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Native North American Indian Wisdom

This section is devoted to, hopefully, pre-European North American traditions. The scope of “World Faiths” does not allow the inclusion of all cultures and peoples. This compilation is not intended to cover all the many faiths but rather to mention a few from diverse areas of the world, noting their core similarities and essential agreements. Though the specific characters may have different names with diverse stories, the general lessons to be found within are much the same.

There is much we, the White conquerors of other races, can learn from looking at the original “Spiritual Path” as trodden by the Original Americans. Concepts of togetherness, fellowship, service, giving, sacrifice, prayer, worship, humility etc. are all there. Service to both God and Creation are self-evident. It is surely a sign of Christian narrow-minded intolerance that these people were condemned as soulless savages, especially by those who would take their lands and make slaves of them!

Here then are a few stories. In many ways they teach the same spiritual truths Jesus taught. Judge for yourself.

We begin with a brief rundown of basic North American traditions.

The Indigenous Peoples' Literature pages were researched and organized by Glenn Welker.

Glenn Welker describes,

“The tribes who lived on the Great Plains of North America believed that supernatural power was to be found in everything around them. It was in the wind, rain, thunder and other forces of nature. It was in the sun, moon and stars, and in animals and birds. The Sioux Indians called this all-pervading power Wakan Tanka, the Great Mystery. For the Sioux, it was Wakan Tanka who was the creator and controller of the universe, but other tribes had their own tales about how the world had come into being. According to Crow myth, for example, the whole world had originally been covered with a sheet of water. There had been nothing at all until Old Man Coyote sent down birds into the depths to fetch mud from which he formed the earth. The Pawnee believed that Tirawa, the spirit who dwelled in the highest part of the heavens, had created all things by sending his messengers, Wind, Cloud, Thunder and Lightning, to shape the world, sow seeds and make rivers. The Indians believed that these beings not only controlled the natural world, but could also use their powers to benefit mankind. If men practiced the proper rituals to honor and please the spirits, they would gain power themselves and be able to perform

great exploits in hunting and war. Gifts and prayers were offered to the spirits in order to obtain their good will and to bring happiness and prosperity to the tribe.

All sorts of customs and ceremonies were claimed to have been received from the spirits in dreams and visions. There were ceremonies to make a man invincible in battle, to help him steal horses or call buffalo. Many of these ceremonies were carried out by the warrior societies to which most of the men of the tribe belonged. The members of these societies protected their village against enemy attack and formed war parties to raid other villages. They organized communal buffalo hunts and sometimes acted as a police force to keep law and order in the camps. For their ceremonies they wore elaborate costumes and face paint and performed spectacular dances before the rest of the tribe.

For many of the Plains tribes, the most important ceremony was that held each year in spring or early summer when the tribe came together after the winter. The Sioux name for this ceremony was Dance Facing the Sun and, because of this, white men called it the Sun Dance. Despite this name, it was not held to worship the sun, but because someone who had been in trouble during the previous year had pledged to sponsor such a ceremony if the spirits came to his aid.

It was a very complicated ritual in which every movement had a special meaning. First, a Sun Dance Lodge had to be built. Then a tall tree was felled and set up in the camp. A bundle of twigs, buffalo skin and offerings were placed in the forks at the top of the tree. This was said to represent the nest of an eagle or thunderbird.

The dance itself usually lasted several days. During that time, the dancers, neither eating nor drinking, circled the pole, gazing steadfastly at its top and praying for power. Some, in order to win the sympathy of the spirits, tortured themselves, piercing their skin with skewers or cutting off a finger. Often, through hunger, pain and exhaustion, they gained the vision, which they sought.

The Indians explained the origins of such ceremonies in their myths. The Sun Dance, it was said, was first brought to the plains by a poor Orphan boy, the offspring of a star and a human girl, who traveled to the Star Country and was instructed in its mysteries by the great Sun himself.”

A question: Could this last sentence be referring to yet another birth between a girl “virgin” and a star “Holy Spirit”? To complete the metaphor; the Star Country is the Reality of the Heavenly Realms and the Instructor of its mysteries is none other than God himself. (The Sun, in this case, is not literally seen as the Creator Almighty. However, the sun is the most influential mightiest single object and is far greater than anything else one could see. Is it such a “sin” to let this most influential reality represent the most influential Reality of God?

We begin with an overview and an excerpt from the beginning of the Mik'Maq Creation story.

Glenn Welker writes,

“The Mik'Maq Creation Story has been passed down from generation to generation since time immemorial and it explains how Mik'Maq people came into existence in North America. The story tells about the relationship between the Great Spirit Creator and Human Beings and the Environment. It also explains a philosophical view of life, which

is indigenous to North America. This way of thinking is evident in the Native Languages and Cultures and in the spiritual practices.

The fact that the Mik'Maq people's language, culture and spiritualism has survived for centuries is based on the creation story. Respect for their elders has given them wisdom about life and the world around them. The strength of their youth has given them the will to survive. The love and trust of their motherhood has given them a special understanding of everyday life.

Among the Mik'Maq people, the number seven is very meaningful. There are seven districts for distinct areas, which encompasses an area of land stretching from the Gaspé coast of Quebec and includes New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. The most powerful spirit medicine is made from seven barks and roots. Seven men, representatives from each distinct area or Grand Council District sit inside a sweat-lodge smoke the pipe and burn the sweet grass. Inside the sweat lodge, the Mik'Maqs will pour water over seven, fourteen and then twenty-one heated rocks to produce hot steam. A cleansing or purification takes place. A symbolic rebirth takes place and the men give thanks to the Spirit Creator, the Sun and the Earth. They also give thanks for the first family, Glooscap, Nogami, Netaoansom, and Neganagonimgoosisgo.

ONE

GISOOLG

Gisoolg is the Great Spirit Creator who is the one who made everything. The work Gisoolg in Mik'Maq means " you have been created ". It also means " the one credited for your existence".

The word does not imply gender. Gisoolg is not a He or a She; it is not important whether the Great Spirit is a He or a She.

The Mik'Maq people do not explain how the Great Spirit came into existence only that Gisoolg is responsible for everything being where it is today. Gisoolg made everything.

TWO

NISGAM

Nisgam is the sun, which travels in a circle and owes its existence to Gisoolg. Nisgam is the giver of life. It is also a giver of light and heat.

The Mik'Maq people believe that Nisgam is responsible for the creation of the people on earth. Nisgam is Gisoolg's helper. The power of Nisgam is held with much respect between the Mik'Maq and other aboriginal peoples. Nisgam owes its existence to Gisoolg the Great Spirit Creator. [Note: Nisgam, the Sun, is not God (Gisoolg) but is simply God's helper. No one can deny that all life on earth, and indeed the very elements in the earth itself, are completely dependent on the Sun.]

THREE

OOTSITGAMOO

Ootsitgamoo is the earth or area of land upon which the Mik'Maq people walk and share its abundant resources with the animals and plants. In the Mik'Maq language Oetsgitpogooin means "the person or individual who stand upon this surface", or "the one who is given life upon this surface of land". Ootsitgamoo refers to the Mik'Maq world, which encompasses all the area where the Mik'Maq people can travel or have traveled upon.

Ootsitgamoo was created by Gisoolg and was placed in the center of the circular path of Nisgam, [This ancient story places the sun as circling the "Land of the Mik'Maq" or earth.] the sun. Nisgam was given the responsibility of watching over the Mik'Maq world or Ootsitgamoo. Nisgam shines bright light upon Ootsitgamoo as it passes around and this brought the days and nights.

FOUR

GLOOSCAP

After the Mik'Maq world was created and after the animals, birds and plants were placed on the surface, Gisoolg caused a bolt of lightening to hit the surface of Ootsitgamoo. This bolt of lightning caused the formation of an image of a human body shaped out of sand. It was Glooscap who was first shaped out of the basic element of the Mik'Maq world, sand.

Gisoolg unleashed another bolt of lightening which gave life to Glooscap but yet he could not move. He was stuck to the ground only to watch the world go by and Nisgam travel across the sky everyday. Glooscap watched the animals; the birds and the plants grow and pass around him. He asked Nisgam to give him freedom to move about the Mik'Maq world.

While Glooscap was still unable to move, he was lying on his back. His head was facing the direction of the rising sun, east, Oetjgoabaniag or Oetjibanoo. In Mik'Maq these words mean "where the sun comes up " and "where the summer weather comes from" respectively. His feet were in the direction of the setting sun or Oetgatsenoog. Other Mik'Maq words for the west are Oeloesenoo, "where the sun settles into a hallow" or Etgesnoog "where the cold winds come from". Glooscap's right hand was pointed in the direction of the north or Oatnoog. His left hand was in the direction of the south or Ongoetasnoog. So it was the third big blast of lightening that caused Glooscap to become free and to be able to stand on the surface of the earth.

After Glooscap stood up on his feet, he turned around in a full circle seven times. He then looked toward the sky and gave thanks to Gisoolg for giving him life. He looked down to the earth or the ground and gave thanks to Ootsigamoo for offering its sand for Glooscap's creation. He looked within himself and gave thanks to Nisgam for giving him his soul and spirit.

Glooscap then gave thanks to the four directions east, north, west and south. In all he gave his heartfelt thanks to the seven directions.

[Here we see a beautiful example of “double meanings” found so often in what is considered Holy Writings. Nisgam is not only the giver of the physical life of the entire world, as is our star, but the name “Nisgam” also applies to none other than the Holy Spirit. God “Gisoolg” creates the form of man but Glooscap cannot move until Nisgam is offered “sand” from the Ootsigamoo or Mik'Maq Spirit World. Then Glooscap looks within himself and give thanks to Nisgam for giving him his soul and spirit. In other words Glooscap “Man” is a spiritual being and needed his spirit to traverse the pathways of the Ootsigamoo spiritual world.

This is the important lesson. The erroneous literal interpretation of the sun circling the earth is actually rather irrelevant. (Think of how this story parallels the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. Also, apply the above double meanings to the terms “life” and “death” and “born again”

But there is more- a lot more.]

Glooscap then traveled to the direction of the setting sun until he came to the ocean. He then went south until the land narrowed and he came to the ocean. He then went south until the land narrowed and he could see two oceans on either side. He again traveled back to where he started from and continued towards the north to the land of ice and snow. Later he came back to the east where he decided to stay. It is where he came into existence. He again watched the animals, the birds and the plants. He watched the water and the sky. Gisoolg taught him to watch and learn about the world. Glooscap watched but he could not disturb the world around him. He finally asked Gisoolg and Nisgam, what was the purpose of his existence. He was told that he would meet someone soon.

[After Glooscap returns from his wandering, returning to the east where he came into existence. God teaches him to watch and learn about the world. When Glooscap attains the awareness to ask the holy spirit the philosophical question of the purpose of his existence he is told he will meet someone.]

FIVE

NOGAMI

One day when Glooscap was traveling in the east he came upon a very old woman. Glooscap asked the old woman how she arrived to the Mik'Maq world. The old woman introduced herself as Nogami. She said to Glooscap, "I am your grandmother". Nogami said that she owes her existence to the rock, the dew and Nisgam, the Sun. She went on to explain that on one chilly morning a rock became covered with dew because it was sitting in a low valley. By midday when the sun was most powerful, the rock got warm and then hot. With the power of Nisgam, the sun, Gisoolg's helper, the rock was given a body of an old woman. This old woman was Nogami, Glooscap's grandmother.

Nogami told Glooscap that she comes to the Mik'Maq world as an old woman, already very wise and knowledgeable. She further explained that Glooscap would gain spiritual strength by listening to and having great respect for his grandmother. [It seems Nogami was as a cold rock which, having been heated by the mid-day sun, was transformed into the body of a very wise ageless woman. If Glooscap listened to and respected Nogami he would gain spiritual strength. (In many scriptures the terms "cold", "warmth", "light" and "dark" are used allegorically to describe the opposites of "knowledge and ignorance", "waywardness and obedience", "strength and weakness". The "hotness" of the rock would attest to the spiritual potency of Nogami. The fact she appeared "already old and wise" would attest to her immortality. This would lead one to suspect she was a vessel of the "Word of God" to Glooscap- maybe the same Reality as the Angel Gabriel appearing to Muhammed or the "White Dove" descending upon Jesus?] Glooscap was so glad for his grandmother's arrival to the Mik'Maq world he called upon Abistanooj, a marten swimming in the river, to come ashore. Abistanooj did what Glooscap had asked him to do. Abistanooj came to the shore where Glooscap and Nogami were standing. Glooscap asked Abistanooj to give up his life so that he and his grandmother could live. [Does this parallel the sacrifice of the early believers of other Faiths? Also, did not Jesus offer up his life on the cross so we all could live? Did not Baha'u'llah consent to be bound in chains that the whole world may attain unto true liberty and everlasting life?] Abistanooj agreed. Nogami then took Abistanooj and quickly snapped his neck. She placed him on the ground. Glooscap for the first time asked Gisoolg to use his power to give life back to Abistanooj because he did not want to be in disfavor with the animals.

Because of marten's sacrifice, Glooscap referred to all the animals as his brothers and sisters from that point on. Nogami added that the animals would always be in the world to provide food, clothing, tools, and shelter. Abistanooj went back to the river and in his place lay another marten. Glooscap and Abistanooj will become friends and brothers forever.

Nogami cleaned the animal to get it ready for eating. She gathered the still hot sparks for the lightening, which hit the ground when Glooscap was given life. She placed dry wood over the coals to make a fire. This fire became the Great Spirit Fire and later got to be known as the Great Council Fire.

The first feast of meat was cooked over the Great Fire, or Ekjibuctou. Glooscap relied on his grandmother for her survival, her knowledge and her wisdom. Since Nogami was old and wise, Glooscap learned to respect her for her knowledge. They learned to respect each other for their continued interdependence and continued existence...

Here is a complete Native American story. It expresses the mistake we all make when traditions are followed blindly and thus cause disunity between the diverse races of the earth. All were given special gifts. All were useful in their time. But now the forefathers are dead. The time is now, not the past.

The "Ancient One" seems to refer to God. Elders would be the same as priests or other authoritative figures among the Indians. "Mothers and fathers" among the Black race would signify traditions handed down from one generation to the next. Teachers, or Gurus, represent another style of culture found among the Hindus and Buddhists, while "The Book" or Bible of the White people tells them how to relate to God. The moral of this story is clear. All people must, independently of respective traditions and authority, look for their own vision and pray within their own heart.

The Indigenous Peoples' Literature pages were researched and organized by Glenn Welker.

The Ancient One

by Bearwalker

Ancient One sat in the shade of his tree in front of his cave. Red People came to him and he said to Red People, "Tell me your vision."

And Red People answered, "The elders have told us to pray in this manner, and that manner, and it is important that only we pray as we have been taught for this has been handed down to us by the elders."

"Hmmm," said the Ancient One.

Then Black People came to him and he said to Black People, "Tell me your vision."

And Black People answered, "Our mothers have said to go to this building and that building and pray in this manner and that manner. And our fathers have

said to bow in this manner and that manner when we pray. And it is important that we do only this when we pray."

"Hmmm," said the Ancient One.

Then Yellow People came to him and he said to Yellow People, "Tell me your vision."

And Yellow People answered, "Our teachers have told us to sit in this manner and that manner and to say this thing and that thing when we pray. And it is important that we do only this when we pray."

"Hmmm," said the Ancient One.

Then White People came to him and he said to White People, "Tell me your vision."

And White People answered, "Our Book has told us to pray in this way and that way and to do this thing and that thing, and it is very important that we do this when we pray."

"Hmmm," said the Ancient One.

Then Ancient One spoke to the Earth and said, "Have you given the people a vision?" And the Earth said, "Yes, a special gift for each one, but the people were so busy speaking and arguing about which way is right they could not see the gift I gave each one of them." And the Ancient One asked same question of Water and Fire and Air and got the same answer. Then Ancient One asked Animal, and Bird, and Insect, and Tree, and Flower, and Sky, and Moon, and Sun, and Stars, and all of the other Spirits and each told him the same.

Ancient One thought this was very sad. He called Red People, Black People, Yellow People, and White People to him and said to them. "The ways taught to you by your Elders, and your Mothers and Fathers, and Teachers, and Books are sacred. It is good that you respect those ways, for they are the ways of your ancestors. But the ancestors no longer walk on the Face of the Earth

Mother. You have forgotten your own Vision. Your Vision is right for you but no one else. Now each of you must pray for your own Visions, and be still enough to see them, so you can follow the way of the heart. It is a hard way. It is a good way.

This next story tells how the original people all lived together as one tribe. Then, as time goes on and growing numbers lead to overcrowding, portions of the tribe move across the river. Arguments ensue over a “white dog” kept by the Chief- whether it was good or evil.

Suffice it to say, this is the beginning of a trend. At the end of the story the Chief is accidentally drowned. The bands feel remorse at the loss of their leader and want to reconcile their differences. At this point they find themselves speaking different languages preventing them from communicating. Is this a parallel with the “Tower of Babel in the Bible?”

Godasiyo the Woman Chief

At the beginning of time when America was new, a woman chief named Godasiyo ruled over an Indian village beside a large river in the East. In those days all the tribes spoke one language and lived in harmony and peace. Because Godasiyo was a wise and progressive chief, many people came from faraway places to live in her village, and they had no difficulty understanding one another.

At last the village grew so large that half the people lived on the north side of the river, and half on the south side. They spent much time canoeing back and forth to visit, attend dances, and exchange gifts of venison, hides, furs, and dried fruits and berries. The tribal council house was on the south side, which made it necessary for those who lived on the north bank to make frequent canoe trips to consult with their chief. Some complained about this, and to make it easier for everybody to cross the rapid stream, Godasiyo ordered a bridge to be built of saplings and tree limbs carefully fastened together. This bridge brought the tribe close together again, and the people praised Godasiyo for her wisdom.

Not long after this, a white dog appeared in the village, and Godasiyo claimed it for her own. Everywhere the chief went the dog followed her, and the people on the north side of the river became jealous of the animal. They spread stories that the dog was possessed by an evil spirit that would bring

harm to the tribe. One day a delegation from the north bank crossed the bridge to the council house and demanded that *Godasiyo* kill the white dog.

When she refused to do so, the delegates returned to their side of the river, and that night they destroyed the bridge.

From that time the people on the north bank and those on the south bank began to distrust each other. The tribe divided into two factions, one renouncing *Godasiyo* as their chief, the other supporting her. Bad feelings between them grew so deep that *Godasiyo* foresaw that the next step would surely lead to fighting and war. Hoping to avoid bloodshed, she called all members of the tribe who supported her to a meeting in the council house.

"Our people," she said, "are divided by more than a river. No longer is there goodwill and contentment among us. Not wishing to see brother fight against brother, I propose that those who recognize me as their chief follow me westward up the great river to build a new village."

Almost everyone who attended the council meeting agreed to follow *Godasiyo* westward. In preparation for the migration, they built many canoes of birch bark. Two young men who had been friendly rivals in canoe races volunteered to construct a special watercraft for their chief. With strong poles they fastened two large canoes together and then built a platform, which extended over the canoes and the space between them. Upon this platform was a seat for *Godasiyo* and places to store her clothing, extra leggings, belts, robes, moccasins, mantles, caps, awls, needles and adornments.

At last everything was ready. *Godasiyo* took her seat on the platform with the white dog beside her, and the two young men who had built the craft began paddling the double canoes beneath. Behind them the chief's followers and defenders launched their own canoes, which contained all their belongings. This flotilla of canoes covered the shining waters as far as anyone could see up and down the river.

After they had paddled a long distance, they came to a fork in the river. *Godasiyo* ordered the two young canoeists to stop in the middle of the river until the others caught up with them. In a few minutes the flotilla was divided, half of the canoes on her left, the others on her right.

The chief and the people on each side of her began to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the two forks in the river. Some wanted to go one way, some preferred the other way. The arguments grew heated with anger. Godasiyo said that she would take whichever fork her people chose, but they could agree on neither. Finally those on the right turned the prows of their canoes up the right channel, while those on the left began paddling up the left channel. And so the tribe began to separate.

When this movement started, the two young men paddling the two canoes carrying Godasiyo's float disagreed as to which fork they should take, and they fell into a violent quarrel. The canoeist on the right thrust his paddle into the water and started toward the right, and at the same time the one on the left swung his canoe toward the left. Suddenly Godasiyo's platform slipped off its supports and collapsed into the river, carrying her with it.

Hearing the loud splash, the people on both sides turned their canoes around and tried to rescue their beloved chief. But she and the white dog, the platform, and all her belongings had sunk to the bottom, and they could see nothing but fish swimming in the clear waters.

Dismayed by this tragic happening, the people of the two divisions began to try to talk to each other, but even though they shouted words back and forth, those on the right could not understand the people on the left, and those on the left could not understand the people on the right. When Godasiyo drowned in the great river her people's language had become changed. This was how it was that the Indians were divided into many tribes spreading across America, each of them speaking a different language.

Home page: "home site" <http://onenessbecomesus.com>

Here is link to American Indian stories. There is a lot here.

<http://www.indians.org/welker/legend.htm>