



## The Soul of the Indian

*Charles Alexander Eastman*

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## **The Soul of the Indian** Charles Alexander Eastman

The author discusses forms of ceremonial and symbolic worship, the unwritten scriptures, and the spirit world, emphasizing the universal quality and personal appeal of Native American religion.

### **The Soul of the Indian Details**

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## From Reader Review The Soul of the Indian for online ebook

### Justin Wiggins says

An amazing and sobering read published in 1911 about Sioux Native American culture, philosophy, spirituality, and the struggle between the Native Americans and Europeans. I loved this book, and Charles A. Eastman is now a hero of mine. I really appreciate my Tuscarora Native American heritage! Shalom.

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### Keith says

A wonderful, informative book written by a Dakota Sioux in the 19th Century. He had a pure, unfiltered view of the beautiful Native American Religion. i.e. Be Thankful, be united, love one another, never quarrel about religion; Worship silent, solitary and free of all self-seeking; Love of possession is a snare - share the fruits of your skill and success with less fortunate brothers - this keeps your spirit free of the clog of pride, cupidity or envy.

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### Matthew Leroe says

Boston University trained physician, Eastman presents pre-colonial American culture within the Sioux tribe as a Native himself. He knew God and morality before exposure to Christianity. He saw his religion as spiritual and natural, and the colonial tradition as materialistic and artificial. That is not to say he condemns Jesus, but the so-called followers of Him who professionalized the pulpit and sought to aggrandize an industry with signs of wealth. While the cost to the Natives was much greater than to the European colonists, I cannot help thinking what deep destruction was also done to the settlers who founded a nation upon the blood of these fellow humans. With an outward "banality of evil," what an inward suppression of compassion for the World God loves!

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### Shoma Patnaik says

I strayed off to Project Gutenberg's Native American shelf after I found *Navajo Silversmiths* on the Art one. I have to say that I'm discovering a whole wealth of excellent reading material here.

This book really spoke to me because of the ideas in it. Ohiyesa, or Charles Eastman states that he hasn't attempted to write a scholarly treatise, merely a recollection of the spirituality of his Sioux roots. I am a little wary of books that attempt to describe Native American spirituality and religion: too often they're a superficial twisting of facts to New Age ideologies without trying to really understand the people behind the faith. However, since Mr. Eastman was brought up in this culture, I feel safer taking his word for it.

It's true that the book feels idealistic and almost too poetic, but perhaps that is the cynic in me; I haven't been able to associate religion with sense. But the ideas and philosophies of the native peoples - at least of the Santé Sioux tribe that Mr. Eastman belongs to - make perfect sense to me. I was surprised at how much my personal philosophies corresponded to the ones described by Ohiyesa. One point in particular resounded with

me: *"To the untutored sage, the concentration of population was the prolific mother of all evils, moral no less than physical. He argued that food is good, while surfeit kills; that love is good, but lust destroys; and not less dreaded than the pestilence following upon crowded and unsanitary dwellings was the loss of spiritual power inseparable from too close contact with one's fellow-men."*

He refers to this as the reason why the native tribes of North America did not build cities or conquer nations and it makes perfect sense. The freedom that accompanies such a life would surely create a purer faith. As he writes, *"The native American has been generally despised by his white conquerors for his poverty and simplicity. They forget, perhaps, that his religion forbade the accumulation of wealth and the enjoyment of luxury. To him, as to other single-minded men in every age and race, from Diogenes to the brothers of Saint Francis, from the Montanists to the Shakers, the love of possessions has appeared a snare, and the burdens of a complex society a source of needless peril and temptation."*

I liked the chapters on *The Great Mystery* and *Barbarism and the Moral Code*, although the entire book was a pleasure to read. I am really no expert on Native American culture and religion, so even though the philosophy in the book made sense to me and was worthy of admiration, even emulation, I can't say how accurate it is. I don't know if the Sioux really had no priests (I would understand perfectly their reason for it) and if their Sun worship, for example, was purely symbolic. Since I have little knowledge myself, and have much more to read and learn, I will assume that this is how it actually is.

I certainly appreciate Mr. Eastman's attempt to present the beliefs of his people without pretension or attempts at exoticism. Then again, he doesn't shrink back from the transcendental, poetic nature of the faith: *"He who rides upon the rigorous wind of the north, or breathes forth His spirit upon aromatic southern airs, whose war-canoe is launched upon majestic rivers and inland seas—He needs no lesser cathedral! That solitary communion with the Unseen which was the highest expression of our religious life is partly described in the word bambeday, literally "mysterious feeling," which has been variously translated "fasting" and "dreaming." It may better be interpreted as "consciousness of the divine."*

Ohiyesa acknowledges the xenophobia of the white settlers without giving in to bitterness. He talks of a missionary who after talking of the Gospel to a tribe, refused to hear their own beliefs. He chooses to take the higher moral ground by describing them simply as "... the first missionaries, good men imbued with the narrowness of their age."

The only drawback of the book is its brevity; it ends rather abruptly. A pity, because Mr. Eastman writes beautifully, with honesty and insight: *"The logical man must either deny all miracles or none."*

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### **Lisa says**

I wanted a book which did not have a Christian theme, and found this little book in the Religious section at Project Gutenberg: *The Soul of the Indian* by Charles Alexander Eastman. It was published in 1911, and is an overview of some of the religious customs of the 'Indians' written by a Sioux who was raised in his native traditions, but later educated at Dartmouth and Boston University. This was an interesting book, as the author tried to separate the later traditions of his people from those they held before the white man came and corrupted them. The author is able, in the beginning of the book, to portray the beauty and peace of his people's silent and solitary communion with "the great mystery".

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### **Thom Swennes says**

You shouldn't judge a book by its cover and you can't judge a book by its size. Although *The Soul of the Indian* by Charles Alexander (Ohiyesa) Eastman only counts sixty-four pages, it relays much about the Sioux Indians both before and after the arrival of Europeans in North America. Many of the general western beliefs about the plains Indians are based more on prejudices than fact. I was surprised by some of these but have no doubt that the book is a truer account than most. History lovers should read this book as it shows the red man from a new perspective. This book was first published in 1911 when conflicts with the Indians were still in personal memories but now, 100 years later, the spiritual, political and traditional information in this book are more easily accepted.

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### **Suzanne says**

It's always interesting to hear experiences and culture and values first hand. This is one of those rare opportunities with the Native American culture, or at least his tribal affiliations part.

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### **Jordan Todd says**

Beautifully written. A great introduction into Native American spirituality, history, and customs.

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### **Red Haircrow says**

As I began to read "The Soul of the Indian" it was like taking a deep breath of relief, because it was as I've been taught and observed. In many ways, it is one of the most accurate accounts in the style and manner of the speaking of elders.

The point about reading books such as these is to put aside one's own beliefs and religious ideas based on one's own culture, and fully step outside to try to understand another people in a new way. Not many people seem to be able to do that, as they limit themselves into forcing an idea into terms or dogma they can more easily accept or understand.

The book is approximately 170 pages in a chapbook style. The edition I have is by Bison, 1980, typeset in an antiquated manner. It is very thought-provoking and contemplative but for all the supposed "complexities" some try to misinterpret from this work, for it us there is one simple premise: "It is as it is".

Quoting a Lakota elder I had the privilege of listening to October 2010, which is described in essays at my blog <http://redhaircrow.com/native-america...> :

"We people have mysteries. Things we cannot explain. Things we don't know how they came to be or how they stay alive but it's all part of life. For some things we have legends and tales passed down from our ancestors, and they're enough though now we have science and all kinds of stuff which explain how things work inside. Or they try to anyway. There are still mysteries and will always be. There are some things you don't need answers to in order to have a happy life or just get by even."

That's the way it's always been with the People but when the black robes came (the European settlers with their Christian religion. The Catholics are directly referred to first as "black robes" but that term came to include all Christians) they saw something they didn't understand. Well, they thought they understood it and put their own words to it, words like "evil", "wrong" and "sin". But there is no evil among the People. Things happen. People are certain ways. That's just life. We don't try to force our own thoughts or beliefs on anybody else, but that's what the black robes did to us.

Then you had some of the People converting to the black robe religion and they too tried to say certain things were "evil" and "sin", but it's not our way to judge others. It's the white man's God's way. Every body should just be how they are and be allowed to. I can be happy with very little because their definition does not apply to me. They might be unhappy with what I had. I think that's why they are so unhappy and so far from the earth. They're always looking at someone else and trying to change them when they don't really know themselves in the first place."

Refreshing simplicity.

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### **Dave Holt says**

I have a lot of respect for Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman) and many of the messages in this book which are often posted as "pull" quotes on social media. Some drawbacks are: the antique language which can't be helped (that's when he was writing), his dwelling on aspects of the culture which cannot be revived or recreated (the joyful and free childhoods of American Indian children), and the odd ending he chose for the book which makes it seem that it hasn't actually ended. In spite of these complaints, he makes an admirable presentation of Dakota Indian spirituality and this is what has immortalized his work.

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### **Rachel says**

Awesome little book! Written in 1911 by a man who was raised among his native Sioux until the age of 15, this book is a great account of the American Indians' traditions, beliefs, and lifestyle before being embellished and altered through lore and cultural influence.

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### **Karen says**

An excellent read - one of Eastman's last works, it is much more introspective than his previous publications and we really begin to see Eastman's critique of both his worlds begin to emerge in this text. In places, he is quite candid about(then revered) elements of native religious practices and stories that as he rightly points out had been developed as a result of external influences (Christianity). Chapter 3, "Ceremonial and Symbolic Worship" was of particular interest to me in regard to NA medicine/religion. Those interested in NA folklore and creation stories will also find this work of particular interest. Anyone who reads this should follow it up with his last work, "From Deep Woods to Civilization" in which he expounds on many of his critiques of the anglo society that are still rather understated in this work.

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**Keith McArthur says**

Written by a Dakota Sioux, born in 1858, so you are getting a first hand account of the subject matter. Charles went to medical school and worked help the Native Americans including those massacred at the Wounded Knee. Gave great detail of the beautiful Native American Religion.

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**Jennifer says**

I recommend this to the general reader as well as those deeply interested in indigenous history and culture. I appreciate the simplicity of the syntax, the occasional poetic expression and even a few quotable phrases. This book I read in under two hours. It is an easy overview of some captivating myths, expressed in a way which will acquaint the reader with the general mindset of the Native American Indian.

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**Derek Ost says****Good read**

An inspiring book. An eye opener to the ways of these ancient people. Inspiring to us to look at the world as sacred and spiritual.

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