

Unit I:

Chapter 2: Aboriginal Spirituality

Pgs: 26 - 58

Aboriginal:

- Of native ancestry, inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times and before colonists.



Origins:

- Impossible to pinpoint an origin or a founder of Aboriginal spirituality.
- Occasionally a significant person rises to the forefront and renews the faith, but no single founder.

- Indigenous - originating naturally in a region, belonging naturally to an environment (of people) born in a region.
- Believe they came “from the Earth”
- Crossed the **Bering Strait** – Asia to N & S. America 35,000 years ago.
- Aboriginal peoples have been in the Americas longer than anyone else.

Plan for a tunnel connection under the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska



Bering Land Bridge Migration Theory – 1:43

- Aboriginal stories about genesis, or origins, carry great deal of spiritual power.
- Genesis: The origin, the beginnings, the formation of something.
- These creation stories are very important for the conveying aboriginal beliefs.

Aboriginal Spirituality Around the World:

- There is a huge diversity of Aboriginal spirituality around the world .
- 80 % of the worlds approximately 300 million Aboriginal peoples live in Asia.
- 13 % live in North and South America.
- Over 800,000 Aboriginal people live in Canada, some in every province.
- Not all, but many Aboriginal people around the world still believe in and practice their traditional religions .

Aboriginal Cultural Groups in Canada:

- Aboriginal peoples either migrated from Asia to the Americas and developed as **First Nations**, or were here from the earliest of times.
- Canada has at least **SIX** distinct cultural groups:
 1. **The Subarctic** (The Innu, The James Bay Cree)
 2. **The Plateau**
 3. **The Northwest Pacific Coast**
 4. **The Great Plains** (Cree, Sioux)
 5. **The Arctic** (The Inuit)
 6. **Northeast Woodlands** (The Iroquois)

Beliefs:

1. Animism:

- Many believe that everything in the world is alive.
- Even in the **AFTERLIFE**, their spirits return to the environment.
- The attribution of a living soul to plants, animals, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena.
- Most Aboriginal peoples believe in a supreme **CREATOR**.
- Power in the universe is also given to other spirits who are less powerful than the creator.

- **Examples:**

- The Inuit call the **SEA** “Sea Woman”
- The Iroquois call the **SKY** “Sky Woman”
- The Algonquin call the **SKY** “Grandfather”



2. Creation Stories:

- Often passed down **ORALLY**.
- Play an important role in Aboriginal cultures by offering a response to questions of existence, such as where we come from and where we go when we die.
- They believe they were always here.
- They “emerged out of this ground.”

- Each cultural group has their own identity and creation stories.
- **Examples:**
 - “Turtle Island” (P.36)
 - The Raven and the First Men

Native Creation Myths – 6:26





The Raven and the First Men by Bill Reid

3. Death and the Afterlife:

- A basic element in most aboriginal religions is the belief in the afterlife.
- Reincarnation: The belief in the rebirth of a soul in a new body or form.

- **Examples:**

- The **Sioux of the Great Plains** believe that four souls depart from a person at death (P.37).
- The **Iroquois** believe that souls or spirits can enter man-made objects like fishing nets or spears.
- The **Inuit** honor the souls of killed animals by facing the animal in the direction from which it came so that its soul can return.

4. Totems:

- A protective entity in the form of an animal, natural object, or plant.
 - Usually a totem belongs to an individual or clan.
 - Link Aboriginal peoples to their mythical ancestors.
 - e.g. The Ojibwa identify each totem group by the name of a bird, fish, animal, or reptile.
 - Persons of the same totem are considered close relatives and may not marry .

EXTRA:

- [Totem Pole Carving](#) – 7:46

Totem Poles:

- A long pole in which several totems are carved, used to recount history
- Carved from mature cedar trees by the Native people of the Northwest Pacific coast (British Columbia, Canada and southern Alaska, USA), full size totem poles are outgrowths of the region's aboriginal art forms.

What Do Totem Poles Mean?

- Originally, totem poles were carved and raised to represent a family-clan, its kinship system, its dignity, its accomplishments, its prestige, its adventures, its stories, its rights and prerogatives.
- A totem pole served, in essence, as the emblem of a family or clan and often as a reminder of its ancestry.

Why Raise Them?

1. In honor of a deceased elder who meant a great deal to the band
2. To show the (great) number of names and rights a person had acquired over their lifetime
3. To record an encounter with a supernatural being
4. To symbolize the generosity of a person who sponsored

- As for totem poles, they once performed much the same function for Native bands.
- A big Native family grouping, not just a mother, father, sister, brother, but a whole Clan of relatives, who were related by blood, by experience, by war exploits, and by adoption identified very strongly with the crests and figures carved on their totem pole.
- In general, totem poles (like Coats of Arms and Great Seals) mean: "This is who we are; these carvings symbolically"

