

Resource Kit

Ilnu Wunji Mikamawey Mawí'omí *Indian Head First Nations*

Native Teachings are a way of Life

The Stephenville/Stephenville Crossing Band Council was formed in 1981, after the Regional Band Council was disbanded. Prior to this most of our members were part of the Bay St. George Regional Band which consisted of Flat Bay, and Port Au Port Bands and any Mi'kmaq people that lived outside their boundaries in the Bay St. George region.

In 1989, we became affiliated with the Federation of Newfoundland Indians. On April 7th, 2002, in keeping with the name of our original settlement, our members decided to change the band's name to Indian Head First Nations.

Indian Head has been in existence for hundreds of years and was mentioned in the writings of W.E. Cormack on his historic journey across Newfoundland, in the early 1800's. In 1822, Cormack listed 150 Mi'kmaq living at Indian Head, with the family names of Benoit, Alexander, Lucoos, Young, Marche, LeBlanc, Gallant, Gabriel, and Cormier. In the early twentieth century, the development of an iron ore mine in the area and the coming of the American Air Force Base at Harmon Field dispersed the people of this settlement to different areas throughout Bay St. George, such as Stephenville, Stephenville Crossing, Mattis Point, Black Duck, Cold Brook, Noel's Pond, and Gallants. Today the descendants of these early Mi'kmaq people and their family names are quite prevalent throughout the region. Indian Head First Nations has a total membership of approximately 1,000 men, women, and children.

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Indian Head First Nations

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Mi'kmaw Culture

The Mi'kmaq (properly pronounced 'meeg mah', and also spelled Mikmaq) were the dominant tribe in the Canadian Maritimes, but in most ways other than language, they were similar to the Maliseet in New Brunswick and the Abenaki of northern New England. The main difference in their lifestyle was that the Abenaki were able to place greater emphasis on agriculture because of their more southerly location. In today's classifications, the Mi'kmaq belong to the Algonquian group.

The word Mi'kmaq actually comes from the word *ni'kmaq*, or 'my friends', which the early French misunderstood as the name of the people. The Mi'kmaq actually referred to themselves as *I'nuk* ('ull noog', or 'the people'.) The odd spelling comes from the efforts of early French missionaries to create a written equivalent of the language. In the phonetic system they invented, the letter 'k' was given a softer pronunciation, more like 'g', and the 'q' became a glottal stop, which is pronounced in some areas like the 'ch' in *Bach*, and in other areas like the sound in the middle of 'uh-oh'. However, if you are not familiar with the phonetic system, it is easy to look at the spelling of the word, and thinking that both the 'k' and the 'q' should be pronounced as hard 'k.' Thus, the word Mi'kmaq became mispronounced as 'Micmac,' which became the accepted spelling and pronunciation for years.

Mi'kma'ki ('meeg mah gee', the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq) included all of what is now Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec, the north shore of New Brunswick and inland to the Saint John River watershed, eastern Maine, and parts of Newfoundland, including the islands in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence as well as St. Pierre and Miquelon. Within this area, the Mi'kmaq lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle, hunting, fishing, and enjoying being together. The Mi'kmaq were hunter-gatherers, and were semi-nomadic in that they routinely moved between summer fishing villages near the coast to winter camps inland. The single-family winter hunting camps were scattered, but during the spring and summer, Mi'kmaq families joined others to form villages. They would travel between the same areas for a few years, until their knowledge of the land told them that resources were becoming less abundant. At this time they would seek another area, to allow the land they had been using to recover. By spreading out the impact in this way, no one area became seriously depleted. Even though there was a certain amount of definition of roles by gender, the Mi'kmaw lifestyle was marked by cooperation between the members of the community. The primary role of the men was to hunt and fish, and to be the protectors of the group. The women gathered plant resources and maintained the camps, and were the lifegivers and caregivers. However, there was a great deal of sharing of these tasks that crossed gender lines. For example, if a family was camped by a river, and the men were away from camp for several days on a hunt, the women were quite capable of fishing to support the families until the men returned. Petroglyphs at Kejimikujik, in Nova Scotia, show men and women fishing together.

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Mi'kmaw Daily Life and Making a Living

The Mi'kmaq were hunter-gatherers, and were semi-nomadic in that they routinely moved between summer fishing villages near the coast to winter camps inland. The single-family winter hunting camps were scattered, but during the spring and summer, Mi'kmaq families joined others to form villages. They would travel between the same areas for a few years, until their knowledge of the land told them that resources were becoming less abundant. At this time they would seek another area, to allow the land they had been using to recover. By spreading out the impact in this way, no one area became seriously depleted. Even though there was a certain amount of definition of roles by gender, the Mi'kmaw lifestyle was marked by cooperation between the members of the community. The primary role of the men was to hunt and fish, and to be the protectors of the group. The women gathered plant resources and maintained the camps, and were the lifegivers and caregivers. However, there was a great deal of sharing of these tasks that crossed gender lines. If a family was camped by a river, and the men were away from camp for several days on a hunt, the women were quite capable of fishing to support the families until the men returned. Petroglyphs at Kejimikujik show men and women fishing together.

In the spring the Mi'kmaq gathered their belongings and moved to the coastal areas, relying on the resources of the sea, rivers, and streams for their livelihood. In addition to the abundant resources of the sea, the encampments were also more visible, so that they could be found more easily by family and friends who would be traveling the shores and getting together for the summer months. The increased visibility also allowed them to keep watch for passers-by, and for possible raids by neighbouring tribes. Also, by staying at the seashores the Mi'kmaq enjoyed relief from the mosquitoes and black flies, which were kept away by the sea winds.

The summer was a time of plenty. The Mi'kmaq gathered clams and shellfish at the shore, and fished for salmon and other fish in the rivers and streams. They would also use their canoes to hunt porpoises and small whales, and were adept at hunting fowl. For this reason, the Mi'kmaq were famous for their skill with a canoe. Constructed from birch bark, their distinctive design incorporated a square-rigged sail and high gunwales, making it capable of crossing open water. During the summer the Mi'kmaq also harvested wild fruits, berries, roots and other plant materials. These were used for food, for medicines, and as materials for weaving, cordage, and other uses. Some food plants were enjoyed fresh, and some were dried and set aside for the winter.

In late summer and early fall, they would make their way inland along the waterways, seeking the shelter of the forests for the winter months. As they journeyed, they would take advantage of the spawning runs of fish by building complex weirs across the rivers, which enabled them to catch large amounts of eels and other fish. As winter came on, the Mi'kmaq established their winter camps and turned to hunting large mammals such as bear, moose and caribou. While these animals were their primary food source, smaller animals were also harvested. They hunted with bows and arrows and lances, or trapped animals with snares or various deadfall traps. In deep snow the hunters had an advantage, since the heavy animals were slowed down by snowdrifts, while the hunters were able to move about easily using snowshoes, sleds, and toboggans. The English word "toboggan" is borrowed directly from the Mi'kmaw word *topa'kun*.

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Telling Time

By observing the natural changes around them, the Mi'kmaq were able to determine periods of time. A year was the major cycle, divided into days, moons and seasons. Solstices and equinoxes were recognized, with the winter solstice marking the end of one year and the beginning of the next. There were four seasons in a year: *siwkw* (Spring) - when the leaves began to sprout, the wild geese appeared, the fawns of moose reached a certain size within the mother, and seals bore their young; *nipk* (Summer) - when the salmon spawned and the wild geese moulted; *toqa'q* (Autumn) - when the birds migrated; and *kesik* (Winter) - when the weather became very cold, the snow fell and the bears began to hibernate.

Mi'kmaw Lunar Calendar

season	English	Mi'kmawí'simk	Translation
Siwkw	April	Penatemuiku's	Egg laying moon
Nipk	May	Etqoljewiku's	Frog Croaking Moon
	June	Nipniku's	Summer Moon
	July	Peskewiku's	Feather Shedding Moon
Toqa'q	August	Kisikwekewiku's	Fruit/Berry Ripening Moon
	September	Wikumkewiku's	Moose calling Moon
	October	Wikewiku's	Animal fattening Moon
Kesik	November	Keptekewiku's	River Freezing Moon
	December	Kjiku's	The Great Month
	January	Punamujuiku's	Tom Cod Moon
	February	Apiknajit	The Snow Blinder Moon
	March	Siwkewiku's	Spawning Moon

Moon Time

Native people know that everything in creation has a spirit. The plants, trees, water, wind, rocks, and mountains have spirit. The sky world including the moon and the other planets have spirit. All of these are part of our First Family, the natural world. The moon is called Grandmother Moon and great respect is shown to her. It is said that the moon cycle is a gift to women. It is a time to cleanse herself mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The moon time is considered a time of power, second only to the ability of the Great Spirit to give life. Women can ask Grandmother Moon for direction in life, for wisdom, and for help for her children and others. Grandmother moon can give her healing and balancing energy to women. When women are on their moon time their power is at its strongest and this is acknowledged in that they do not prepare food or medicines, take part in ceremonies or use the pipes or other sacred items. The moon time is a ceremony of life for women and a time of renewal. It is a time for them to relax and take it easy. It is a time of reflection. Some teachings say that when the moon is full, woman can ask Grandmother moon to give them new energy. Around the full moon, women on their moon time become very intuitive. It is an opportunity for women to take the time to foster their intuition and to have strong dreams. Grandmother moon watches over the waters of the earth. We see this in her regulation of the tides. She controls all female life. Much of the water life spawn according to the cycles of the moon.

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Mi'kmaw Organization

Politically, the Mi'kmaq were a loose confederacy bound together through a common system of matrilineal clans. For the most part, clans (or bands) were independent with their own chiefs and ceremonies, a system which has been remained largely in place to the present day. The Mi'kmaq had a matriarchal society, where the eldest women in the group had the greatest influence. As life givers, women were deeply respected, and their wisdom was recognized as being of highest importance when vital decisions were to be made. Thus, the Grandmothers, with their vast experience and knowledge, were listened to with great respect by all members of the family, clan, or district. In the end, the decision was made by the entire group, but never without consulting the matriarchs. In Mi'kmaw tradition, women are accorded the highest respect and regard, for they are the portals through which a spirit comes to earth. Obviously, without this portal, it would not be possible for our spirits to come here for the growth and healing that we need. The man's role is therefore a supportive one, protecting the woman and family from harm, and providing those things that require strength. Historical proof of this respect can be seen in the petroglyphs at Kejimikujik National Park / National Historic Site. Of all the images scribed into the slate, the most common are representations of the traditional woman's peaked hat, indicating the importance of the woman in traditional society.

It was the men in their role of protector who interacted with other groups. The most respected warriors and providers (as determined by the Grandmothers) became a chief, or *saqamaw*, and this was generally passed on in a hereditary manner from father to son. Other elder males became members of the chief's council. The chief and council were the final authority regarding routine decisions about hunting and fishing territories and other such matters, but referred to the Grandmothers for council regarding decisions that affected the course of the nations. When the Europeans arrived, since they always dealt with the men, they understandably mis-interpreted this to mean that the Mi'kmaq were patriarchal.

Mi'kmaki, or the Mi'kmaw territory, was divided into seven districts: Kespukwitk (Land's End), Sikepne'katik (Wild Potato Area), Eski'kewa'q (Skin Dresser's Area), Unama'kik (Land of Fog), Epekwitk aqq Piktuk (Lying in the Water and Explosive Area), Sikniktewa'q (Drainage Area), and Kespe'kewa'q (Last Land). Each of these districts had its own matriarch, generally the eldest and most-respected Grandmother, who would also often be a medicine woman. It also had its own district Grand Chief, or *kji' saqamaw*, selected from the chiefs within the area. Periodically, all of the district Grand Chiefs would convene in a Grand Council to make important decisions, such as the assignment of hunting and fishing territories or matters of peace and war. They would achieve a consensus and determine how relations with other nations would be managed. In all cases, the best interests of all of the people was the guiding principle. Once again the advice of the Grandmothers was listened to with greatest respect.

The Mi'kmaq were also members of the Wabanaki Confederacy, a loose coalition that included the Maliseets, the Pasamaquoddy, the Penobscots, and the Eastern and Western Abenakis of present-day Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. At its peak, the Wabanaki Confederacy influenced life throughout the Maritimes and northern New England.

An important part of aboriginal organization is the clan. Your clan is with you from the day you are born. It is believed that your clan walks with you and looks after you. The clans of a Nation are often the animals and other creatures that inhabit the region. Some of the clans of the Six Nations are the Turtle, Bear, Wolf, Rock, Snipe, Pipe of Peace and the Heron. If knowledge of your clan is lost to your family and if your search through family, church, treaty, band, or school records does not reveal this information you can make the request to know what your clan is to a spiritual person who has the ability to find out what clan is watching over you. Many people put out a food offering for their clan in the fall to give their clan strength and energy to survive the winter and in the spring to revitalize their clan's spirit after a hard winter. In the past, clans were painted on warrior shields encircled with medicine bundles.

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Hunting and Fishing

Moose was a valuable staple in the Mi'kmaq diet in the Maritimes. In later years and up to today, the moose has also become just as valuable to the Newfoundland Mi'kmaq. Hunters were generally excellent trackers, and could determine the sex and approximate age of their quarry based on tracks and dung. They would position themselves for attacks downwind of the moose, and would often call the moose closer by imitating their own calls. Deadfall traps and head snares were also occasionally used. Using snowshoes in the winter gave the hunters a distinct advantage, as the moose generally stuck to circular paths called 'yards', where they were easy prey to the hunters' spears.

Smaller mammals such as muskrats, otter, mink, marten, fisher and lynx, were often taken using deadfall traps and snares. Beavers were frequently taken by damaging the dam around their pond, and picking off the beaver as they were exposed by the falling water level. Beaver were also fairly easy game in the winter, when they could be caught at their breathing holes in the ice.

Ruffed grouse are easily detected because at mating time the male thumps its breast with its wings, causing a loud drumming sound. Hunters would use a leather noose attached to a pole to snare the bird at close range. Geese and ducks were often hunted at night, while they slept on the water. The hunters would allow their canoes to drift into the flock, then light birch bark torches. The startled fowl would take flight, circling the canoes in confusion, and the hunters would simply knock them down with sticks, or wait until the birds were exhausted and catch them by hand.

The Mi'kmaq relied heavily upon the sea and its products, for it supplied about 90% of his available food. Hunting for game required more skill than fishing (fish were extremely plentiful) and Mi'kmaq man prided himself on being a good provider for his family and the village.

Early in the year, the Mi'kmaq lived on shallow-water fish, such as the flounder, which lives on mudflats in the low-tide zone and in the mouths of rivers and estuaries where it can be speared, caught on hooked lines or trapped in weirs. In the middle of March, fish would begin to spawn, often so abundantly that everything swarmed with them. First smelt, then herring, then sturgeon and salmon would make their spawning runs, so that the people were assured of food from March through until September, when the Mi'kmaq's favourite fish, the eel, would begin to run.

The Mi'kmaq would construct fish weirs to trap the spawning fish in great numbers. The weirs were simply V-shaped lines of obstacles (wood, rocks, etc) that were constructed across the streams, which forced the fish to pass through a narrow opening, where a basket or net was used to capture them.

For large fish like the sturgeon and the salmon, the Mi'kmaq used a spear. At night, birch bark torches were used to attract sturgeon. Being a curious fish, it would circle around the canoe and when harpooned would swim furiously, dragging the canoe until it became exhausted.

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Shelters and Tools

The most common shelter used by the Mi'kmaq was the wigwam*. There were basically two types: the smaller cone-shaped style, which could hold 10-12 people, and the larger oval variety, which could hold as many as 24 occupants. In both cases, the structure is based on a pole frame, covered with birch bark or, more rarely, hides. Because of the effort required to harvest birch bark, the coverings were usually carried from location to location. To construct a conical wigwam, the women would cut 4 or 5 long spruce poles, which were lashed at the top to form the basic frame. A flexible sapling, often striped maple, was then bent into a hoop, which was lashed inside the frame for extra support at the top. Shorter poles were then lashed to the hoop to provide greater strength and support for the covering. The frame was made so that the planned doorway faced away from prevailing winds of the area.

Once the frame was completed, it was covered with pieces of birch bark. The bark was soaked in warm water to make it flexible and resistant to tearing, and holes were punched using an awl made from bone or an animal's tooth. The bark was sewn into place using spruce root, which is very flexible and tremendously strong. They would start at the bottom of the wigwam, at both edges of the doorway, and overlap the pieces as they worked around to the back. They would then begin the next row. In this way, the bark overlapped like shingles to shed both rain and wind. An opening was left at the top for smoke to escape, but a separate collar of bark was made to close up this opening in the event of a storm. Finally, additional short poles were laid against the bark to help keep it in place, and the doorway was covered with a hide.

Inside the wigwam, a rock fireplace stood in the center to provide heat and light. The floor was generally covered with fir boughs, which provided a springy surface for sleeping. In the winter, there would be time enough for the women to decorate the wigwam with various designs of birds, moose, otters and beavers. If additional ventilation was required, short poles would be wedged under the pieces of bark, creating openings to capture the breeze. Besides the wigwam, other more make-shift structures included lean-tos and snow shelters consisting of hollows covered with fir branches and containing a central fire.

A wigwam is a dwelling which has a framework made of poles, which may or not be conical (the Mi'kmaq had an oval wigwam for larger families,) and which is covered with bark, or perhaps brush, thatch or woven reeds. The structure is common to the First Nations peoples of the Eastern Woodland region. The structures were generally fairly small, since they were constructed within forest clearings and other restricted spaces, and since the materials were carried from one seasonal site to the next by canoe or by hand. A tepee is a dwelling constructed by the people of the Plains areas. These were similar to conical wigwams, but generally were much larger, since the plains were quite open, and tepees were covered with hides rather than plant materials

The Mi'kmaq worked stone into various tools, including scrapers, points, knife blades, axes and adzes. Stone was either knapped (flaked by controlled pressure) or was pecked (struck with a harder stone and chipped) and ground into the desired shape. Some examples of stone implements are shown below, from various timeframes. They also made extensive use of bone, which is more easily shaped, but does not hold an edge as long. The Mi'kmaq were also expert basket weavers. They used wood splints pounded from ash logs, which they wove into sturdy but light-weight containers. These baskets, which could be very highly ornamented, were in high demand by Europeans in the 1800s. They also used birchbark and wove rushes to make containers of various types, and even experimented with pottery, which was not easily transported and soon fell out of use.

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Mi'kmaw Dress

In some accounts, explorers like Cartier and Champlain described the Indians as almost "stark naked." This description fits the Mi'kmaq male because his basic garment was the breechcloth, made of very supple leather. This was passed through a leather strap around his waist, between his legs covering his genitals, and through the strap behind him. The ends of the breechcloth were folded over the strap and left to hang down, providing extra coverage. The leather was made by brain-tanning the hide, and kept pliable as required by rubbing it occasionally with extra fat. The leather was also smoked, which allows it to retain its pliability after it has gotten wet.

Buckskin leggings, made from a single piece of leather with outside fringed seams, were also held up by the waist strap. The leggings were worn in cooler weather, and also for protection against brambles and underbrush. Even the women wore these leggings on occasion.

A jacket was made from the hide covering the legs of moose. The hide from each leg, including the hip, was carefully removed in one piece. These would form the arms of the jacket, and the two pieces would be laced together in front and behind, looking something like a bolero jacket.

For colder weather, cloaks were made from the brain-tanned hides of moose, beaver, marten, bear, and seal. These were wrapped over the shoulders and interlaced with leather strips under the chin, or worn over one shoulder and under the opposite arm if more freedom was required.

The moccasins were made from old moosehide robes, now more pliable and moisture-resistant with added grease. The English word moccasin probably comes from the Mi'kmaw word *mkisn* ('my shoes'.)

For special occasions like weddings and feasts, more elaborate garments were worn. Robes of white moosehide decorated in various ways were common. According to the whim of the designer, two inch strips of ornamented leather appeared in vertical or horizontal patterns or both. Colors were obtained from red and yellow ochres, white from powdered or burned shell, black either from bog manganese or charcoal, and many other colours were obtained from various plant-based dyes.

For different feasts, ceremonies, and rites, the Mi'kmaq man painted his body. For feasts, he painted himself with a single color, or with several, in a pattern distinctive to each person. In mourning, the whole face was painted black. In war, red was used.

In aboriginal times, the Mi'kmaq wore no hats. However, in the 1700s, Mi'kmaw women observed that women with influence wore a particular style of hat. They adapted this hat to become the distinctive pointed or peaked cap, which was unique to the Mi'kmaq. They also pierced their ears, from which they hung many decorations of wampum, shell or quill-work, and wore arm and leg bracelets.

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Mi'kmaw Spirituality

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'kmawí'simk, this translates as *Msit 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.

In many Native American beliefs, the supreme being is referred to as Creator or the Great Spirit. In the Mi'kmaw 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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Medicines

The term 'medicine', as it applies to Native American traditions, tends to sound a bit misleading. Its origin is actually a corruption of the word 'Midewiwin' (mih-day-i-win), the name for the Grand Medicine Society of the Anishinabe. From this corruption, we derive the word 'medicine', which refers to traditional healing herbs and to many aspects of spiritual practices. We also get the term 'Medicine Man', which in popular use has become a catch-all term for someone who is knowledgeable about traditional herbal remedies, or who carries out certain spiritual ceremonies. The actual Mi'kmaw word for such a person is *puoin* (boo-oh-win.) There are a number of sacred medicines that are used commonly for ceremonial purposes by Native American peoples, including the Mi'kmaq. In general, these are used for purification prior to participating in a ceremony, or for daily spiritual cleansing. This process is referred to as 'smudging', and simply involves burning the medicine to produce smoke, and using the smoke to cleanse. According to teachings, the smoke attaches itself to negativity within us, and carries it away; when the smoke vanishes, so does the negativity. In addition, these medicines can be used as offerings when desired. Tobacco is the first plant that the Creator gave to Native people. It is the main activator of all the plant spirits. The three other plants are sage, cedar, and sweetgrass and together they are referred to as the four sacred medicines.

Tobacco is very commonly used for offerings by most First Nations, and is often an ingredient used in smoking preparations for the sacred pipe. The familiar tobacco plant did not grow in the Maritimes area; instead, the Mi'kmaq used a plant called "Indian tobacco" (*lobelia inflata*.) This was frequently used in a smoking mixture called 'kinnikinnik' which also usually included alder and red willow bark and bear berry leaves, among other herbs.

Sweetgrass (*hierochloa odorata*, or vanilla grass) is often used for smudging. Sweetgrass grows wild all across North America, and is one of the most commonly-used medicines among the First Nations. When it is burned, it produces a sweet-scented smoke similar to some incenses. This scent is attractive to spirits of all types. Sweetgrass is most often available in braids, as shown, and is thought of as the hair of Mother Earth. Mi'kmaq tradition names sweetgrass as the sacred medicine of the East direction

Sage is another very common smudging herb. While any sage will do the job, white sage (*salvia apiana*) is generally preferred. This sage is known by a number of different names regionally. Its thick leaves and tendency to smolder well and produce a very pungent smoke are what make it perfect for smudging. Sage smoke is attractive to spirits of good intent, but is repellent to spirits that intend harm. For this reason, sage is particularly useful for smudging and purifying people, objects, areas or structures. Placing crumbled sage leaves with an object is considered to be protective as well. For the Mi'kmaq, sage is the sacred medicine of the South direction

Cedar is the sacred medicine of the West direction, and is used for cleansing and energizing. We frequently use cedar to line the floor of our sweat lodge, and have prepared a number of combinations of different cedars for smudging. Cedar smoke has a fresh, invigorating scent. Since cedar is not common throughout the Maritimes area of Canada, the Mi'kmaq frequently used juniper, a close relative, for the same purposes.

Fungus is the traditional Mi'kmaw medicine of the North direction, but it has been largely ignored today and replaced by tobacco. Fungus can be used by women to protect men from the draining effects of moon-time. A particular favourite is locally called deer-foot fungus, and is a subspecies of hoof fungus (*polyporus fomes fomentarius*) that grows on birch trees

It is said tobacco sits in the eastern door, sweetgrass in the southern door, sage in the west and cedar in the north. Traditional people say tobacco is always first. It is used as an offering for everything and in every ceremony. "Always through tobacco", the saying goes. Sweetgrass is the sacred hair of Mother Earth. When sweetgrass is used in a healing circle it has a calming effect.

You take care of these sacred medicines by keeping them in a dry place. They can be stored in bags or wooden boxes. If you have been using alcohol or drugs, healers say you should wait four to seven days before touching the medicines.

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The Medicine Wheel

The Medicine Wheel is a very powerful symbol of Native American spirituality. Because it is a circle, it represents the many cycles that appear in the natural world: the cycle of night and day, of the seasons, and of birth, life, and death. However, it is important to note that each Nation has been given its own understanding of the Medicine Wheel, and the colours, order, and other details may differ. This does not mean that any one understanding is right or wrong; each Nation received teachings that work best for them. The description that follows is for the Mi'kmaw Medicine Wheel.

As is true of many many Native American traditions, the Mi'kmaw Medicine Wheel contains four colours: red, white, yellow and black. These colours represent the four races of man, of which Native Americans were aware long before the arrival of the Europeans. Also, each direction has a Spirit Guide (sometimes called a totem,) an element, and a sacred medicine associated with it.

Because the circle represents the passage of the sun and the seasons, discussion of the Wheel usually starts in the East direction, where the sun rises, and travels in a clockwise direction*. This also applies to moving around any circle during a ceremony.

The East, then, is seen as a direction of beginnings, including infancy (the beginning of life) and spring (the beginning of a new year.) The West is seen as a direction of endings, and is the direction the spirit travels when it leaves this Earth.

Direction	Color	Guide	Medicine	Element	Season	Life Stage
East	White	Eagle	Sweetgrass	Water	Spring	Infant
South	Yellow	Thunderbird	Sage	Fire	Summer	Adult Woman
West	Red	Black Bear	Cedar	Earth	Fall	Adult Man
North	Black	White Bear	Fungus	Air	Winter	Elder

The medicine wheel is the basis of the four directions, and to honour each of these directions is to honour all mankind. However, in some cases we go further, and honour seven directions. The additional directions are:

Up: The direction of the Creator, the sky, Grandfather Sun and Grandmother Moon.

Down: The direction of Mother Earth.

Inward: To honor ourselves and the spirit that exists within us.

When we have acknowledged each of the seven directions, we have acknowledged all that is.

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The Talking Circle

The talking circle is a traditional way for Native American people to solve problems. It is a very effective way to remove barriers and to allow people to express themselves with complete freedom. For this reason, it is becoming more and more popular in mainstream society. The talking circle is making its appearance in schools, corporate board rooms and team dressing rooms around the world, for the simple reason that the technique works very well. The symbolism of the circle, with no beginning and with nobody in a position of prominence, serves to encourage people to speak freely and honestly about things that are on their minds.

Everyone sits in a circle, generally with men to the North and women to the South. The conductor of the circle will generally sit in the East. A token, such as a feather or a special talking stick, is passed clockwise around the circle. As each person receives the token, they may speak for as long as they wish, including addressing a topic brought up by another in the circle. When they have finished, they pass the token along. If someone does not wish to speak, they simply pass the token. The token may go around several times; when everyone has had the opportunity to speak as many times as they wish, the conductor ends the circle.

The most common type of circle is a simple sharing circle, where people just share whatever they have to say. There is no particular purpose or theme, and many fascinating side-trips often happen. The sharing circle is also an excellent introduction to ceremonies, and is a great learning tool for those who are just discovering traditional Aboriginal ways. We frequently incorporate such circles in our gatherings, and find that the circles generate a feeling of harmony and kinship in those who participate. Another common circle, and perhaps the most powerful, is the healing circle. This is generally guided by the conductor, and will be convened to deal with issues that are bothering people. These issues may be specific, or the circle may be called to simply allow everyone to get any problems off their chests. Very often, a simple chance to have a voice, and to have a problem heard in a sympathetic and supportive environment, is all that a person requires for healing. In addition, sharing amongst a group allows everyone to take a piece of the burden from the person with the problem, who then leaves the circle with a lighter load. However, since the problem does not belong to the other participants, they are able to lay down the piece of the burden they accepted and walk away without having increased their own loads.

Another type of circle is used to mediate problems between people, either individuals or groups. Again, very often all that is required for a solution to such problems is the opportunity to hear and speak in complete honesty, so that both sides of the problem become aware of the impact of the problem on the other party. In these circles, the conductor guides the participants toward finding their own equitable solution to their problem, since a solution that is created by the participants is the most likely to work over the long term.

There are a few very simple guidelines that allow a talking circle to function: *Only one person speaks at a time* - only the person holding the feather or talking stick may speak. Dialogues are not part of the circle, as they can become confrontational.

Introduce yourself - it is polite to introduce yourself in the first round. Use your spirit name, if you have one; otherwise, use your given name.

Speak from the heart - the speaker should address the circle from the heart, and may speak for as long as they need to, with respect for the time of others.

Listen with respect - all people except the speaker listen attentively and give support to the speaker. Listening with the heart allows you to hear the true intent beneath what the speaker is saying. Listen in the way you expect others to hear you.

What is said in the circle stays in the circle - never repeat anything that is said within the circle, unless you have the permission of the speaker.

When convening a circle, smudging the participants with sage will help dispel any negativity they may be carrying with them. In a way, it's like 'wiping' your spiritual 'feet' before entering the circle. As well, keeping a sage smudge burning during the circle, particularly when emotions are intense, will help keep negativity from entering.

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The Sweat Lodge

The sweat lodge ceremony is one of the most common ceremonies practiced by Native American people. Sweats may be conducted as a preliminary to other activities, such as a fast. Sweats may also be done for healing. The purpose behind all of these, however, is simple spiritual cleansing. The lodge is designed to provide a safe, sacred place where the participants can concentrate on the spirits that are invited to the ceremony. These spirits are brought in with the 'grandfathers', which are the stones that are heated in the fire. Splashing water on the grandfathers creates steam, and we then have all four elements present in the lodge: earth below, air around, fire in the grandfathers and water in the steam.

A private place is preferred for a sweat lodge, to ensure that there will be no interruptions or distractions. A natural area is best, as it enhances the connection between the lodge and the Earth. A positive frame of mind should be maintained at all times while constructing the lodge.

The lodge is constructed of flexible saplings, and is made in a dome shape. For maximum flexibility, collect the saplings right after a good rain. The lodge can be any size, but larger lodges are harder to heat thoroughly - we make ours about 4 meters in diameter, and limit the number of people if required.

The butts of the saplings are embedded in the ground, and bend towards each other from opposite sides of the structure. They are secured by weaving them into the structure, and by braiding the branches at the ends around the sapling opposite. If anything else is required, we use a natural material, such as spruce roots, cotton cloth or sisal twine.

In the center is a pit, into which the grandfathers will be placed by the Firekeeper. The entrance is made facing east, toward the sacred fire. The entire structure is covered with layers of heavy but breathable fabric, like canvas - we use military surplus tents. Be very thorough in ensuring that no light leaks into the lodge.

A few meters to the east, we make the sacred fire in which the grandfathers are heated. We first create a small platform of pieces of firewood, on which the grandfathers are carefully stacked in a pyramidal pile. Kindling and more firewood are then stacked around the grandfathers, building into a tepee shape that is sometimes called the Lodge of the Sacred Fire. An opening is left facing the sweat lodge, and is used for lighting the fire, after which it is quickly closed. By the way, it is not the size of the fire that matters - it is our prayers that heat the grandfathers. From personal experience, we can vouch for that, having seen red-hot grandfathers coming from a smallish fire made with wet wood. By preference, we will use birch and maple for firewood.

The best type of stones for a sweat are igneous. Above all, do NOT use sedimentary stones that come from a wet area, as they will explode when heated. In our area, we collect quartzite and basalt cobbles from the sea shore, which are perfect for the task. The stones should be somewhere between eight and fourteen inches in girth; larger ones hold heat longer.

The grandfathers can be re-used, if you desire, but we usually collect new grandfathers for each sweat. When we collect, we make our intentions known, then we pay attention: some stones will volunteer to be taken home, and others will not. Of course, don't forget your offering!

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The Sweat lodge Ceremony

There are many different sweat lodge ceremonies, each with somewhat different proceedings. In many cases the sweat will be done in four rounds, in other cases it is done as a single round. The number of grandfathers varies from one type to the next. In general, however, here's how it happens:

The lodge is thoroughly smudged before use, and cedar may be placed on the floor. The pit is cleared of any grandfathers from the previous sweat.

The first grandfather represents the Creator, and is brought into the lodge by itself. The Conductor then enters the lodge to greet and smudge the grandfather.

NOTE: once the first grandfather has entered the lodge, a sort of pathway or umbilical cord exists between the sacred fire and the lodge, along which spirits will enter the lodge; other than the Fire Keeper, nobody should ever cross this line.

When told, the Fire Keeper then brings in the remaining grandfathers for the round, one at a time, placing them where the Conductor directs. The Conductor again welcomes and smudges each one.

When all grandfathers have been brought in, the participants may enter the lodge. Generally, men enter first, and move clockwise around the pit to their positions in the north. Women follow, and sit in the south. As each person enters, they say "Msit No'kmaq" or "All my relations."

When everyone has entered, and the water container has been passed into the lodge, the Conductor will call for the door to be closed. This may be the task of a separate Door Keeper, but generally the Fire Keeper does this.

Each round of the sweat is dedicated to one of the sacred directions, and the spirits and elements of that direction are honoured in a prayer by the Conductor. Each participant may then be offered a chance to pray or speak as well. The Conductor splashes water on the grandfathers to create steam and fill the lodge with heat; as we sweat, impurities are taken from our bodies. The Conductor is also responsible for controlling the energies within the lodge, and for keeping the participants safe while they are spiritually open and vulnerable. This can take quite a toll on the Conductor.

When the round is complete, the Conductor will call for the door to open. Participants may be offered a chance to leave the lodge to stretch, and water may be passed around for a drink. Finally, when directed by the Conductor, the Fire Keeper will bring in the next round of grandfathers, and the process is repeated.

Depending on the Conductor, the sweat may or may not be very hot. Some conductors will do moderate sweats for beginners allowing participants to concentrate on the spirits and the ceremony rather than on breathing and staying conscious. However, sometimes the spirits have other ideas!

Conductors also make it known that anyone can leave the lodge at any time, simply by asking for the door to be opened. Sometimes, people enter the lodge for the wrong reasons, and if the spirits want that person to leave they are free to do so. In other cases, the person may simply be claustrophobic. However, they can still be part of the sweat lodge by sitting outside the lodge and adding prayers and energy to the circle within.

When the sweat is over, the participants emerge from the sweat lodge spiritually and physically cleansed. Many feel that they are being reborn as they emerge, since the lodge has a womb-like feeling. Generally everyone gathers for a small feast afterwards, so that the good feelings continue for a time, and a bond can be formed between the participants.

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The Sacred Pipe

The sacred pipe, often referred to mistakenly as the 'peace pipe,' is one of the most powerful and sacred objects for Native Americans. By using the pipe, we may communicate with the spirits and make our needs known, asking for the things we need in our lives. In its most basic form, a pipe is simply a bowl and a stem, which together can be used to smoke an herbal preparation. Generally the bowl is made of stone, while the stem is made of wood. There is no need for fancy decorations, as they are not what makes the pipe special or powerful.

It should also be made very clear that true followers of the Mi'kmaw spiritual ways NEVER smoke so-called 'recreational drugs' in the pipe. While some nations were given such drugs as part of their sacred medicines (for example, the use of peyote in the south-west) the Mi'kmaq were not given these medicines, and so for us to use them is an insult both to the Creator, who gave us what we need, and to the nations for whom these medicines are truly sacred. The bowl of the pipe, with its hole for accepting the pipe stem, represents the woman; the stem, then, represents the man. Joining the pipe symbolizes a union and a balance between male and female aspects of the world. At the same time, the stone of the bowl represents the spirits of the inorganic things of our world, while the wooden stem represents the organic beings. While other symbols may be added through carvings or decorations, these are very powerful, and are present in all pipes.

There are two types of pipes. A personal pipe can be owned by anyone, and be used to pray on their own behalf. It should not, however, be shared. Pipe Carriers, on the other hand, carry a pipe on behalf of the people. If there is need, the Pipe Carrier will use the pipe to pray for the people, to call in the spirits for a gathering or ceremony, or perhaps for healing or teaching. In the Mi'kmaw tradition, a Pipe Carrier is born to the task. There is no way to earn this privilege - it is something you were given before you arrived on this Earth. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of confusion today about the role of the Pipe Carrier, caused mostly by people who are learning about the traditions of other Nations and trying to apply them to ALL Nations. In addition, because First Nations traditions are now seen as 'cool', it seems that everyone wants to be a Pipe Carrier, but again, it is not a task you can assume simply because you want it. Acting as a Pipe Carrier when it is not your true calling is not only disrespectful, it is dangerous, both to you and to anyone who shares your pipe.

An entire ceremony surrounds the use of the personal pipe for praying, which allows you to adopt the correct frame of mind for the prayer. Prior to handling the pipe, ensure that you have smudged. Also, when the pipe is removed from its container, it must be smudged as well. When you join the pipe, be aware that you are creating a sacred moment in time. As you handle the pipe, use your left hand to hold the bowl, and your right to hold the stem.

Loading the pipe is done in four steps, each honouring the four directions. During each step, offer a pinch of tobacco to that direction, and address the spirits of the direction, asking them to hear you when you pray. Place the tobacco into the pipe bowl and repeat for the next direction. When the pipe is loaded, it should be lit from something besides your trusty Zippo. If you are near a sacred fire, use it to light a small twig, or better yet a sweetgrass braid, and use that to light your pipe. As you smoke the pipe, again acknowledge each direction as you take a puff. Release the smoke deliberately; as it rises toward the sky, it takes your prayers with it. If you wish, smudge yourself by guiding the smoke over your head with your free hand. Between each direction, turn the pipe stem in a circle clockwise to honour the four cardinal directions.

Finally, when the tobacco has been consumed, separating the pipe is a way of telling the spirits that you are finished. Clean the ashes out of your pipe, and dispose of them in a thoughtful way: for example, in a sacred fire, or at the roots of a tree. Carefully wrap your pipe and put it away. As you do all this, be aware that your prayers have been heard, and offer your thanks for the attention of the spirits. Should you be involved in a pipe ceremony conducted by a Pipe Carrier, the pipe may be passed around. If so, you accept the pipe stem with your right hand and the bowl with your left. Take a puff, and again release it thoughtfully as a prayer. Turn the pipe stem clockwise through a full circle, then pass the pipe to the next person stem first. If for some reason you do not wish to smoke the pipe, or if the tobacco has been exhausted, then you can simply touch your shoulders with the pipe stem and pass it along.

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Fasting

A fast is a period of time during which a person goes without food and, usually, water. However, as with most spiritual matters, the actual conditions of the fast will vary from person to person, and from fast to fast, depending on the reason for the fast and the requirements of the person. It is said that when you fast you are sacrificing yourself for all, for your family and community, by denying yourself the basic comforts of shelter, water, food, and companionship.

A cleansing fast: A cleansing fast is done on a regular basis by men, who do not have the gift of a woman's ability to cleanse herself monthly. The purpose of a cleansing fast is to allow the body to cleanse itself of impurities, which it does as a normal physical result of not eating for an extended period. At the same time, the man should be concentrating on prayer and meditation, to aid in spiritual cleansing. In olden times, a man would have done a cleansing fast once each season.

A vision quest fast: A vision quest fast can be done by men or women. The purpose of the vision quest is to seek guidance from the spirits in the form of visions or dreams. The seeker concentrates strongly on prayer and meditation, including use of a personal pipe if they have one, and requests that the spirits provide him or her with the guidance they need. These fasts tend to be longer in duration than cleansing fasts.

Feasting for ceremonies: In some cases, people will fast in honour of certain ceremonies. For example, before the spring or fall Bear Feast, people who have the Bear as their Spirit Guide, or who are part of the Bear clan, can fast in honour of the Bear and his long winter fast. This is generally a short fast, perhaps a day or two, and can often be done in the home or while going about your daily life, since the point of this fast is simply to do without food in honour of the Bear. While a personal commitment is required, the fast is done pretty much without ceremony. People who fast in this manner are often requested to speak during the ceremony, if they were given anything to share.

Spring and fall are generally the times for fasting. Some teachings say that you fast in the fall to take away negative energy and you fast in the spring to replenish yourself with new energy. Healers and elders say that fasting has a cleansing and healing effect. Fasting has also been described as a healing way where the first person we face when we fast is ourselves. Offerings are made before a fast and may be food as well as tobacco. Very often fasters will go into the sweat lodge before they are taken out to their fasting place and later, when they are brought in from their fast. The fasting conductor lets the fasters know the duration of their fast through the connection he or she has with the spirit world.

Fire keepers tend the sacred fire at the base camp for the duration of your fast. The person who has put you on your fast looks after you while you are out. Your fasting site may be encircled with cedar and with tobacco ties. You might build a sacred fire at your site where you offer your tobacco. However your fast is set up, you are in the care of Mother Earth and our First Family.

Everything you see on a fast is important. It is said that fasting brings you closer to the spirit world and that your spirit wakes up when you are on a fast. You may feel that the questions you were asking have been answered. When you are on your fast you will take your sacred items with you, for example your drum so that you can see traditional songs. You are calling on the spirits with a song and they will hear it and come to help you. At the end of a fast, when the person who has taken you out to the fast comes to get you, you may be taken to the sweat lodge where you have the opportunity to talk about your fasting experience. Your fast maybe ended by drinking water and eating cedar water and berries.

You have to earn the right to be a healer, elder, or medicine person. This comes from partaking in fasting, sweat lodge ceremonies, pipe ceremonies and years of discussions with elders. It may be important for everyone, especially young people, to be aware of this and to exercise caution when they are seeking healing, teachings, or advice. It is advisable to consult with people whom you trust to get referrals to respected and recognized Traditional Elders, Healers, or Medicine People.

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Approaching a Traditional Healer, Elder, or Medicine Person

When you are on a healing journey, it is a natural step for you to seek help and guidance from a “Traditional Healer, Elder, or Medicine person. When healers talk about healing, they say the Creator and the spirits work through them to help the people. If they are asked in what way they are different, they say that the gifts they have and that they are allowed to use is what makes them different. They always express their deep gratitude for the healing powers of everything the Creator has put here and for the spirits that do the healing. Each healer has a purpose and that purpose is to help people. They tend not to call themselves Healers but might refer to themselves as helpers to the spirits. The help that they give is credited to the spirit that they have, the Creator, and the spirit helpers who come in different forms to assist them. Helpers can manifest in any form. They can be plants, animals, trees, sticks, rocks, fire, water, and earth.

The abilities of some Healers are said to be their birth right and generally these individuals start training and working at an early age. The abilities of others may be revealed later in life as a result of a severe illness or a near death experience. Some may go on fasts or on a vision quest where their gifts and their responsibilities are revealed and are explained to them by the spirits. A Healer can be given his or her direction of how to take care of the people through dreams and visions.

There are similarities to all healing practices but each Healer has their own way and medicines that they work with. Each Healer is an individual and they live their lives according to the teachings they have received. Some work with plants, some may counsel, some may use other forms of doctoring and some may heal with their hands. They may work through ceremonies such as the sweat lodge or pipe ceremonies. There may be one or many forms of healing that they have received training in. Depending on the form that their healing work takes, Healers may use drums and shakers as they sing and pray. They will use one or more of the four sacred medicines for smudging.

Some Healers are called Medicine People because they work with the plant medicines. They know about plants and they prepare the medicines themselves. There are special procedures for everything. If a Healer needs a powerful medicine for someone, the Healer has to find out how to get it, how to keep and store it, and how it should be used and given. One plant may have five or six uses. The Healer may need to fast in order to learn about a particular medicine. Healers say they are continually learning.

A Traditional Healing is Holistic, if a person seeks help for an ulcer, it is not only the ulcer that is treated. The root cause of the condition is also addressed. Healers look at all aspects of the individual, the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical as they are all connected. There are some who describe the work they do in terms of working with energy, the mind and the spirit. They might work with eagle feathers to get to the core of the problem. Counselling is an intrinsic part of all Healing, but there are Healers whose particular gift is healing with words. Some communities have seerers who it is said can see backwards and forwards.

Healers may perform doctoring during a sweat lodge ceremony or they may take care of you when you go on your fast for healing. They may work through pipe ceremonies to advise and prescribe and they may support you when you participate in the ceremonies.

A Traditional Elder is someone who follows the teachings of our ancestors. It is said Traditional Elders walk the walk and talk the good way of life. An Elder does not have to be a senior but could be someone younger who has earned the respect of their community by contributing to its spiritual development.

When you go to visit a Healer, Elder, or Medicine Person be yourself, be respectful to them and to yourself. Take tobacco to give as an offering. Tobacco is meant for that communication between you, the Healer and the Creator. The tobacco can be in any form. For example it can be one cigarette from a pack, it can be a pack or cigarettes, it can be a pouch of tobacco or it can be loose tobacco wrapped in a small square of cloth called a tobacco tie. Talk to the Healer or Elder and tell them why you have come. Refrain from taking alcohol or drugs for four days before going to a Healer. Women should schedule their visits with a Healer for times when they are not on their moon time. Other gifts can be given to express your gratitude for the help you have received. Items like baskets, blankets, or money are all suitable. Many Healers will have helpers who will convey any protocols that are specific to them. Take advice and direction from these helpers.

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Feasts and Giveaways

Feasts and giveaways are an important part of Aboriginal Life. They are held throughout the year to acknowledge the help received from the spirit world, our relatives, ancestors, and other members of the community. Feasting gives us the opportunity to honor all those who have helped us, to feed them and to express our respect for what they have done for us. Feasting is also spoken of as the way we strengthen life and the spirit of our bodies.

Feasting may be an individual or group event. At larger gatherings, drumming, singing and traditional dancing maybe part of the ceremony and the feast. Tobacco is always offered and the foods served vary according to the customs of the community or territory and the reason for the feast.

There are spirit feasts with the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, and winter. The feast for honoring and feeding the dead is held in the fall and in some communities also in the winter. Some people hold a feast before the seeds are put in the ground an again after harvest time. Feasting the harvest may consist of taking a plate of food back to the garden and leaving it there as a way of giving back to the earth.

We feast the gifts that we carry. We acknowledge the spirit of our pipes and feathers for their power to help us. We have drum feasts for the drum we carry. We feast all the items that we took with us on our fasts, such as our colors, feathers, and shakers. Berry ceremonies are held to thank Mother Earth who has given birth to the berries. There is a feast for a girl who has just begun her Moon Time. We feast the helpers that are given to us and all the others who so eagerly give us help when we ask for it. People will feast the eagle, the bear, the wolf, the mountain, fire, plant medicines, and all the other spirit helpers who come to them. There are feasts for the salmon and the deer because they have come back.

Feasts for the dead is also a way to maintain a relationship with our families or loved ones who have gone to the spirit world. At a feast for the dead, the teachings say we can call the spirits back. This is the time we can ask them for help in addition to showing our gratitude to them for the help they have given us. In some communities the ceremony is held in the fall between the time that the leaves fall off the trees and the first snowfall. The feast begins with prayers and an offering of tobacco. The people and directions are acknowledged and the spirits are told what is being done. The food is set out on the table. The foods include the ones that those relatives and ancestors loved when they lived here. The might be wild meat , fish, berries and teas. The smudge bowl is taken around and the food and people are smudged. Gifts of cloth and leather are also given with the food and tobacco offerings for the spirits.

Out of respect, the younger ones make up a place of food for the elders. By doing this, the younger ones learn about taking care of another human being. The Elders are the first to be served and then the other participants follow in a specified order. As the feasters make up their plate of food from the dishes laid out on the table, they put a spoonful of food for their relatives and ancestors into a pot set out for that purpose. At the end of the feast this pot full of food is taken outside and the food is set on the ground for the spirits. Any food left over on the table at the end of the feast is eaten or taken out and put on the ground. It is said that during the night, many spirits come from different directions to share in the feast. The spirits of relatives and ancestors bring other spirits who haven't been remembered and the share the food with them.

Very often a feast is followed by a give away. The giveaway takes place to thank the people who have come to support us. Gifts could be tobacco ties, ribbon shirts, moccasins, blankets, small tobacco pouches or any other item useful item for the home. The giveaway makes people feel good because the gifts they have made are valued by the people who receive them. At a traditional wedding for example, the couple gives all kinds of gifts to those who have come to wish them well. Feasts and giveaways also take place when a young warrior has his first hunting kill. The new hunter holds a feast and giveaway and gives all of the animal's meat to the community in respect for becoming a hunter. This is the rite of passage of a boy to a hunter.

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Your Name and your Colors

Everything in creation has a name. The trees, animals, plants, fish, water, and air all have names. When we receive our spirit name, we know we are in Creation. We are able to identify ourselves when we communicate with the spirit of each thing in Creation. A spirit name is important for a good beginning, strong prayers, and the good life. A spirit name is important for personal protection against sickness and disease.

When you have your spirit name, which may be referred to as your Indian Name, your communication with the spirit world is strengthened. When the spirits that we talk to have been our name, they see everything about us. They see our life, our future and who we are, and when we offer tobacco to them, they can guide us.

Elders and Healers say that when your spirit comes to this world, your name and colors will follow you to the spirit door. It is said that our spirit name is the name we had before we came into this world. Spirit names are said to be ancient and some of these names are the names of our ancestors. Your spirit name is said to be fifty percent of your healing and balance because, with it, you know who you are, where you belong, where you are going, and where you came from.

Before the arrival of the newcomers, Native People had a way of getting their name. This varied from Nation to Nation. Today there are communities where the traditional ceremonies for the naming of babies are still held as they were for thousands of years. In some communities babies are given their spirit names when they are two three or four weeks old. An Elder who has the ability and honour to give spirit names talks to the baby in their Native language and the baby's spirit listens. The Elder explains to the baby what his or her name is and what it means to have that name. The baby hears and understands. It is never too late to get your spirit name and colors. The spirit waits for you to come to them for a name. The Traditional people recognize that because of what has happened in our communities historically, many of us don't know the teachings and they will wait for us to come to them.

Today, we can offer tobacco to a Traditional Healer, Elder, or Medicine Person who has the ability to call names and colors through the spirit door. We can also seek our name through ceremonies. The person we ask to give us our name may use special songs to call on our name and colors.

Naming ceremonies are held in some communities to announce a person's name. Many traditional people say that when you receive your name you should announce it to the community and the four directions of the universe. Those attending the ceremony come up to you, shake your hand and call you by name. Your family gives out gifts to the people and everyone enjoys the feast you have prepared. Often you will have three or four sponsors. They are like grandparents to you. When they accept the responsibility for being your sponsor, they know it is for life both yours and theirs.

Everything in Creation has a color that represents a certain type of color. A spirit name such as "Bringer of the first Light" has to do with the morning with the colors of purple and yellow which are the colors that appear in the morning. This is the time that this person would do ceremonies because at this time she will gain strength and gifts. When you wear your colors for ex. Ribbons, it is considered the Good Life which keeps you straight and walking a good way. Colors are as important as a name. It is said your colors should come with your name. They represent your powers, you receive guidance from them and they help you focus. You can hang your colors in your room if you are on a healing journey. You can make your dancing regalia with your colors in beads and materials.

You need to find a path to honor your spirit name and color. You can honor them through different ceremonies. You can make food offerings during the year. These can be monthly with the moon cycle or four times a year with the changing of the seasons or once a year.

Resource Kit

Ilnu Wunji Mikamawey Mawí'omí Indian Head First Nations



Sacred Items and Bundles

When we carry sacred items, we carry them with the recognition that everything in Creation has spirit, including the animals, and plants, the rocks, water, moon and stars. Even one feather of a bird has spirit. When we carry a feather in our bundle and use it for our personal prayers and in ceremony, we are calling on the spirit of that bird for help and guidance.

Drum The drum is the heartbeat of our people; it's the heartbeat of life. We live the first nine months of our lives within our mothers and we listen to the heartbeat; it sets the pattern of existence.

Drumstick There are various types of drumsticks. Some people refer to the drumstick as being part of the Thunderbirds. Other teachings say the drumstick is the arm of the Great Spirit who gives us a heartbeat.

Rattle It is said that before the creator made everyone, the universe was in darkness and the only sound was the sound that the shaker makes, the shaking of seeds in a gourd. The spirits are drawn in when many people use their shakers as they sing a song.

Eagle Feather The eagle is one of the ones who is closest to the Creator because he can fly so high and he spoke for the people. In the old ways, if you did something remarkable for your people you had the right to an eagle feather. If a warrior proved himself in battle, facing an enemy, he received a feather. Today the greatest enemy Native people face is alcohol and drugs. If you are in a battle with one of these, you are in a battle for your life. When you overcome alcohol or drugs, you have one that battle and become a warrior. You earn an eagle feather and you to live by it. It is a high honor to receive an eagle feather.

Sacred Bundles Many First Nations people who follow their traditional teachings will have sacred items to help guide them. A sacred bundle consists of one or many sacred items. It can be a little tobacco pouch that someone wears around their neck or it can be the items that the spirits have given to a person to carry for the people.

Personal Bundles You can have a personal bundle that you have built with items you have gathered and that you take care of. This bundle is sacred to you. It contains items that help you in your personal development; it contains items that have given you a teaching and that you use in ceremonies. Maybe your parents or grandparents or an Elder gave you something to help you on your path. All the contents of your bundle relate to you. It may include medicines, your drum, a bowl, a rock, your colors, a feather, a staff, a rattle, and your pipe. You may also carry a clan marker, something that represents your clan such as a bear claw if you are of the bear clan. Tobacco is always first in your bundle. These items remind you of the beauty of Creation.

Bundles for the people The bundles for the people are used for healing and ceremonies. It is said that these bundles contain things that the Nations need to survive. The Healers who carry the medicine bundles say they do not own these bundles. They believe that our people's understanding is that we do not own anything, not even our physical bodies which is given back to Mother Earth when we die. They carry these items as gifts for these people. The Healers who take care of these bundles have been chosen by the spirits to carry on the teachings, the work and the responsibilities that come with these bundles. Sacred bundles are taken out at certain times of the year. Others keep them in the bundle until they are ready to use in a ceremony. Some leave their feathers out as these may have been given to them to create calmness in the home.

Resource Kit

*Ilnu Wunji Mikamawey Mawí'omí
Indian Head First Nations*



Programs and Contact Information Federation of Newfoundland Indians

Employment and Training (Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement)

Mr. Hayward Young Jr.

709-647-3550 Toll Free: 877-647-3129 Fax: 709-647-3509

Email: haywardyoung@fni.nf.ca

Fisheries (Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy, Allocation Transfer Program)

Mr. Calvin Francis

709-676-2188

Youth (Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement)

Ms. Candace Russell

709-634-6299 Toll Free: 1-877-634-6299 Fax: 709-639-2257

Email: Candace@fni.nf.ca Website: <http://www.fniyouth.com>

Diabetes Prevention (Consolidated Contribution Agreement)

Shelly Garnier

709-647-3009 Toll Free: 1-866-647-3009 Fax: 709-647-3509

Email: shelly@fni.nf.ca

Other Contact Information

President, Federation of Newfoundland Indians

Brendan Sheppard

Tele: 709-634-0996

Federation of Newfoundland Indians Website:

<http://www.fni.nf.ca/main%20page/newpage1.htm>

The Mi'kmaq People of Newfoundland-A Celebration

<http://www.mikmaqcelebration.com/>

Definition of a Successful life

“To laugh often and much;
To win the respect of intelligent people and
the affection of children;
To leave the world a better place;
To know even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived;
This is to have succeeded”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Do you have any info for our website site ?
Contact me at : lmwells@hotmail.com or
646-2662**

The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) is the national organization that represents 800,000 off-reserve Indian, Inuit, and Metis (non-status) people of Canada. Their website can be accessed at

<http://www.abo-peoples.org/>

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is the national organization that represents all the First Nations peoples (status) in Canada. Their website can be accessed at;

<http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=3>

It is the responsibility of each person alive to care for and protect Mother Earth. Please get active and protect the environment. Anyone wanting help or support with environmental issues can contact Frank Russell.

Information for these pages was obtained from Miawpukek Mi'kmaqey Mawi'omi brochures and Mi'kmaq Spirit Website

Looking for more information on the Mi'kmaq Nation? Check out these websites!

<http://mrc.uccb.ns.ca/hoffman.html>

<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/arch/infos/mikmaq1.htm>

<http://www.mikmaq-assoc.ca/>

<http://www.freeessay.com/papers/1736.htm>

<http://www.newtfn.com/history.html>

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/9479/mikmak.html>

http://www.native-languages.org/mikmaq_culture.htm

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/objects/index.htm>

<http://www.firstnationsseeker.ca/index.html>

<http://www.bloorstreet.com/200block/sindact.htm>

<http://www.muiniskw.org/>

Man's Poison

Last night I dreamed I was an Eagle,
Flying high in the sky,
Weak from the poison
Of man trying to destroy.

Unable to focus
Throwing caution to the wind
Fighting a battle
I knew I couldn't win.

My body was burning,
From fever and the sun
Unable to understand
The harm that man has done.

Unable to understand
why other species had to die
Unable, I struggle, to stay in the sky
Fighting to live, yet wanting to die.

-Frank Russell- -

Looking for some books to read? Remember your local public library has access to thousands of books. If they don't have the book you are looking for, they can usually bring it in!

Dorothy Anger: Where the Sand Blows

Daniel N. Paul: We were not the Savages

Thomas C. Parkhill: Weaving ourselves into the Land

Pritchard: No Word for Time

Ruth Whitehead: Six Micmac Stories

Richard Mac Ewan & W. D. Hamilton: Memories of a Micmac Life

Rita Joe & Lesley Choyce: The Mi'kmaq Anthology

Michael Runningwolf, Patricia Clark-Smith: On the Trail of Elder Brother

Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk: Women of the First Nations: