

Abenaki Emergence Myth
An Abenaki Legend

“Note: The character Kloskurbeh is identified with Glooscap of the Algonquin myths. The Abenaki, or Wabanaki, are an Algonquin people of Maine and New Brunswick.

First Manitou, the Great Spirit, made Kloskurbeh, the great teacher. One day when the sun was directly overhead, a young boy appeared to Kloskurbeh. He explained that he had been born when the sea had churned up a great foam, which was then heated by the sun, congealed, and came alive as a human boy.

The next day, again at noon, the teacher and the boy greeted a girl. She explained that she had come from the earth, which had produced a green plant which bore her as fruit. And so Kloskurbeh, the wise teacher, knew that human beings came forth from the union of sea and land. The teacher gave thanks to Manitou and instructed the boy and girl in everything they needed to know. Then Kloskurbeh went north into the forest to meditate.

The man and the woman had many, many children. Unfortunately, they had so many children that they were unable to feed them all by hunting and picking wild foods. The mother was filled with grief to see her children hungry, and the father despaired. One day the mother went down to a stream, entering it sadly. As she reached the middle of the stream, her mood changed completely and she was filled with joy. A long green shoot had come out of her body, between her legs. As the mother left the stream, she once again looked unhappy.

Later, the father asked her what had happened during the day while he was out trying to gather food. The mother told the whole story. She then instructed the father to kill her and plant her bones in two piles. The father, understandably, was upset by this command and he questioned the mother many times about it. Naturally, it was shocking and disturbing to think that he had to kill his wife in order to save his children: But she was insistent. The father immediately went to Kloskurbeh for advice. Kloskurbeh thought the story very strange, but then he prayed to Manitou for guidance. Kloskurbeh then told the father that the mother was right; this was the will of Manitou. So, the father killed his wife and buried her bones in two piles as he was commanded to do.

For seven moons, the father stood over the piles of bones and wept. Then one morning, he noticed that from one pile had sprouted tobacco and, from the other, maize. Kloskurbeh explained to the man that his wife had really never died, but that she would live forever in these two crops.

To this day, a mother would rather die than see her children starve, and all children are still fed today by that original mother. Men like to plant in the cornfields extra fish they catch as a gift of thanks to the first mother and a remembrance that we are all children of the union of sea and land.” (Abenaki Emergence).