



Niyanemse – Trickster's Older Brother

Today I'm going to tell you a little bit about what I was taught through legend about a character whose name we are told is Niyanemse. Now, although we have no real meaning in Cree for Niyanemse, we are told it was the name of Trickster's older brother. Now I know throughout my travels and in my sharing of stories with countless kihtiyayak, Elders, I've rarely heard of this character but it's common here in northern Alberta. So, although throughout our nations, there are a lot of stories that refer to Trickster's brother, there's not a whole lot of information in the legends about Trickster's brother. Here in the north, we seem to have a lot of stories in relation to Trickster's older brother.

The first time I heard the name Niyanemse was actually from a master storyteller, Chief Billy Joe Laboucan, of the Lubicon nation. He was telling legends and I have learned many legends from him and he spoke about this character. So, I asked about Niyanemse and he started telling me all these different legends about Niyanemse and his adventures which are very similar to Trickster's stories. However they went separate ways.

I found this really interesting and as I started learning more and traveling in the circles of the carriers of our sacred stories, I heard his name come up a little bit here and there; just little pockets here and there from those who share these stories. I managed to get a good collection of stories about this older brother character that we didn't hear a lot about. So, I think this a really good instance where because our Trickster stories were so common and they were the stories people wanted to hear, I think his older brother's stories sort of got left behind and we had fewer and fewer carriers of those legends as time moves forward to now. So, I'm very grateful that these legends were passed on to me and to be able to put the pieces together to see exactly the timeline and the evolution of Niyanemse and the part he played in our traditional legends as nēhiyawak, as Cree peoples. So, I'm very proud to share the stories.

Now, from what I gather, the first time Niyanemse shows up is in [The Legend of the Rolling Head](#), where we are first introduced to Trickster when we're told through that story how he and his brother went through a terrifying experience with this rolling head, traveling across



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our great nation right from the west coast all the way to the east coast where they finally escaped the rolling head in that legend.

But we are told that because they had lost their mother and father during that whole rolling head legend, they were left alone. Trickster was the younger brother and Niyanemse was the older brother and they arrived on the east coast together and from there they started to have to live on their own.

So we were told at that time what happened. One day, Niyanemse saw this huge, huge canoe coming on the water but he didn't see any beings in it and the paddle was sort of sitting floating in the water. He got curious and as it came closer he crawled up this huge paddle and he went into the canoe and to his shock it was a giant. There was a giant sleeping in this huge canoe and it noticed him when he crawled into the canoe and it sat up and it grabbed him and when it grabbed hold of him, it tied him up and took him captive.

Now, the last sight that we're told Niyanemse had of his younger brother, Trickster, was that Trickster was running on the beach and he could see a pack of wolves going towards Trickster.

That was the last sight, we're old, that Niyanemse, the older brother, had of Trickster before being carried away by this giant. We're told this giant took Niyanemse to their island and there was nothing but giants who lived there. We're told that they were huge.

But, what happened is the giant who took him had a daughter and they were looking for a mate for his daughter. Right away, this giant's daughter fell in love with Niyanemse and wanted this little, little man to be her husband.

Now, her dad didn't want anything to do with this little being. But, he agreed that if Niyanemse could pass all of these tests he could marry his daughter and he'd be allowed to live freely amongst them. So, they went through this series of challenges and the challenges involved many different things. This is where we start to hear the story of Niyanemse facing these challenges as he was trying to prove himself to these giants. This is where we get the legend of the moose where Niyanemse puts his hand on the moose's head and how we get the handprint on the moose's head.

But you'll learn about that in the story of the moose and other challenges that Niyanemse goes through. Those are all separate legends.



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In the end, what happens is Niyanemse manages to escape because in one of the stories, the daughter is looking for him and he’s hiding under this huge canoe. He had managed to get loose of his bonds and he hid there and the giant’s daughter was looking everywhere for him.

She hears him under this canoe and goes to turn the canoe over, but Niyanemse hangs on as the canoe is being turned over and after she turns it over, she pushes it to get a better look all around the canoe. To Niyanemse’s great fortune, she manages to accidentally push it back into the water and Niyanemse sails away from these giants.

We’re told that from there what happened is all of the giants got so angry that Niyanemse escaped, they vowed to eat every single human being alive and that all they were going to eat was people. From there we get the legends of the man-eating giants.

After Niyanemse goes, he manages to go along the coast and back to where his brother was, where he had last seen Trickster on the beach with the wolves. All he finds is this pack of wolves. He goes to start killing these wolves because he’s sure that they must have, kahkiyaw mahihkana, all these wolves, must have eaten his brother.

He vows he’s going to get revenge and goes to wipe out this pack of wolves. As soon as he starts to attack them, one of the wolves is yapping and barking at him, not really attacking but looking like it’s trying to say something. So, Niyanemse stops and he’s wondering what’s wrong with this mahihkan when suddenly this mahihkan transforms into his younger brother.

During Niyanemse’s many years staying with the giants, Trickster had been granted all of these special strengths and powers and one of them was to transform himself and he transformed himself and lived amongst these wolves. Trickster explained this to Niyanemse and he told his brother that from now on I’m going to live here because men are new to this earth and I’m going to stay here and help them and guide them and try and help them along as they’re becoming a part of this world. Niyanemse agrees and tells his brother that that’s a good vocation, to look after men and walk beside them and teach them and try and help them. That’s when the two brothers split up. Trickster went to walk with all two-leggeds and to help them. Of course, we know that he goes through a lot of mischief and trial and errors himself but we follow his journey throughout all of his legends.



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At that point, we’re told that Niyanemse had heard about the vow these giants have made and he vows that his vocation is that he’s committing to wiping out those giants so that they can’t eat all of the men. All of the stories and legends about Niyanemse are about him tracking down and hunting and wiping out these giants until finally we’re told one day he finally does drive them way to the farthest north and gets rid of these giants. But those are through a series of legends.

So, that’s what I know about Trickster’s older brother and, like I said, the name we were given was Niyanemse. And, as I said, we really have no meaning for that word other than that’s Trickster’s older brother.

I’m grateful that those stories were saved and survived even though a lot of them were lost. I’m grateful for the few that I was given and I’ll be sharing some of those legends of Niyanemse with you as we’re going through all of these legends that were passed down to me.

So, watch out for those legends and learn a little bit about Niyanemse.

Kinanaskomitinawah kahkiyaw, thanks to you all.

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