

## MI'KMAW CULTURE – SPIRITUALITY

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### MI'KMAW SPIRITUALITY 101



Like most Native American beliefs, the Mi'kmaq traditional spirituality is animistic. This does NOT mean that we worship animals - the term 'animism' means that we recognize and acknowledge the living spirit within all things. As one would expect, this encompasses the entire animal kingdom, but we also acknowledge the spirit within plants, and within the rocks and waters of our world. We also do not 'worship' these things. Instead, we recognize that their spirits and our own are akin to each other, and we treat these spirits with the same respect we

wish for ourselves. As in many Native American traditions, this respect is expressed verbally with the phrase "All My Relations," which acknowledges our connection with all things around us. In Mi'kmawisimk, this translates as *Msi't No'kmaq* ("Mm-sit Noh-goh-mah") which is one of the most meaningful phrases in the language.

In practice, the respect is expressed in the way we deal with the world around us. We will not kill an animal unless we are in danger, or require it for food, and then we give humble thanks and an offering (usually tobacco) to its spirit for giving its life for us. In exactly the same way, we will not kill a plant unless we have need of it for some purpose, and again we will make an offering in recognition of its sacrifice. In fact, we will make an offering to Mother Earth if we dig a hole, in recognition of the fact that we are disturbing her skin. Native spirituality demands that we recognize our place in the world around us, and never forget that we are surrounded by other beings who were created by the same supreme being that created us, and are just as deserving of life as we are. Stated simply, we take nothing we don't need, we waste nothing, and we offer thanks for everything we do take.

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### THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In many Native American beliefs, the supreme being is referred to as Creator or as the Great Spirit. In the Mi'kmaq language, these translate respectively as *Kisu'lk* ("gee-soolg") and *Kji Niskam* ("jee nis-gam"). *Kisu'lk* created the world for us to come to, in order to grow and to heal as spirits through the experiences we have as humans. Each of us has a particular purpose or goal when we come here, and our lives will be steered in such a way that the experiences we require will be made to happen. We will meet certain people, or be present at a particular place and time to witness a certain event. However, we always have free will, so we can choose to

benefit from our experiences or not, and we can resist the urges that try to steer us in the right direction. If we make it through an entire lifetime without accomplishing the things we need to accomplish, we simply come back in a new body to try again. In most cases, the return is virtually immediate.

For each of us, the human experience will be different, because our spiritual needs are different, as are the tasks that are required of us. For some, destiny may require that they be a Chief, while others will be an ordinary member of the village. In either case, these are the best possible destinies for these spirits, and to turn aside from their paths means that they will not be doing what is required to accomplish whatever it is they need. However, in almost all cases it is possible to find that preferred road again. If a person realizes that they are off-track and wishes to return to their path, help is provided by the spirits to make that happen. Once again, the right person will show up, or another opportunity will arise to have a particular learning experience that was missed previously. Once you are walking your intended path, you find that all things you need (but not necessarily those you want!) are made available to you.

Once we have progressed in whatever manner we required, we return to our spirit form forever. At that point, we may take up tasks that help the people on Earth in some way. It takes some time to completely cross over to the spirit realm, because we need time to mourn the loss of our earthly life, just as those we leave behind must mourn us. In addition, we need to re-learn what it is to be a spirit. The time required for this is slightly different for each person, but tradition requires a waiting period of one year. At this time the Death Feast is held for the spirit of the person who has left.

It is possible, however, for a spirit to mess up so badly on Earth that it is beyond redemption. This usually involves doing drastic harm of some sort to the beings around you. However, like most Native American beliefs, Mi'kmaw spiritual tradition does not include a concept equivalent to the Christian Hell. If the spirits believe that a person is totally beyond hope, that person's spirit simply ceases to exist upon their death.

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## **TRADITIONS AND CEREMONIES:**

Follow these links to learn more about various traditions and ceremonies:

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- [The Medicine Wheel](#)
- [The Talking Circle](#)
- [The Sweat Lodge](#)
- [Fasting](#)
- [The Sacred Pipe](#)
- [The Role of Women](#)
- [Personal Spirituality](#)