

2: Team Building

Words of Wisdom

Man in the Maze

Ojibwe Dreamcatcher Legend

**If you have one
hundred people who
live together, and if
each one cares for
the rest, there is One
Mind.**

*Shining Arrows
Crow, 1972*



Man in the Maze

This figure is called Se:he or l'ittoi ("Big Brother") in the Tohono O'odham language. He is shown at the top of a labyrinth, or maze, and is often referred to as the "Man in the Maze".

For the Tohono O'odham, the symbol represents a person's journey through life. The twists and turns represent choices made in life; with each turn, man becomes more understanding and stronger as a person. In the middle of the maze, a person finds his/her dreams and goals. At the center (the last turn in the design), man has a final opportunity to look back upon his or her choices and path before passing to the next world. Several other tribes related to the Tohono O'odham use the same or a similar symbol, sometimes with a slightly different interpretation.

Here is how Alfretta Antone, a member of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, a Tohono O'odham tribal member, sees Se:he and the maze:

"Elder Brother lived in the maze ... and the reason why he lived in the maze was because ... I think how I'm gonna say this ... magician or oh, medicine man that can disappear, and that can do things, heal people and things like that ... that was Elder Brother ... Se:he ... they called him ... he lived in there ... but he had a lot of enemies so he made that, and to live in there people would go in there but they couldn't find him ... they would turn around and go back.

"But in real life ... when you look at the maze you start from the top and go into the maze ... your life, you go down and then you reach a place where you have to turn around ... maybe in your own life you fall, something happens in your home, you are sad, you pick yourself up and you go on through the maze ... you go on and on and on ... so many places in there you might ... maybe your child died ... or maybe somebody died, or you stop, you fall and you feel bad ... you get up, turn around and go again ... when you reach that middle of the maze ... that's when you see the Sun God and the Sun God blesses you and says you have made it ... that's where you die.

"The maze is a symbol of life ... happiness, sadness ... and you reach your goal ... there's a dream there, and you reach that dream when you get to the middle of the maze ... that's how I was told, my grandparents told me that's how the maze is."

Ojibwe Dreamcatcher Legend¹

This is the way the old Ojibwe say Spider Woman helped bring Grandfather Sun back to the people. To this day, Spider Woman will build her special lodge before dawn. If you are awake at dawn—as you should be—look for her lodge and you will see how she captured the sunrise as the light sparkles on the dew which is gathered there.

Spider Woman took care of her children, the people of the land, and she continues to do so to this day. Long ago, in the ancient world of the Ojibwe Nation, the Clans were all located in one area called Turtle Island. When the Ojibwe Nation dispersed to the four corners of North America, Spider Woman had a difficult time making journeys to all those baby cradle boards, so the mothers, sisters, and grandmothers weaved magical webs for the new babies using willow hoops and sinew. The shape of the circle represents how Grandfather Sun travels across the sky.

The dreamcatcher filters out the bad dreams and allows only good thoughts to enter into our minds when we are asleep. A small hole in the center of the dreamcatcher is where the good dreams come through. With the first rays of sunlight, the bad dreams will perish.

When we see little Spider Woman, we should not fear her, but instead respect and protect her. In honor of their origin, many dreamcatchers have eight points where the web connects to the hoop (eight points for Spider Woman's eight legs). Some people place a feather in the center of the dreamcatcher, to symbolize breath or air. From the cradle board, a baby can watch the air play with the feather and be happily entertained with the blowing feather.



¹ Adapted from <http://www.cynaunltd.com/dreamcatcher>