

Mi'kmaq Creation Story

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The Mi'kmaq people have been gathering together around fires. And when we gather together, we hear the stories from our old people. And the stories talk about the importance and the meaning of the number 7.

Life began with the number 7. First, there was the Giver of Life, who made everything. Then there was the sun, we call Nisgam, our Grandfather. And it's the sun that gives us our shadows, and it's important that we have shadows. And they are our spirits, it gives us our lifeblood. And then, the third entity was the Earth, Ootsitgamoo. And upon the Earth, all life is given to us from our Mother Earth we call Oetsigitpogoin. Not too long after everything was created, the Life-Giver caused a bolt of lightning to strike and hit the earth. It formed the shape of a person. The head was in the direction of the rising sun. And the arms were outstretched and the feet were in the direction of the setting sun.

It was not until the second bolt of lightning that hit the earth, that the first one who spoke, we call Gellulaskiv in our language, Glooscap. He was given his toes, his fingers, his hands and he was given 7 sacred parts to his head. He had to listen to his world. When we are born, the first thing we hear is our mother's heartbeat. Also Glooscap was given his eyes, so he could look and see his world around him. He also was given two holes in his nose, from there, he sensed his place in this world. He also was given his mouth, to drink the water that is in abundance for everybody. Also to be able to share the food that we eat, that comes from Mother Earth. We take the medicines that we gather from the animals and the birds and the plants and the trees. And last that came from Glooscap's mouth was words.

And our Elders teach us that if we can listen first and look and sense and share our food, our medicines, our water and the air and then to be able to speak. Then in this way, we have been able to honour and give respect to all life and everything around us.

So Glooscap was still lying on the earth, because it was not until the third bolt of lightning that hit the earth that he was given his freedom. And he stood up and he said: "Gisoolg, Oh Giver of Life," He said. "thank you for giving me my life. Grandfather sun, thank you for giving me my shadow, my heart, my lungs and my life, my blood. And Mother Earth, thank you for giving me all life that I need to continue to survive and to live. Thank you for the birds that fly in the sky, the trees and the plants, the animals and the fish that are in the waters.

So Glooscap now started to explore his world around him. He travelled to the setting sun, until he arrived at some water. And then he travelled South and then he came back to the North the land of the ice and snow. And he turned around and wanted to go back to the East where he was given his life. And he came to the place where the sparks were still left over from the bolt of lightning that caused his creation. He was looking at the sparks and he saw an eagle soaring. It was flying around in a circle, slowly coming down and descending. Finally, the eagle landed in front of him. And the eagle said: "I am Gipu, I come with a message from the great spirit, Gisoolg." He said; "I have come to tell you that you will be joined by your family, to help you understand your place in this world." And as the eagle was flying up, a feather fell. Glooscap picked it up. And he looked up at the eagle and he said: "This is going to be my reminder and my strength, my connection to the Great Spirit, and the eagle, the messenger."

And so as he was hanging onto the eagle feather, he turned around. He saw an old woman sitting on a rock; silver hair was shining and glittering. "I am your grandmother." She said. "I owe my existence from this rock on the ground. Early this morning, dew formed over this rock and with the help of the Life-Giver, the Shadow-Giver and Mother Earth, they gave me a life of an old woman, already wise and knowledgeable." She said: "I will teach you all there is to know about the animals, the birds, the plants, the trees and the fish. Then you will be able to gain your life from there."

Glooscap was happy that his Grandmother came to join him, because now he was going to be taught about everything there was to surviving on the earth, because she was old and wise and very knowledgeable. So Glooscap, since he was so happy, he called upon an animal: "Abistanooj, he said, come here, my brother." Abistanooj came, he was the marten. "What do you want, my brother." He said: "I want to ask you if you can give up your life so that Grandmother and I can continue to live. We will be able to get clothes from your skin, food from your meat and tools from the bones and medicines from inside." Abistanooj said: "Take my life, Glooscap."

So, Grandmother grabbed Abistanooj and snapped his neck, while Glooscap looked up and said: "Oh, Gesulk, forgive me for taking the life of an animal, my brother. Give us strength so that we can survive and continue to live. Glooscap was happy that the animal had given up his life. And Grandmother told Glooscap: "Gather 7 sparks that are leftover from the bolt of lightning. Bring 7 pieces of wood, put them on those sparks, and with your eagle feather, light the fire. This is our Jiwukto, our great spirit fire. And so there, Grandmother cooked Abistanooj the meat, to celebrate Grandmother's arrival to the world.

Glooscap one day decided he would walk down to the water. As he was walking along these sweet smelling grass, a young man stood up in front of him. He was tall and he had long hair and white sparkling eyes. "Who are you, where did you come from?" He said: "I am you sister's son, Netaoansom. Far out in the ocean, Widjosin the whirlwind caused the water to foam up and foam began to form on top of the water, and finally was blowing along the sand, and it rested on this tall, sweet smelling grass. And with the help of the Life-Giver and the Shadow-Giver and Mother Earth, they gave me a life of a young man. I have strength in my arms and my legs. I can run and help Grandmother and you. I have vision. With my eyes, I can see far away into the future. You will be able to be guided by my strength, my vision. And I also am gifted with the spirit to guide you."

So Glooscap was happy that his nephew came into the world. He called upon the fish from the waters to come ashore, because he did not want to bother the animals anymore. The fish came ashore. And he told his nephew: "Gather the fish and bring them to Grandmother, because it's the fish that will give us food and medicine and tools." So, they had a feast of fish to celebrate Glooscap's nephew's arrival to the world.

And one day, as he was sitting by the fire, a woman came and sat beside him. She put her arm around him and said: "Are you cold my son?" And he looked at her and he said: "Who are you? Where do you come from?" She said: "I am your mother." She said: "I owe my existence to the leaf on the tree that fell to the ground. And early this morning, dew formed over this leaf; and with the help of the Life-Giver, Grandfather sun, and Mother Earth, gave me a life of a woman. "She said: I bring life into this world. I bring all the colours of the blues of the skies and the yellows of the sun, to form together the greens of the grass and the forest. I bring the black of the night, the white of the snow, the red of the earth, the colour of the rainbow. And I bring strength and understanding for my children, that they will continue to

survive and to live, and to understand one another and to share and rely on each other.” So Glooscap was happy that his mother came into the world. He called upon his nephew to gather the food from the plants and the trees and the roots and bring them together so that Grandmother prepared a feast, so they could celebrate his mother’s arrival to the world.

And so one day, after they all ate and celebrated and were living their lives, the eagle came back. And he said: “I bring another message. The Great Spirit tells us that you and Grandmother have to leave this world, and you have to go to the land of the spirits. But you have to make sure that the fire does not go out. Instruct your mother and your nephew to look after that fire.”

“Out of the fire, 7 sparks will fly and when they land on the ground, 7 women will be created. 7 more sparks will fly out of the fire, and of these sparks, 7 men will be created. And these 7 women and 7 men will come together to form the first 7 families and go off in 7 different directions. The Mi’kmaq are one of these 7 original families. When the Mi’kmaq reach their territory, they later will split up into 7 clans, each having their own fires or mawiomies. After the passing of 7 winters, all of the families will once again gather at the sight of the original great fire. There they will honour the first 4 levels of creation by bringing together all their fires to form, once again, the Great Spirit fire or Ekjibuctou.”

To honour Glooscap’s grandmother, Nogami’s arrival was celebrated with a sweat lodge ceremony. To make a sweat lodge, 7 large animal skins are placed over a dome, shaped out of 7 saplings and red-hot rocks are placed inside the centre of the lodge. Inside, representatives from the 7 original families pray and sing, and together they give thanks for the gift of life and they ask for forgiveness for taking the life of animals, birds, trees and fish. There are 4 rounds to give thanks to the 7 levels of creation. 7 rocks are taken from the Great Spirit fire and placed inside the lodge. Then 7 more rocks are brought to honour the 7 original families. Then 7 more rocks are brought inside to honour the 7 clans. Then 7 more rocks to honour the 7 sacred medicines. This is what the Mi’kmaq sweat lodge ceremony is about.

To honour Glooscap’s nephew, we braid the sweetgrass, the hair of Mother Earth. We light the sweetgrass on the Great Spirit fire and offer the smoke to the 7 sacred directions. With the smoke, we cleanse our ears for understanding, our eyes to look from the goodness of our hearts, our nose to sense our place in the world and our mouth so that we will share the water, the medicine and food which comes from Mother Earth, and then to ensure that we speak with kindness, from our hearts.

To honour Glooscap’s mother, who came from the leaf of a tree, the leaf that we burn as tobacco, we offer tobacco 7 times to the Great Spirit fire, to give thanks to the 7 levels of creation. In order to make everything more meaningful, we take the stones from which Nogami or Grandmother comes from and shape it into a sacred pipe bowl and attach it to a stem, shaped from the wood of a tree from which Glooscap’s mother was created. This is how we bring together the spirit of Mother and Grandmother. We then give thanks to all creation by offering tobacco to the 7 sacred directions, each time, putting some into the sacred pipe. And in this way, we honour all of creation, all of our families and that we are all related to one another: the birds, the plants, the animals and the fish. And since our collective words are represented in the smoke, we blow our words in 7 sacred directions. In this way, the seven levels of creation are entrusted to hold onto our words.

This is the way our Elders honoured our creation and explained how our world came into being. This is the creation story.