

Mide'wiwin Origin Narrative

When Mi'nabo'zho descended to the earth to give to the Ani'shina'beg the Mide'wiwin, he left with them this chart, Mide'wigwas'. Kit'shi Man'ido saw that his people on earth were without the means of protecting themselves against disease and death, so he sent Mi'nabo'zho to give to them the sacred gift. Mi'nabo'zho appeared over the waters and while reflecting in what manner he should be able to communicate with people, he heard something laugh, just as an otter sometimes cries out. He saw something black appear upon the waters in the west which immediately disappeared beneath the surface again. Then it came up at the northern horizon, which pleased Mi'nabo'zho, as he thought he now saw someone through whom he might convey the information with which he had been charged by Ki'tshi Man'ido. When the black object disappeared beneath the waters at the north to reappear in the east, Mi'nabo'zho desired it would come to him in the middle of the waters, but it disappeared to make its reappearance in the south, where it again sank out of sight to reappear in the west when Mi'nabo'zho asked it to approach the center where there was an island, which it did.

Then Ni'gik [Otter] asked Mi'nabo'zho, "Why do you come to this place?" Then the latter said, "I have pity on the An'shina'beg and wish to give them life; Ki'tshi Mani'ido gave me the power to confer the means of protecting themselves against sickness and death, and through you I will give them Mide'wiwin, and teach them the sacred rites."

Then Mi'nabo'zho built a Mide'wigan in which he instructed the Otter in all the mysteries of the Mide'wiwin. The Otter sat before the door of the Mide'wigan four days, sunning himself, after which he approached the entrance where his progress was arrested by seeing two bad spirits guarding it. Through the powers possessed by Mi'nabo'zho he was enabled to pass these; when he entered the sacred lodge, the first object he beheld being the sacred stone against which those who were sick were to be seated, or laid, when undergoing the ceremonial of restoring them to health. He next saw a post painted red with a green band around the top. A sick man would also have to pray to the stone and to the post, when he is within the Mide'wigan, because within them would be the Mide spirits whose help he invoked.