

Askami's Story

Greetings. I am Askami, which means "always" to the Abenaki Indians, the original native people of Vermont. My message has always and will always be truth. You may wonder why I have been sent to speak to you. It is to share a vision of the past, the present, and perhaps the future. Today you have a waste problem, but this was not always so. There was a time when there was no waste problem on Mother Earth. There was a time, my sisters and my brothers, when all the creatures of the world knew and followed Mother Earth's four Laws of Nature and so lived in harmony. I will now teach you these four laws.

With my story, I will be taking you to a time before European settlers travelled to the shores of the American continent – a time long, long ago when the world was younger and there were no people. Listen very carefully and try to forget the world as you know it, for much was different in those early days. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine the scene I will describe to you.

The land before you has no buildings. It is covered with giant ferns and plants you have never seen. The rivers, lakes and oceans are clean. Animals roam the land freely. They form a delicate web of life with one animal serving as food for another. When an animal dies, its flesh and bones are consumed by other hungry animals. What is not eaten is returned to the soil, making it richer and healthier for plants to grow. And so, we have our first Law of Nature: "THERE IS NO WASTE IN NATURE."

Time moves on and my ancestors, the Native Americans, travel to these lands. They follow the first Law of Nature and take from Mother Earth only what they need. When they kill a buffalo, they eat its flesh, hold a big feast, and share the meat with the entire tribe. They wear the skins and make the bones into tools. They waste nothing. Even the teeth are used as jewelry. My people always give thanks to the animals when they take their lives, for they know the animals are our brothers and sisters.

My people give thanks to all the animals and plants, the rivers and air, and even the sun. They realize they need all of these things to survive. And so, we have the second Law of Nature: "EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED." If we harm our friends the insect, we harm the birds that eat the insects. If we poison our water, we poison ourselves

It is now the year 1607, and the fair-skinned people come from the east across the big sea and live here with my people. Soon we see towns

scattered over the countryside. Farmlands replace forests. The settlers work hard to clear the land. Many people prosper, and with this prosperity, some people forget the first two laws of Nature. They kill more animals than they need to survive, and many animals are killed just for the fur.

Time goes on. The land becomes filled with many people who use more than they need and create much waste. But the people do not know the third Law of Nature: "THERE IS NO SUCH PLACE AS AWAY." All things must go somewhere. And so, the people's waste comes back to them, for they must drink the water and use the land they have polluted to grow their food.

Time goes on. Many, many people now live on the earth. More people have more possessions. To create more things, they take more from the land, metal to build machines which make products, oil to make the machines work. More...more...more. But Mother Earth has only so many gifts to share with her children. The fourth law, my sisters and brothers, is: "THE EARTH HAS LIMITS." There is only so much oil, metal and land. There is a limit to how much waste we can create, for we are running out of places to put our waste.

And, so you see, my mission is urgent. Although I see the past and understand the present, I cannot truly predict the future, because you, the children of the earth, are the creators of the future. It is up to you to decide what the future will be. Let the Laws of Nature guide you in your thoughts and actions.

I leave you with words spoken in 1854 by a wise Native American brother, Chief Seattle:

"WHATEVER BEFALLS THE EARTH
BEFALLS THE CHILDREN OF THE EARTH.
MAN DID NOT WEAVE THE WEB OF LIFE.
HE IS MERELY A STRAND IN IT.
WHATEVER HE DOES TO THE WEB,
HE DOES TO HIMSELF."