



How Medicines Came to Man (Bear Legend)

We are told that when people first came onto this land, they didn't really know how to take care of themselves and they started getting sick. They didn't know how to look for medicines or how to cure themselves. At that time, all of the animals had a job to take care of kahkiyaw Nēhiyawak, all the Cree people. They carefully looked after them and took care of them.

One in particular, Mosōm Maskwa, grandfather bear, was really bothered by what he was seeing; he could see all these sicknesses that were coming out and the People were starting to die and they didn't know how to get rid of those illnesses. So, Mosōm Maskwa called kahkiyaw mosōminanak, all the grandfathers, and ekwa nohkōminanak, the grandmothers. He told them, "We need to do something. These people are getting sick and they don't know how to fix these sicknesses."

It was decided that somebody was going to have to go into the world of spirits and go learn how to cure these sicknesses and which plants they should be using, and what things they should be using to cure these sicknesses. All the animals talked amongst themselves. Who was going to make this journey to the spirit world? From the Legend of Four Directions, we know that Mosōm Maskwa was the one who spoke to spirits and the animals said that.

"Well, Mosōm Maskwa, you're the one who speaks to spirits. You're the one who's going to have to go speak to the spirits and ask them how we fix these sicknesses."

So Mosōm Maskwa agreed and said, "Okay. I'll have to leave this earthly form to go into the spirit world and learn from the spirits. But, I need someone to look after my body while I'm gone to the spirit world."

The other animals agreed. "Okay. We'll make sure no one touches your body while you're going into the spirit world."

Mosōm Maskwa agreed and he began digging into the ground to make sure his body would be safe as he traveled to the spirit world. He dug a hole deep into the ground and he put himself in there. Once the hole was finished and he was in there, he went to sleep for a really long time. He went into the spirit world to learn about these sicknesses.

Once Mosōm Maskwa went to sleep, it seemed like the whole world went to sleep. All the leaves dropped from the trees; the green went away from the plants; it's almost as if the whole world went into a rest, into a sleep to look after Mosōm Maskwa as he traveled into the spirit world.

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After a great, many, many moons, Mosōm Maskwa finally started to emerge from this hole in the ground, this burrow, his den. As soon as he started to emerge, everything around him started to wake up. The trees started to grow leaves again; the grass started to turn green again; everything seemed to come awake.

Mosōm Maskwa came out and he went to where the People were and he told kahkiyaw Nēhiyawak, "Come! Watch me. Watch me carefully and what I'm going to go and do and the plants I'm going to dig. These are the plants that are going to heal you and fix your sicknesses."

So, Mosōm Maskwa walked through the woods, looking at all the plants, tipping over logs, and finally, when he found the plant he was looking for, the medicine, he started digging it up and he took that root out of the ground. The People were carefully watching him and everything he did.

Once he got the root, he said, "This is the medicine that will cure the sickness you have right now." The kahkiyaw Nēhiyawak thanked Mosōm Maskwa and they took that root and prepared the medicine. It got rid of the sickness.

So, as Nēhiyawak, we are told to this day Mosōm Maskwa does what he did all those years ago every year. Every year he goes into the ground and when he goes into the ground, that means he's going to travel into the spirit world.

Everything goes to sleep to protect him and watch over him as he travels in the spirit world. When he does finally emerge, everything comes to life again and just as he did kāyas, long ago, he'll go straight to where the plant is or medicine that's going to help us.

So, as Nēhiyawak, we've always been told to watch Mosōm Maskwa as he comes out of his den because he's going to teach us what kinds of medicines are going to cure our bodies and fix sicknesses. We are told to continue doing this to this day. Every year, Mosōm Maskwa goes through the same thing so we continue to follow him and watch him for the cures for sicknesses.

So that's the story of Mosōm Maskwa and how medicines came to Nēhiyawak and we're told, still, to watch and observe Mosōm Maskwa.

Ay-hay, Thank you