



illustration: Deia Schlosberg

The Iroquois Native Americans' creation story

Once, long ago, a great tree flourished and provided everyone with all that they needed, and they were happy. But the Council Ruler knew that there was a great sea in darkness under the land, and he decided to give it light by uprooting the tree and making a hole in the ground.

The Council Ruler sent a woman, Aten-en-sic, down to the sea below, wrapped in light. The animals below saw her coming from above and knew that they must prepare a solid piece of ground for her arrival. First, Beaver swam down to the bottom of the sea to try to grab some earth, but he disappeared.

Next, Duck tried, but she too failed. Finally, Muskrat dived down and came back with some earth in his paw, and Turtle volunteered to have the earth on his back.

Now that Aten-en-sic had a safe place to land, the birds went to fetch her and place her on Turtle's back. Thus, Turtle became the Earth Bearer – and whenever he is restless and stirs, great waves and earthquakes shake the ground.

The earth quickly grew into a great island. Aten-en-sic gave birth to twin sons, one good and one evil, each of whom claimed the island as his own. The good son gave it trees and animals and protected the rivers with hills and mountains.

Creation Stories

The world's religions show a remarkable unanimity in their teaching about humanity's relationship with the environment. Islam, for example, teaches us that we are the guardians of nature, while the Judaeo-Christian tradition states

The rainbow serpent: an Aboriginal creation story

Long ago, in the dream time, before there were men and women, animals and plants, the world lay still and smooth and flat. The rainbow serpent, who was the mother of us all, lay in a deep sleep in the very centre of the earth.

Then one day the rainbow serpent suddenly awoke, and broke through the surface of the earth, showering everything with a bright red ochre dust. She travelled all over the land, forging mountain ranges and deep channels with her body. Such was her power and so great was her effect on the earth, that great rains began to pour from the sky, and fill the deep channels where her body wound its way. The high points created the mountains and the low points were filled with water to make the rivers and seas. The places where she did not

travel remained flat, and became the deserts.

Then the rainbow serpent began to call on all living creatures to come out from the centre of the earth and populate the land. She called on the birds and the animals. And finally she called on the human tribes. She told them to live in peace and harmony with their fellow creatures and reminded them to respect the rocks and trees, and the very earth itself, since all of creation has a spirit.

illustration: Jana Vodicková





The bad son twisted the trees and brought storms and hurricanes and bent the rivers. When their mother died, the good son made the sun from her face, and the earth, from which all life would come, from her body. The bad son put darkness in the western sky to chase down the sun each night.

After a long and arduous battle, the good son won control of the island and banished his brother to a pit under the earth. He continues to create and protect the world to this day.

that to love God is to love all of His creation. The religions and cultural traditions of indigenous peoples place even more emphasis on this relationship between humankind and the natural world. Here are two of their typical creation stories.

She told them to pass this knowledge of Mother Earth to their children and to the children yet to come – for men and women were now the caretakers of the land.

Then the great snake descended into the great ocean, where she guards the fish and other water creatures. And the people know that if they take more fish than they can eat, or kill for greed or pleasure, or abuse the laws of the land in any way, the great mother serpent will come out of her hiding place in the water, and punish those who have broken her laws.



photo: UNEP/Topham

SOUTH SEAS SOLUTIONS

The people who live on the isolated islands of the South Pacific have to be particularly careful in managing their natural resources: if these sources of food and shelter run out, they cannot simply move elsewhere.

For example, in the Solomon Islands, the people of Tikopia bury root vegetables and other foods to guard against poor harvests or other emergencies – like the category 5 cyclone that hit in 2003. They strictly monitor their population growth through traditional social systems that allow only the eldest son in each family to marry and have children. They stopped the practice of pig farming when they found that the animals

were eating too many of their starchy food crops.

The people of Tikopia are also among many island communities committed to conserving their fish. Traditional fishing rights ensure that areas along the coastlines are family owned: each family harvests and cares for their own section of the shore. Community taboos prevent people from removing small fish prematurely and ensure that they always throw a certain portion of the catch back into the sea. Fishing is prohibited in certain areas and during particular seasons. These restrictions are widely respected and based on the fishermen's intimate knowledge of when and where fish breed.



Sami Hero

Olof T. Johansson, a Sami reindeer herder, has been a driving force in protecting Sweden's ancient forests and securing land rights for his people. A Green member of the Sami parliament, he persuaded large forest owners in Sweden to recognize grazing rights for reindeer herders, and to set aside extensive areas of old, unexploited forests to allow the build-up of hanging lichens, which are essential for the animals in winter.

photo: www.oloft.com