



How Old-One Made Earth-Woman

Nicola Nlaka'pamux People – Canada and USA

A long time ago, before the world was formed, there lived a number of people together. They were the Stars, Moon, Sun, and Earth. The latter was a woman, and her husband was the Sun. The Earth-woman always found fault with her husband, and was disagreeable with him, saying he was nasty, ugly, and too hot. They had several children. At last the Sun felt annoyed at her grumbling, and deserted her. The Moon and Stars, who were relatives of the Sun, also left her, and moved over to where the Sun had taken up his abode.

When the Earth-woman saw that her husband and his friends had all deserted her, she became very sorrowful, and wept much. Now Old-One appeared, and transformed Sun, Moon and Stars into those we see in the sky at the present day, and placed them all so that they should look on the Earth-woman, and she could look at them. He said,

‘Henceforth you shall not desert people, nor hide yourselves, but shall remain where you can always be seen at night or by day. Henceforth you will look down on the Earth.’

Then he transformed the woman into the present Earth. Her hair became the trees and grass; her flesh, the clay; her bones, the rocks; and her blood, the springs of water. Old-One said,

‘Henceforth you will be the Earth, and people will live on you, and trample on your belly. You will be as their mother, for from you, bodies will spring, and to you they will go back. People will live as in your bosom, and sleep on your lap. They will derive nourishment from you, for you are

fat; and they will utilize all parts of your body. You will no more weep when you see your children.'

After this the Earth gave birth to people, who were very similar in form to ourselves; but they knew nothing, and required neither food nor drink. They had no appetites, desires, knowledge, or thoughts. Then Old-One travelled over the world and among the people, giving them appetites and desires, and causing all kinds of birds and fish to appear, to which he gave names, and ascribed to them certain positions and functions.


He said to the people, 'Where you see fish jump, there you will find water to drink. It will quench your thirst, and keep you alive'.

(...) He also told the people how to cook and eat salmon and other food, and showed them tobacco and pipe-stone, and how to smoke. He also taught the people the relationship of the sexes, how to have sexual intercourse, and how to give birth to children.

When he had finished teaching them, he bade them good-by, saying,

'I now leave you; but if you forget any of the arts I have taught you, or if you are in distress and require my aid, I will come again to you. The Sun is as your father, and the Earth as your mother. When you die, you will return to your mother's body. You will be covered with her flesh as a blanket, under which your bones will rest in peace.' □

Recorded by James Teit from a Nicola Nlaka'pamux narrator (1912).

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Comments

We do not know who exactly was the Nlaka'pamux storyteller who told this creation myth to Teit, but two pages below, at the end of another similar Old-One myth, Teit (1912) wrote:

The narrator of this story was a shaman called Nkamtcinê'x, belonging to Sulū's, and probably somewhat over seventy years of

age. (...) Other old men who had particular tales were Tcuiè'ska of Nicola, (...) and Ye'luska of Spences Bridge. (p. 324)

Thus, it is possible that the narrator of the story included here in The Earth Stories Collection was Tcuiè'ska of Nicola.

The Nlaka'pamux People were formerly known as the Thompson Indians or the Thompson River Salish. The Nlaka'pamux Nicola, that is, the Nlaka'pamux of the Nicola River Valley, refer to themselves as the Scw'exmx and speak a distinct dialect of the Thompson language. Together with the Spaxomin, which is a branch of the Okanagan People, who live in the upper course of the Nicola River, they collectively form what we now know as the Nicola People.

According to the 2016 Canadian population census, the Nlaka'pamux People have only 3,105 members. (Nlaka'pamux, 2024).

Sources

Teit, J. (1912). Old-One and the Earth, Sun, and People. In *Mythology of the Thompson Indians* (pp. 321-322). Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill & G. E. Stechert.

Nlaka'pamux (2024, Nov 22). In *Wikipedia*
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nlaka'pamux>

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Preamble – Earth, Our Home: Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.

Preamble – Earth, Our Home: The protection of Earth’s vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

Preamble – Universal Responsibility: To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities.

Principle 1: Respect Earth and life in all its diversity

Principle 4: Secure Earth’s bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

Principle 5: Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

