

*"Netukulimk is a complex cultural concept that encompasses Mi'kmaq sovereign law ways and guides individual and collective beliefs and behaviours in resource protection, procurement, and management to ensure and honour sustainability and prosperity for the ancestor, present and future generations."*

— Kerry Prosper (2011)

## What is Netukulimk?

Netukulimk is an essential concept for Mi'kmaw people because it embeds understandings as to how a person should live their life on earth where Spirit guides the heart, mind and actions. Netukulimk governs the physical, emotional, cognitional, social and spiritual relationships a person has with everything, including the physical features of the land, the rhythms and cycles and patterns of Wskitqamu (Mother Earth), and all her living beings and nonliving things. These key understandings and their interconnectiveness are emphasized in the teachings of Lillian Marshall as seen in the poster Pemi Punqek Mi'kma'ki (Eco Calendar).

Netukulimk begins when a person learns to weave respect, responsibility, relationship, and reciprocity into every aspect of his or her life ... everything they do to Wskitqamu and on Wskitqamu. It is more than a mental concept because it is a profound way of "being and knowing" that guides one's understandings of how to live within Wskitqamu and how to live in harmony.

When an individual, a community, a society weaves this way of knowing and being such that it guides actions, then people begin to live and act according to Netukulimk.

*" So this is what we truly believe. This is what reinforces our spiritualities: that no one being is greater than the next, that we are part and parcel of the whole, we are equal, and that each one of us has a responsibility to the balance of the system."*

— Albert Marshall, from Tepi'ketuek / Mi'kmaw Archives (<http://mikmawarchives.ca/authors/albert-marshall>)

Netukulimk recognizes the Four Aspects of Humanness:

- spiritual (spirit)
- emotional (heart)
- cognitional (mind)
- physical (body)

Netukulimk incorporates the Four Levels of Interactions, of Interconnectiveness:

- self
- family
- community
- environment

Netukulimk weaves the Four Core Values:

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Relationship
- Reciprocity

# Building, Growing and Nurturing Understanding of the Four Core Values through Teachings

## Teaching of Keptite'tekemk / Respect:

Respect the rhythms, cycles and patterns of all living beings and non-living things that Wskitqamu sustains. Keptite'tekemk, Respect, is one the *Seven Sacred Gifts* in the teachings from Murdena Marshall.

## Teaching of Responsibility:

We learn from the telling and re-telling of the Mi'kmaw Creation Story that the people were given responsibility to care for Wskitqamu. Niskam gave us all the tools and teachings to be responsible care takers.

The Mi'kmaw Creation Story begins with Niskam creating the sun, the four elements, the plants and animals, and finally humans. Kluscap is the first human to be created, then Nukumi (Kluscap's Grandmother).

Netawansum, the strong hunter and provider, is the third to arrive and after a long wait comes Ni'kanaptekwiskw (Kluscap's Mother) who brings the gifts of strength and understanding.

It is Kluscap's job to pass along the wisdom, teachings and knowledge that he learned from his family to the Mi'kmaw people.

Listen to Elder Jane Meader describing the Mi'kmaw Creation Story or read a version of it at the links below, respectively.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCVIUYID3qs>

<http://www.muiniskw.org/pgCulture3a.htm>

## Teaching of Relationship:

All living things are considered relations, "Msit No'kmaq" (all my relations). For instance, the soil, lichens, trees, water, sky, stars, etc. are all viewed as kin, as relations. Mi'kmaw see everything as Msit No'kmaq which conveys the understanding that the relationship one has with family extends to the plant world, the animal world, and the four elements of earth, air, water, and fire. This creates strong interconnectiveness among all living beings and non-living things and is an understanding clearly illustrated by the word "wejisqalia'ti'k" which loosely translates to "from this earth we sprouted" revealing our deep sense of Mi'kmaw relationship with Wskitqamu.

## Teaching of Reciprocity:

The circle is an excellent symbol or visual for representing reciprocity. It reminds us that we live within interdependent and interconnective systems. As caretakers of Wskitqamu, we honour the understanding about balancing "give and take" within our continuous and diverse interactions with the land, with other groups of living beings and non-living things, and with ecological resources. Elders and Knowledge Keepers begin teaching the young people about only taking what you, your family, and/or your community may need while also teaching the youth to keep in mind the sustainability of the resources themselves. A good example of this is knowing how much one can harvest during times of scarcity or times of over population. When you consider this teaching, you realize there is a richer understanding within Netukulimk: you are part of a whole system and any actions you undertake must consider the health and well-being of the whole system.

## The Fluidity, Flux and Elasticity of Our Mi'kmaw Knowledge System

Since time immemorial, Mi'kmaw Knowledge with its understandings of the rhythms, cycles, patterns, and systems has grown and changed. This fluidity and flux adds elasticity to Netukulimk enabling it to be dynamic and thus transcend time. As a result, Netukulimk continues as an essential Mi'kmaw way of being and knowing.

The dimensions within our Mi'kmaw Knowledge are, therefore:

- interactions;
- core values; and
- fluidity, flux and elasticity.

Knowing these dimensions can help build initial understandings of Netukulimk. This way of being and knowing enriches our interactions, our relationship building and growing, and our decision making. Netukulimk embeds strong stewardship and thus can be viewed as a powerful model to mentor our youth as environmental, ecological, and kinship stewards who live and work within wholistic Mi'kmaw understandings.

Netukulimk also resonates with the traditional wholistic understandings of learning described in *Mi'kmaw Ways of Being and Knowing*:

*" Mi'kmaw core values, principles and philosophy of life tend to center around our understanding of spirituality and to the connectiveness of all of creation. Knowledge was disclosed and shared with the specific purpose of teaching the individual to live in harmony with Mother Earth and how to behave as a sacred being living among other sacred beings."*

— Elder Jane Meade

## Teaching of the Drum and Netukulimk

Let's look at drum making. Fluidity, Flux and elasticity together are like the hide that stretches over a framework. When the hide is wet, it can be stretched over frames of many different sizes and shapes. The frame of the drum is akin to the Four Core Values – it is always crafted with respect, responsibility, relationship and reciprocity. These Four Values give the frame strength and structure. The string used to secure the hide to the frame and hold it in place represents the level of connections one must consider: self, family, community and environment. The string also represents the Teaching of Interconnectiveness; when you make a drum, long pieces of string are woven underneath and connected at the center. If you pull the string too much on any one side or place, it will affect all other levels and aspects.

The beauty of the drum is not in the lone task of making it but rather in the sound made when a person plays it... and this can only happen because of, and through, the relational and reciprocal actions of the drum and drummer. This illustrates why action is essential in Netukulimk... why action must always be guided by Spirit to achieve harmony and balance.

The beat of the drum also reminds us of the heartbeat, which is the first sound the child hears in the womb of her or his mother. And thus, from their earliest moments of life, the child learns that Wskitqamu is filled with sound, heartbeat, rhythm, cycles, patterns and interconnectiveness. In teaching about Netukulimk, we can continue to build, grow and nurture this early understanding.