Guiding the Way

First Nations, Metis and Inuit

A Guide for Staff
Ojibwe Morning Prayer

Miigwetch Nmishoomis
Thank you Grandfather

Miigwetch Nookmis
Thank you Grandmother

Gii-bi-waase-aazheyin nongwa
for the shining sun today

Miigwetch ndikid nongwa
I say thank you for today

Gii-miizhiyaang mino-bi-maad-sa-win
for giving us life

Miigwetch ndikid nongwa gii-miizhiyaang nesewin
I say thank you for giving the air we breathe

Miigwetch shkikimi-kwe ogii miizhiyaang maadizowin
I say thank you mother earth for giving us

ogii miizhiyaang nbiish
for giving us water

ogii-miizhiyaang wesinhyaag, beneshiyaag, amoodegik, minwa nbishing aa-yaa-gig
for giving us animals, birds and the animals that crawl and the animals that are in
the water

Miigwetch waabnong, zhaawanong, epingishmak, miinwa giiwedinong
Thank you for the four directions east, south, west and north

Miigwetch Gzheminidoo.
Thank you, Lord.

By Theresa Root and Marilyn Root
Kitche Manitou (The Great Spirit) beheld a vision. In this dream he saw a vast sky filled with stars, sun, moon, and earth. He saw an earth made of mountains and valleys, islands and lakes, plains and forests. He saw trees and flowers, grasses and vegetables. He saw walking, flying, swimming, and crawling beings. He witnessed the birth, growth, and the end of things. At the same time he saw other things live on. Amidst change there was constancy. Kitche Manitou heard songs, wailings, stories. He touched wind and rain. He felt love and hate, fear and courage, joy and sadness. Kitche Manitou meditated to understand his vision. In his wisdom Kitche Manitou understood that his vision had to be fulfilled. Kitche Manitou was to bring into being and existence what he had seen, heard, and felt.

Out of nothing he made rock, water, fire, and wind. Into each one he breathed the breath of life. On each he bestowed with his breath a different essence and nature. Each substance had its own power which became its soul-spirit.

From these four substances Kitche Manitou created the physical world of sun, stars, moon, and earth.

To the sun Kitche Manitou gave the powers of light and heat. To the earth he gave growth and healing; to waters purity and renewal; to the wind music and the breath of life itself.

On earth Kitche Manitou formed mountains, valleys, plains, islands, lakes, bays, and rivers. Everything was in its place; everything was beautiful.

Then Kitche Manitou made the plant beings. These were four kinds: flowers, grasses, trees, and vegetables. To each he gave a spirit of life, growth, healing, and beauty. Each he placed where it would be the most beneficial, and lend to earth the greatest beauty and harmony and order.

After plants, Kitche Manitou created animal beings conferring on each special powers and natures. There were two-leggeds, four-leggeds, wingeds, and swimmers.

Last of all he made man. Though last in the order of creation, least in order of dependence, and weakest in bodily powers, man had the greatest gift – the power to dream.

Kitche Manitou then made The Great Laws of Nature for the well being and harmony of all things and all creatures. The Great Laws governed the place and movement of sun, moon, earth and stars; governed the powers of wind, water, fire, and rock; governed the rhythm and continuity of life, birth, growth, and decay. All things lived and worked by these laws.

Kitche Manitou had brought into existence his vision.

Haudenosaunee Creation Story

Before the beginning of time on earth, there lived beings in a place called Karonhia:ke or The Sky World. Now, in The Sky World these beings were magical and could make things happen just by thinking about them. The beings were similar to human beings in that they had the abilities to love and care for each other.

In the center of the Sky World, there was a tree growing. It was called the Tree of Life. On that tree grew many different kinds of fruit. Also, there were blossoms on that tree and those blossoms glowed. They lit up Sky World.

The beings in Sky World were told not to disturb that tree. But one day, a woman who was expecting a baby, asked for a drink of tea made from the roots of the Tree of Life. Her name was Iotsitsisen, which means Mature Flower. When her husband, Taronhiawakon, dug near the bottom of the tree to get at the roots, the dirt caved in and some say that the tree fell down. This was terrible. Iotsitsisen went to see what had happened and it is said, that she lost her balance and fell into the hole. Others say that she knew she was destined to go through that hole and so she jumped. Nevertheless, she grabbed at some roots and seeds from the Tree of Life as she fell. Because she fell through the hole in the sky, many people refer to her as Sky Woman.

As Sky Woman was falling, there were many birds flying. There were water mammals and fish in the water. One flock of birds, the geese, flew to the woman and caught her with their powerful wings. They tried to bring her back up to Sky World, but she was too heavy and so they lowered her to the water below. All of the other birds, mammals and fish life realized that she did not have feathers, scales, fur or webbed feet and all agreed that she could not survive in the water or air with their help. A giant snapping turtle came forward and said that they could put her on his back. That is the reason we call this place where we live, Turtle Island.

Sky Woman thanked the creatures, but she said that she needed dirt in order to survive. One by one, the animals dove down to try to get dirt from under the water. Finally, the muskrat was successful in bringing the dirt to Sky Woman. She placed the dirt on the back of the turtle. She stood and then sang and danced in a counter-clockwise direction and when she did that, the turtle’s shell grew and the grains of dirt multiplied. She placed the roots and seeds from the Tree of Life and they started to grow right away. When she finished dancing and singing, there was land and plant life as far as all could see.
Time went by and Sky Woman gave birth to a baby girl and she was named Tekaweahkwa. The baby girl grew up. She was told not to walk toward the west, but one day, the daughter started to walk toward the west. As soon as she did so, a wind started to blow from the west and a cloud started to move toward the daughter. The daughter saw the outline of a male-being in the cloud. The daughter fainted. When she woke up, she found two crossed arrows lying on top of her stomach. She had become the bride of the Spirit of the West Wind and she was now going to give birth to twin boys.

Those boys were very special. After all, their grandmother was Sky Woman and their father was the Spirit of the West Wind. The boys could talk to each other while they were growing inside their mother and they didn’t always agree with one another.

When it was time for them to be born, the right-handed twin was born in the usual way. However, the left-handed twin decided to push his way out through their mother’s armpit. That’s how he was born, but it killed their mother. They buried their mother and from her head grew corn, beans and squash. Those are the staple foods of the traditional Haudenosaunee diet and they are called The Three Sisters. From her heart grew sacred tobacco, which is used when there is a desire to communicate with the Creator. From her feet grew the wild strawberry which is known as The Big Medicine. Even in her death, the mother of the two boys was still making sure that they had what they needed to survive. She is called Mother Earth and to this day she still supports all of the people, animals and plants.

The twin boys grew up and went about the task of creating everything that is found in the natural world. They made rivers, flowers, animals and eventually they made the human beings. The left-handed twin, Tawiskaron (Ice Skin), became the keeper of the night and the right-handed twin, Okwiraseh (New Tree), became the keeper of the day. When they were done making their creations, everything was in perfect balance.

When Sky Woman passed away, her head was flung into the night sky. She is called Grandmother Moon. She reflects light at night. She helps the people keep track of time. She controls the rise and fall of the waters. She keeps company with the stars and the left-handed twin, the keeper of the night. She regulates the monthly cycles of all of the female life which guarantees that new life will be born. She is the leader of all the female life.

Eventually, the human beings were made. They are supposed to be the caretakers. They are supposed to make sure that everything stays in balance. However, it is the human beings who keep forgetting what they are supposed to do. The human beings forget to take only what they need and to leave the rest for the future generations to experience and enjoy. The human beings are the ones who forget that everything in the natural world is connected and is part of the same web of life and so should be respected. It is hoped that all of the people of the world will someday remember and respect their original instructions and take good care of their Mother Earth.

This is one very short version of the Haudenosaunee Creation Story. The whole story takes many days to tell.
Métis Prayer

Creator we thank you for many blessings you have given these many years.

We are Métis, with roots and rights that extend hundred of years into this continent.

We are neither First Nation, Inuit or European immigrants to this land, we are the middle ground between two camps. The compromise between differences and the dawn that separates night from day. We are not Half Breeds but the children born of a marriage between two different worlds.

We are descendants of the English, the Scots, the Algonquins, the Cree, and the Ojibwa to name a few. Dark or fair hair, brown or blue eyes, we are an invisible minority.

See our sash we so proudly wear? It is a mix of different elements like the life we Métis live. We speak English, French, Michif, and Maskegon.

To be Métis is to blessed with the fruit of not one but two family trees, not half but a doubling. Being twice blessed we are a strong, proud, Nation. We are Métis.

Creator for all of this we give you thanks.

Créateur nous vous remercions pour votre bonté depuis des centaines d'années.

Nous sommes Métis et nos racines sur ce continent remontent à des centaines d'années.

Nous ne sommes ni membres des Premières Nations, ni Inuits, ni immigrants Européens venus sur cette terre. Nous sommes le trait d'union entre deux camps. Le compromis, l'aube qui sépare la nuit du jour. Nous ne sommes pas des sang-mêlés, mais des enfants nés d'un mariage entre deux mondes différents.

Cheveux foncés, cheveux blonds, yeux bruns, yeux bleus, nous constituons une minorité invisible. Car nous descendons des Anglais, des Français, des Algonquins, des Cris, des Objibway et des Écossais pour en nommer que quelques-uns.

Nous parlons diverses langues : l'anglais, le français, le michif et le mashkegon.

Voyez la ceinture que nous portons si fièrement. Elle est un assemblage. Elle est un mélange. Elle est composée de divers éléments, comme la vie des Métis.

Être Métis, c'est avoir la chance de posséder le fruit de non pas un...mais de deux arbres généalogiques. Nous ne sommes pas la moitié de quoi que ce soit... mais le double de tout.

Nous sommes forts et fières, nous sommes Métis.

Courtesy Senator Reta Gordon, Métis Nation of Ontario
The Legend of Sedna

The legend of Sedna is a well-known Inuit legend. As in many legends, it contains epic struggles that reflect the challenges and tensions that exist within a culture. The legend of Sedna provides insight into how Inuit culture values the family and children very highly, and yet due to the challenging environment in which they exist, are sometimes are forced to make difficult decisions. The overpowering role of nature is always evident, as is the presence of sometimes malevolent forces.

According to one version of this legend, Sedna was a beautiful Inuit girl who was pressured into marriage by her father. Unknown to Sedna, her new husband was actually a raven who fed her fish and kept her in a nest on an island far away from her family. Her father, who missed Sedna terribly, went in his kayak to rescue her but the raven, with his special powers, called up a storm.

The father panicked and pushed Sedna into the cold water. As she clung to the kayak, her frozen fingers and hands were broken off and fell into the sea where they became seals, whales and other sea mammals. Sedna could no longer struggle and sank into the water where she became a goddess of the sea. Her frustration and anger continue to be expressed through the creation of storms and high seas.

Inuit hunters have treated Sedna with respect for centuries to ensure she will allow Inuit to harvest her bounty. Today some hunters still sprinkle a few drops of fresh water into the mouths of sea mammals they harvest to thank Sedna for her generosity.