like thunder and lightning, we could hear them in the distance, she would say, "*Maajaan niwii-biindaakoojige*." And all my life, even in my adulthood, prior to going into the formal teachings of the lodge, I had no idea what tobacco was for (laughter), but I knew enough to go put it out... not fully knowing why I was doing it. *Mii dash Manidoog ikidowag gikendaasowaad biinje'ii Midewigaanig*. Manidoo promised Anishinaabe when Anishinaabe left that place close to where the one who made all things is at. It was difficult for that spirit to leave there, because the creator is an extremely loving spirit, and how can you leave some place that is loving and caring. It's hard for our spirits, to leave there. But the Creator promised the spirit that there would be a place where we would use tobacco to be close to that, that loving *manido* again, and all we had to do was use *asemaa* to do that.

And the teaching school even further, and described a time when, when the earth was made. And that's after a long, long time of sharing the teachings of the lodge the earth was made, and finally, a being was lowered onto the earth to come and partake of what life is like as a human form on the Earth, so that one was promised the ever loving *gizhewaadiziwin* of the Creator if they used *asemaa*. And it happened to be that the first human form that was placed on this earth is the brother to *asemaa*. So *asemaa* to us in our

teachings in the lodge, is the brother to us as Anishinaabe people, and for us to be able to communicate with the Creator. The Creator placed *asemaa* on our mother, the earth, for us to have a direct communication with the Spirit, with the *manidoo*. And there is nothing on this earth, or anything that any human being can do to deter our prayers from reaching that place that *manidoo* promised he would put another, another spirit that would take care of those wishes for us. It's almost like a vessel that our prayers get carried on, to get to where, to that level of the universe that the Creator placed that Spirit to come and listen to us from. And the Creator promised that us that we would always have that direct contact with the Creator.

And the tobacco that we use in the lodges is not chemically modified or sometimes none of it has ever been touched by other than Anishinaabe people. It doesn't have the same kind of chemicals and growth hormones and things that are carcinogens, and all those things. Tobacco, that's not what we call our *asemaa*. We don't have an English word for *asemaa*. Tobacco is the one that's modified or grown with lot of chemicals in it to get us addicted to, you know, those chemicals and therefore contribute to (laughter) global economy. Our *asemaa* does not do that. Our *asemaa* is a loving, living organism that helps carry our prayers and thoughts to the Creator.

ER (25:07): When you're doing your tobacco offerings, is there a special place that you put your tobacco, or a special way that you take that tobacco?

GJ: When I was growing up, my grandmother would always say "*biinaakamigaang ashi gidasemaa*." And again, it was one of those words that I never knew what that was, *biinaakamigong*. *Biinad* is someplace that's clean and untreaded on. There has, there's no there is not any, I don't know what it is yet to this day, but it's *biinaakamigaa*, it's a clean and pure Earth where you would not see anybody, probably not walking there all the time, or animals going there to relieve themselves. But I think *biinaakamigong* means anywhere on the earth, because the Earth cleanses itself. At least it used to what it was in its pristine form and shape before it became changed by different pollutions and agriculture and all those kinds of pollutants that get placed on the Earth all the time. At one time, *biinaakamigong* would have meant just about anywhere on the Earth.

Biinaakamig would be in the water too, because the water is part of the *Aki*, so anywhere on the Earth, on the rocks, on that by the trees, *miziwe go*, because as far as I know, and in the teachings of our Lodge, we don't put out tobacco. Because it's a living form, it's a living life form, we release it and let it, release it from the containment of the packages where it's being kept in, and we put it back onto the Earth. *Biinaakamig*, we're just releasing it so that it goes back and grows and becomes part of the Earth again. But before it does that, the spiritual part of the tobacco goes around the Lodge, or the Lodge is wherever we are. There are trees standing around us all the time, everywhere we are, no matter where we are on this Earth, it's a Lodge. So when you think about it that way, the whole entire Earth is a

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Lodge. But then it goes all over those places four times, then goes straight directly to where the *manidoo* promised us and the fourth level of spirituality, the Creator placed the *Midemanidoo* for us to be able to talk to him or her. Even though in our physical understanding of our reality, there's still a spiritual essence to that. Those two things are always together, the spirit and the physical thing. They're always walking together all the time, but they never end together. A physical part of who we are goes back to the Earth, but the spirit continues to travel, every life form is that way.

ER: Miigwech for tuning into Anishinaabe Bizindamoo-makak. Support for this program comes from the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe and the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Our producer is Staci Drouillard. The theme song is by the

Stonebridge Singers. Until next time, this is Erik Redix. Giga-waabamin!

Ojibwe Transcription: Gordon Jourdain