



HEMISPHERES

*Excerpt from a speech called
RedTalks
by Elder Dr. Duke Redbird*

A number of years ago, I read a book called *The Master and his Emissary* by Iain McGilchrist, a fascinating exploration of the differences between the human brain's right and left hemispheres, and the effect of this phenomena on society, history and culture. As a poet I found

metaphors that I could apply to the engagement between Indigenous and Settler mentalities. The European Settlers' propensity to place emphasis on characteristics associated with the brain's left hemisphere, ruled by logic, quantitative, analytical, and detailed is in direct contrast to the Indigenous inclination to place emphasis on the characteristics associated with the brain's right hemisphere which are intuitive, creative, free-thinking, and holistic.

Was it possible that the eastern hemisphere of the earth represented the left hemisphere of the brain, and the western hemisphere of the earth represented the right hemisphere of the brain? The left-brained Europeans, functioning from quantitative, logical and analytical perspectives, were driven to create a society that was motivated by short-term thinking and defined by profit over people. The right-brained Indigenous people, on the other hand, motivated by long-term thinking and imitated nature and organized their communities using systems of biomimicry, thus creating a society that was intuitive, creative, free-thinking, qualitative, with big-picture perspectives.

Even the languages of the right-brained Indigenous people were structured differently than the binary based languages of left-brained Europeans. Binary Latin-based languages from Europe separated the world into categories, whereas binary concepts such as "either" and "or" did not exist in the right-brained world. European-based languages created ideas "carved in stone" so to speak, teaching

children and society members to categorize and witness things as being in a state of one or two mutually exclusive conditions. Languages of the right-brained Indigenous people are verb-based and include concepts that 'flow like a river'. The language does not demand children question and judge everything based on an "either/or" bias, but rather encourages children to recognize the reality that all options, as in nature, are available experiences in life.

The emphasis the left-brained European society places on creating soulless systems is driven by the desire for economic profits generated through the eternal life of the corporation. Right-brained human beings are not seeking the ever-lasting life of any individual, and certainly not that of the corporation, but rather the sustainability of Mother Earth and the health and vitality of all her creatures, which in turn guarantees a birthing place for all life into eternity.

McGilchrist posits that today the left hemisphere of the human brain is colonizing the right hemisphere of the same brain to the detriment of the collective human personality. I add to this the idea that the insatiable appetites of the settlers' pragmatic left-brained European society has created a reductionist, left-brained architecture that has colonized the right-brained Indigenous reality, not only invading their creativity, innovation, and imagination, but also leading to the degradation of the earth and threatening the diversity of life.