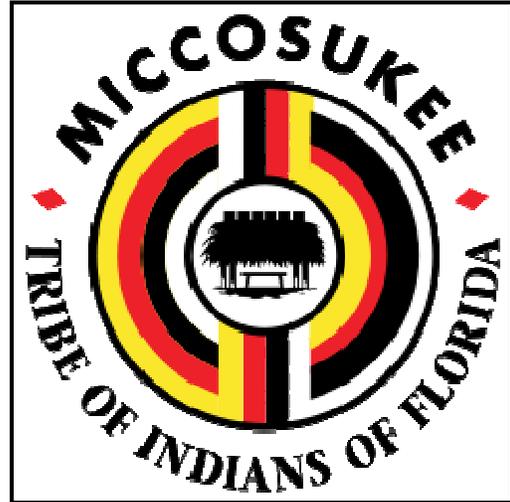


# A Colloquy with COUN-HA-CHEE of the Miccosukee Tribe

By Guido Mina di Sospiro on December 8, 2012

During both my childhood and adolescence I read countless books—some historical, most fictional—on the struggle “Red Man vs. White Man,” always rooting for the designated loser, i.e., the Native American. Despite that, here in the US I never sought to meet with a Native American. It took the Editor-in-Chief of an Italian travel magazine to make me do just that. When I lived in Miami back in the Nineties, he asked me as a favor to write an article on the Miccosukee, of Creek descent, who dwell in South Florida’s Everglades. I drove out to meet with their public relations manager, who in turn directed me to their village. There, he introduced me to various members of the tribe, including a meek and serene man, a “promulgator of the Old Ways.” As it turned out, he came from a family of healers, or medicine men, as he himself called them.



In the article I published in the magazine I did mention COUN-HA-CHEE but none of the things he revealed to me; it was just not the right readership for them. But I did tape our exchange, and transcribed every word of it.

During our colloquy COUN-HA-CHEE spoke very slowly, each word much apart from the other, *sotto voce*, sometimes down to a whisper. The reader, while reading my questions at a normal pace, should make an effort and read his words extremely slowly. Clearly, he spoke as a spokesperson with a voice *not exclusively* his. I’ve added some endnotes. It is COUN-HA-CHEE himself who uses the word “Indian.” There follows the colloquy, transcribed word for word (my questions in italics).

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“The Miccosukee Indians and maybe all of the native Americans have always had stories about the white people. We were told that when these white people arrive they would signal the beginning of the end of the Earth. And for us, we were told to recognize these people. We have, in our vocabulary, an ancient word; and in our vocabulary we have two names that are both ancient and they refer to white people. The first word is AH-NAHT-KEE. AH-NAHT-KEE in the Miccosukee language refers to ‘not humans’—an existence that resembles human but that is not human. The second word is YAHT-TAT-KEE. YAHT-TAT-KEE is a white human being.”

*“So most whites are AH-NAHT-KEE?”*

“When we see destruction being condoned, we refer to it as AH-NAHT-KEE. We refer to the condoning[i] of the killing of nature as the way of the AH-NAHT-KEE.

“We see people who live an everyday way of life such as yourself. We see people approach us, and they talk and they ask questions about Old Ways; we refer to them as YAHT-TAT-KEE. YAHT-TAT-KEE is a white human being. We feel that Old Ways of Native Americans were also taught to all children around the world, and for some reason most of the people around the world forgot them. They laid them aside for the sake of progress. Maybe it was to gather more food, maybe their thoughts were on their food, but for some reason they laid down the teachings. And when they got to the pinnacle of what they were after, they forgot to bring the teachings with them. But we feel that all the people around the world have the same teachings as the American Indians; only, they have not decided to pick them back up.”

*“Blinded by greed?”*

“For us, we were introduced to money. Money never existed here in this Land.[GMdS1] We were introduced to it in the time that the Spaniards came. We fought with the Spaniards because they were killing our people. And they couldn’t defeat us, and our Land, so they made peace with us. And they gave us money, guns, horses, cows, and traded for the natural products of this Land. For us, squash, beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn—all of the natural produce of this Land. It was food like the Spaniards never saw before. But they needed it to survive here. They did not recognize it as food, we introduced it to them. So they gave us money; we didn’t know what to do with it; so we made jewelry out of money. It was not important, and for our people we still carry on this way of thinking, that money is very bad. But today not only the Indian people see it as being bad; we even hear the white people refer to it as ‘root of all evil.’ So we assume that they also understand.

“For us, we are told that if you take a person’s existence and you follow his ways and at death you make him into a symbol or a part of life that the world cannot live without, then you are doing a very bad thing, you are creating a sickness. When human beings die you should not use that person’s spirit in place of God. So most of the time that you see Miccosukee Indians you will find that they carry very little or no money at all. And the Miccosukee Indians will tell you that the reason for this is because the Americans at death of their people have taken their faces and put them on to this piece of paper; and the piece of paper which has taken the place of religion and way of life. A piece of paper with a picture that they will kill you for, they are all willing to die for.

“So you will find the Miccosukee Indians carrying very little or no money at all, because we feel that it is carrying the ghost of a person, and an idol.”

*“And where does the spirit go when a man dies?”*

“For our people, we have been asked many times where the American Indian believes that the spirit of human beings travel to. When we tell them that we believe that there is such a place as heaven that they speak of, they will ask us, ‘Where do you believe heaven is?’ We tell them that heaven is not beyond the blue sky as you look upward. Heaven is only as far away as the air that you breathe<sup>[ii]</sup>; that the air that makes life possible is the only thing that hides heaven from the eyes of human beings; that the air that we breathe, if it is to open, you will see heaven. It hides it from us. We are told that someday the existence of air, those particles that make up air will open, split apart. And when they open, you will see heaven, and you will be able to cross.

“So for that reason the American Indians have always been very careful in what they say and what they do. The Old Ways that has taught to them to treat life as sacred is because they realize that God is *not* a billion light years away, but it is right here, and only the air is hiding it. So if you can touch the air, you are touching the very existence that hides God.”

*“Is there any way by which you can reach this Otherness without leaving your body, without dying?”*

“For our people, we are told that there is travel, but this gift they share with those who have already crossed over. If you die and you cross through the air that hides heaven you will find that the air itself is a darkness; you will have to go through this darkness. But in going through this darkness through the other side, if you choose when you are with God that you want to come back with your relations... it is possible. It’s a gift. So you can come back across and visit. But for our people, the American Indians, we find that this gift is not only recognized by American Indians, but by all people around the world. Only they don’t see it as a gift; they see it as something unnatural. They speak a lot about ghosts, ‘a ghost must be in the house, or, a ghost makes this noise,’ but they see it as something unnatural. We don’t see it as something unnatural—we see it as a gift.”

*“And can anything of the sort happen, in your experience, while the person is still alive? To be able to reach this Otherness? To break through these air particles, and then come back? Something like an altered state? Hallucinogens, special drugs prepared by the medicine man?”*

“For our people, not much of how you can see the other side is taught to us, but we are told that you can see those who left. And there is a way to see. But this way to see you will have to use an animal. But it is very bad to take such an existence just to benefit your own curiosity of what it looks like. But we are taught of how to do it, and we need an animal to do it, and we don’t sacrifice the animal—the animal has to be alive. And we will take something from the animal while it’s living and we will use it, and that makes it possible to see.

*“Have you done it?”*

“I will not go that way.”

*“Is it something only for shamans or for anybody among you?”*

“Anyone. Anyone can do it.”

*“Don’t you need a special training or a certain frame of mind?”*

“For the Miccosukee Indians, we find that it is something that no-one will ever attempt.”

*“How do you know it’s there?”*

“The culture of our people is taught through personal experiences. For myself, I didn’t need it.

“In an accident in my past I was able to cross. For me, I found myself from an accident unable to talk, unable to get up off the ground. And I saw people coming around me trying to lift me up and in the beginning I could hear them talking, ‘Are you OK? Can you stand up?’ By then I could no longer hear their voices, I could only see the movements of their mouths. As I fell back to the Earth, I lay as people stood around me. I looked up to a little small light that was flashing in the background, and this little pin light was flashing and I kept my eyes focused on it and it appeared to be growing. As I watched it, it grew and grew and pretty soon this little pin light grew to be as large as the sun. And I was thinking, ‘There are two suns!’ And this other light, this sun got so large that I couldn’t see the ends. From the light that covered the blue sky I looked to the left and I could not see the end of that light; I looked to the right, I could not see the end of that light. And as I looked directly into the light, it appeared that this gigantic light was going to crash into the earth and to destroy all that is living. The thought that I felt by looking into that was that of the impact with the Earth. I closed my eyes, and as I did I felt that light rush through my body. At the time that it rushed through my body, it pushed my hair into the ground, and I felt my hair waving through the air with force. It made my hair mingle with the Earth.

“At that point I felt a calmness, and I opened my eyes. I found myself floating above my body as a crowd was gathered around it. I looked down on it and I was thinking to myself, ‘There are two people like me—I am up here in the air and there’s another one of me in the ground...’ At that point, my body spun around and I headed the way the sun goes down. As it traveled on through the darkness, this darkness finally broke to light.

“As I got into the light, I found a place where the Earth was smooth but not flat, and covered with the light that we see here, but more beautiful. And everywhere that I looked I saw people—smiling and walking around. So those people looked up at me and they were pointing to me, and I was thinking to myself, ‘I need to be down there where those people are, that is where I belong...’ And I got the feeling that I was never going to be with them, that I was going to just hang in the air forever. Those on the ground kept pointing at me, looking at me—and all of a sudden I felt myself being pulled backwards, feet first.

“I went back through the darkness and I opened my eyes a second time: I was in an infirmary, covered with ice, and an attendant said: ‘You came back! We thought we lost you!’ [\[iii\]](#)”

“I that point I realized that there is more to this life than just walking this Earth, that there is a purpose for us here. These images I’ll never forget, and when they speak of it, I remember every second. There *is* a way to cross over. And the Miccosukee Indians can see it, but not cross, but we can see it.” *(A long pause followed. These last words have been whispered, each one very spaced apart from the preceding and following one.)*

“Do you have any other questions?” *(By then my mind was not asking any other questions, nor was my mouth.)*

*“I was wondering, going back to a more mundane level, about the beautiful tale that you told me, before I started taping, about the boy going out to hunt—one, two, three times, four times, and finally he is allowed to partake of the food, because by then he’s learned that he is hunting for the clan, for the family, not for himself. So the fact that he too can eat of his own prey comes as a surprise. That’s one 4. Then there is the other 4—the four elements you mentioned, the four logs in the fire, starting with Mother Earth, oriented towards sunup, and then, counterclockwise, the Plants, the Animals and finally us, human beings. And then there are the four colors, which are the four colors of the human races, unmixed, that is...”*

“The four sacred colors are also connected with the four directions—East, North, West and South. These four colors play an importance at healing ceremonies. For our people, we find that these four colors that we have always been using throughout the history of our people’s existence. Today we realize that what we have always been told were the most sacred of colors—because they are to be used for healing—are the colors of the human beings.”

“*You must have wondered why it is that 4 is a magical number?*” [\[iv\]](#)

“For us you find that the numbers which are most often used among the Miccosukee Indians are Two and Four. When we go hunting for food, we always go out in two; when you go into a dance for a religious ceremony, there are two dances; when you have the ceremonies for healing, you will find four elements being used. For our people you will find that any healing rituals the time given is to follow a specific fasting period—it comes in four.

“For us it has always been such a simple way of life, and to us it never seems mysterious. This way of life, we are told, must be followed; and if you do not follow it, we are told that your journey to the other side will be filled with punishment.

“For us, we hear of outside people saying that there is a heaven and that there is a hell. And they tell you that the religion that came to this Land from across the ocean spoke of

ten thousand years. We do not understand that teaching. But if it is a teaching where human beings believe in God, then we accept that teaching.

“For our people, we believe that the teaching is a gift, that it must be treated as a gift—you must take care of it and cherish it as a gift. So for Miccosukee Indians, the religion of our people has kept intact; it’s cherished; it’s protected.

“For our people, we know that there are ways in which man first exist and never go against. We understand that there is a delicate balance. That delicate balance is delicate only for man. And we understand that if we upset that delicate balance, we hurt ourselves and not hurt other life. And so we are taught that we must treat our life with great respect. When you take an animal’s life, you treat it with great respect. You honor the gift of life that was shared with you. And we are told that the animal gives itself to you. And the Miccosukee Indians when they go hunting they sing a song. They will speak the night before they go hunting of what animal they are going to look for. And when they go looking for that animal, if they come across another animal, they do not kill it, because the night before, that is not what they spoke of. They will continue on their journey in search of that animal that they spoke of. If that animal chooses to give itself to the Miccosukee Indians, it will appear. It will look at you. And it will prepare for its death. If the animal does not give itself to you, then on the way home another animal sees your flight and recognizes that you are here searching for food, and it dies give itself to you.

“For our people, we have way in which we prepare the animal. Not all of the animal is allowed to be eaten by man, or a woman. Certain parts of the animal woman cannot eat. Only a Miccosukee man. Certain parts of the animal, man or woman, is not allowed to eat. We are taught to give it as an offer of thanks to God.

“For us, we still follow these Old Ways.

“You have come to a place where we still hide many things from the outside world. The outside world we feel is not ready to know about many things that we have. We can offer them as gifts to them, but they will offer these gifts for destruction. So the American Indians as a whole have in their possessions many things that will aid mankind. But this day, mankind is not ready for them. [v]

“503 ago your ancestors came. They shot us, but they will not remember us. And today they still follow that way. The day that they show us that they are human beings, the American Indians will give *all* our secrets. Not today.

“For our people, we are told stories that we see coming true, and we sit and watch prophecies as they unfold, and we wonder what can we say to the world that can awaken them. And we find ourselves sitting and watching prophecies come to pass without saying anything at all to the world. We find that prophecies have already been set and timetables to be up to us when the end should come. We know the beginning, we know the end. And we know that it is up to man.”

*“The Mayan Calendar ends in year 2012; that would appear to be the end of this world. Some might be able to cross over into the other dimension, but most of us would be gone. Chronologically, you tell me: Do you think it is around that time?”*

“We were told that in the end the people who have come to this Land will construct paths that mark this Land to resemble a spider web, and that all of these paths that they construct will be only used as for escapement, or that they only do it in preparation for what they know is the end. They say that when they make these paths on this Land, they will make a mark on each path to show you that they are ready for war, that they are ready for the end. And this path will be marked as a way to escape that. In 1994 the American Indians, the Miccosukee, travel this Land and we see just about every paved path that the Americans build marked with a blue sign that says ‘Evacuation Path’. We are told that the end would be near.

“The sign you will look for beside that is that the Earth will start to heat up. As the Earth starts to heat up, life that you have never seen will start to appear. That life will have a rebirth. And life the way that God created it in the beginning. We will come back full circle.

“For us, when we sit and listen to these stories, we wonder if the time isn’t here. We see the roads of the American say ‘Evacuation Routes.’ We hear the world speaking of pollution that they have caused to have built over a thin layer of protection from the sun’s radiation—the intense heat; they say that they have broken a hole through it which is allowing deadly heat to come in. They are saying to us that the Earth will become like a green house. We are hearing from the scientific community life that they are creating that never existed before, but they are creating it. We are hearing from the scientists they feel that they are able, with their technology of today, to bring back dinosaurs. And we sit here and we are reminded that life will end in the way that God created it.

“When he first created life, Earth spoke; trees spoke; animals spoke. And today we are told that around the world people are finding ways to talk with animals and have animals talk back with them. And any day of the week we can turn on a television set and through animation we can see Earth talking; we can see trees talking; and we can see animals talking.

“But the last sign, we haven’t seen yet. There is one more sign that will come and that will be the last. That one we rarely speak of. We feel that it is better that world does not hear.”

*“I respect that.”*

“We go to religious ceremonies, and the religious ceremony is very special to my people. In the religious ceremonies, we have medicine bundles. And these medicine bundles tell us of the future. In these medicine bundles we carry spirits that travel from place to place and return back to the bundle. And it is through their travel that we are told what is coming in the year. For our people, more and more we find that the bundles, when

traveling, sometimes do not return. And for us that tells us that there is an imbalance—they have always returned. If you were to take a piece of the medicine bundle of the Miccosukee Indians and take it into a room and place it on a table and lock the door with no windows to the room, and you returned another day and opened that room, you would find the idol from the medicine bundle to have vanished, but if you open up the medicine bundle it will be there again. Sometimes they do not return and sometimes that makes us worry.

“For the Miccosukee Indians, we are very religious people, we believe that the Earth talks; we believe that the trees talk; and we believe that the animals talk. And we believe that we are all that’s left to exist, the ones that have the least to offer—and we have no teaching. And for us we really believe that if we don’t follow the Old Ways, we bring the timetable closer for the end of the Earth.

“For the Miccosukee Indians you will find that the change you just spoke of (*off tape, I had touched upon a burgeoning global environmental awareness*) is not a rebirth, but is the shaking of a sick person. Something needs to be done to heal that person. We feel that as a human being we have been called upon as warriors. The American Indian is a warrior. And the warriors have always existed, since the creation of the Second Human Being. But warriors never fought among each other. The reason warriors were created was to continue a fight to keep religion alive. Warriors were not created to fight and kill.

“We are warriors, but we are warriors to keep the words of God; we are not warriors to kill people. We are still here. The Miccosukee Indians are those warriors that are trying to keep religion alive.

“The day that the human being forgets the Old Ways is the day that Earth will die. So every day we speak after the Old Ways so that the Earth will stay alive.

“In the year 2012 my children will be here. And I will teach them that it is their responsibility to keep the Earth alive. As brothers to the animals, the trees—and the Earth is our Mother. We’ll have to be prepared.”<sup>[vi]</sup>

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[i] I kept my interruptions down to a minimum, for his words were music to my ears. More detachedly, it should be pointed out that the killing of nature has not only been condoned by the White (or Western) man, but encouraged.

[ii] I am reminded of Terence McKenna’s “the Otherness is with us, it runs a life parallel to ours.” (Quoting from memory.)

[iii] I was really after was their way of reaching the Otherness—the one he alluded to and that entails using an animal. Perhaps it was too soon to press him for that.

[iv] This point would deserve a treatise. C.G. Jung, for example, wrote in great detail about the concept of quaternity, alchemical and otherwise. The 4 material elements appear in various traditions, and so do the 4 cardinal directions. Then there are the 4 goals of life, the 4 stages of life, and the 4 world ages in Hinduism; the 4 requirements for practicing Vedanta; the 4 refuges in Jainism; the 4 noble truths, the 4 levels of formless realization, and the 4 universal feelings, all according to Buddhism, as well as the 4 stages of Buddhist meditation; the 4 covenants in Judaism; the 4 last things in Christianity; the 4 steps to God in Sufism; the 4 levels of existence according to the *Kabbalah*; etc. That the Miccosukee myths and practices would hinge upon the numbers 2 and 4 does not surprise me. Not only because the 4 suns are a tradition of the Native Americans, but especially because Native Americans have never stopped living in tune with nature, and two and four are exceedingly natural numbers. The interplay of opposites is at the root of life as we know it, regardless of one's cultural canons.

[v] I am persuaded that they do hold many secrets. And it is most wise to keep them from us, for Western man can only magnify the unknown, can only take magic out of context and use it to his mundane ends.

[vi] Suddenly, COUN-HA-CHEE brought back the date I had mentioned much earlier. He too confirmed the date of the end of the spiral, the beginning of a new phase.