



## Message of Tenskwatawa As delivered by the emissary Le Maigouis (1807)

*Starting in 1805, a Shawnee prophet named Tenskwatawa led a revitalization movement that attracted thousands of followers from indigenous nations in what the US government called the Indiana Territory. From his headquarters near Greenville, Ohio, Tenskwatawa dispatched an Odawa follower, called Le Maigouis, to carry his message to Odawa and Ojibwe (a.k.a. Chippewa) communities along Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. Le Maigouis's preaching came to the attention of Josiah Dunham, a US military officer stationed in the area, who forwarded the following account of a speech of Le Maigouis's to the territorial government in Detroit. Dunham subsequently arrested Le Maigouis, viewing his preaching as seditious.*

*Throughout the following selection, Le Maigouis claims to be quoting Tenskwatawa; thus the "I" who speaks at the beginning and ending of the selection should be understood as Tenskwatawa. Much of the middle of the selection is Tenskwatawa conveying words that he heard from the Great Spirit; thus the "I" who speaks through that portion of the selection, enclosed in quotation marks, is the Great Spirit. In this selection, Le Maigouis never speaks in his own words.*

Children, I was asleep when the Great Spirit addressed himself to another spirit [and] said, "I have closed my book of accounts with man and am going to destroy the earth. But first I will awaken, from the sleep of the dead, the first man I created; he is wise, and let us hear if he has aught to say." He then awoke me and told me what he was about to do.

I looked round the world and saw my red children had greatly degenerated—that they had become scattered and miserable. When I saw this, I was grieved on their account and asked leave of the Great Spirit to come to see if I could reclaim them. I requested the Great Spirit to grant, in case they should listen to my voice, that the world might yet subsist for the period of three full lives; and my request was granted.

Now, therefore, my children, listen to my voice; it is that of the Great Spirit! If you hearken to my counsel and follow my instructions for four years, there will then be two days of darkness, during which I shall travel unseen through the land and cause the animals, such as they were formerly, when I created them, to come forth out of the earth. The Great Spirit bids me address you in his own words, which are these:

"My children, you are to have very little intercourse with the whites. They are not your fathers, as you call them, but your brethren. I am your Father. When you call me so, you do well. I am the Father of the English, of the French, of the Spaniards, and of the Indians. I created the first man, who was the common father of all these people, as well as yourselves; and it is through him, whom I have awakened from this long sleep, that I now address you. But the Americans, I did not make. They are not my children, but the children of the evil spirit. They grew from the scum of the great water when it was troubled by the evil spirit, and the froth was driven into the woods by a strong east wind. They are numerous, but I hate them. They are unjust. They have taken away your lands, which were not made for them.

"My children, the whites I placed on the other side of the great lake, that they might be a separate

people. To them I gave different manners, customs, animals, vegetables, etc., for their use. To them I have given cattle, sheep, swine, and poultry, for themselves only. You are not to keep any of these animals nor to eat their meat. To you I have given the deer, the bear, and all wild animals, and the fish that swim in the rivers, and the corn that grows in the fields, for your own use; and you are not to give your meat or your corn to the whites to eat.

“My children, you may salute the whites when you meet them but must not shake hands. You must not get drunk. It is a great sin. Your old men and chiefs may drink a little pure spirits, such as comes from Montreal. But you must not drink one drop of whiskey. It is the drink of the evil spirit. It was not made by me but by the Americans. It is poison. It makes you sick. It burns your insides. Neither are you, on any account, to eat bread. It is the food of the whites. [...]

“My children, you are indebted to the white traders. But you must pay them no more than half their credits, because they have cheated you. You must pay them in skins, guns, canoes, etc., but not in meat, corn, or sugar. You must not dress like the whites nor wear hats like them, but pluck out your hair, as in ancient times, and wear the feather of the eagle on your heads. And when the weather is not severe, you must go naked, excepting the breechcloth. And when you are clothed, it must be in skins or leather of your own dressing.

“My children, you complain that the animals of the forest are few and scattered. How shall it be otherwise? You destroy them yourselves, for their skins only, and leave their bodies to rot or give the best pieces to the whites. I am displeased when I see this and take them back to the earth, that they may not come to you again. You must kill no more animals than are necessary to feed and clothe you; and you are to keep but one dog, because by keeping too many, you starve them.

“My children, your women must not live with the traders or other white men unless they are lawfully married. But I do not like even this, because my white and red children were thus marked with different colors that they might be a separate people. [...]

“Your wise men (or conjurers) have bad medicine in their bags. They must throw away their medicine bags and, when the medicine is in the blossom, collect it fresh and pure. You must make no feast to the evil spirits of the earth, but only to the good spirits of the air. You are no more to dance the *Wabano*, nor the *Piogan* or Pipe Dance. I did not put you on the earth to dance those dances, but you are to dance naked, with your bodies painted and with the *poigamangum* (or war club) in your hand. You must all have this weapon and never leave it behind you. When you dance [thus], I shall always look on with pleasure. [...] You are, however, never to go to war against each other but to cultivate peace between your different tribes, that they may become one great people. [...]

[...] Now, my children, listen to what I say, and let it sink into your ears; it is the order of the Great Spirit. My children, you must not speak of this talk to the whites. It must be hidden from them. I am now on the earth, sent by the Great Spirit, to instruct you. Each village must send me two or more principal chiefs to represent you, that you may be taught. The bearer of this talk will point out to you the path to my wigwam [...T]he world is changed from what it was. It is broken and leans down, and as it declines, the Chippewas and all beyond will fall off and die. Therefore

you must come to see me and be instructed, in order to prevent it. Those villages which do not listen to this talk and send me two deputies will be cut off from the face of the earth.

**Source:** “Speech of Indian Chief to Various Tribes,” enclosure in J. Dunham to William Hull, May 20, 1807, *Michigan Historical Collections*, vol. 40 (Lansing: Michigan Historical Commission, 1929), 127-133, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071219797>. Public domain in the United States, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Sentence breaks adjusted for readability. Editorial emendations that were enclosed in square brackets in the source publication have been integrated directly into this presentation of the text without square brackets, in order to reduce textual clutter. Spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and typography (italics) regularized and otherwise emended in line with modern American conventions. An *or* “floating” outside parentheses has been relocated within them.

The racial labels *red* and *white(s)*, capitalized in the source publication, have been converted here to lowercase, along with many other words capitalized in the source per antiquated convention, including other terms referring to people (*children, fathers, brethren, man, women, traders, chiefs, deputies*). The term *Great Spirit* and the names of dances, in English and otherwise, are inconsistently capitalized in the source but consistently capitalized here. *Father* is capitalized here, as in the source, when referring to the Great Spirit but otherwise has been converted to lowercase. Other terms with religious overtones that are capitalized in the source, not always consistently, have been downcased for the sake of readability, including *book of accounts, the evil spirit, spirits, counsel, talk, and bearer*. The term *great lake*, capitalized in the source, has been downcased for consistency with the source’s lowercasing of *great water*. *Poigamangum* and its English translation have also been downcased.

The phrase *have had medicine* has been emended to *have bad medicine*, following the printings of this same text that appear in John Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada, and the United States of North America, in the Years 1806, 1807, and 1808* (London: T. Gillet for Richard Phillips, 1810), 1:395-403; *Revolutionary Services and Civil Life of General William Hull [...] by His Daughter, Mrs. Maria Campbell; together with The History of the Campaign of 1812 [...], by His Grandson, James Freeman Clarke* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1848), 313-320.

These edited excerpts from Le Maigouis’s speech are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite one of the source publications listed above.



© 2021 by John-Charles Duffy. Except as otherwise noted, this work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

All rights are reserved for the flag-shaped “Empire and American Religion” logo; if you alter this work, you may not reproduce the logo. Use of the Creative Commons license icon is subject to the Creative Commons Trademark Policy.