

## **NEHETHO CUSTOMARY LAW PRINCIPLES**

The *Nisichawayasihk Nehethowuk* traditionally live by reference to *Kihche'othasowewin* (the Great Law of the Creator), which is underpinned by spiritual and philosophical beliefs, values, principles and goals. *Nisichawayasihk Nehetho* customary law is the sum total of these beliefs, values and norms.

All combine to guide and direct the conduct of *ethiniwuk* (individuals), *ka'esi minisichik* (the family), *ka'esi anisko'wahkometochik* (the extended family), *ka'esi mamawe'minisichik* (the clan) and *ka'esi'pisketuskan'nesichik* (the nation). In this way social order is maintained by doctrines or principles that reflect *Kihche'othasowewin*.

Ceremonies are an important part of *Nisichawayasihk Nehetho* customary law and are performed primarily to seek guidance, reconciliation, restore harmony, reverse the potential of misfortune and achieve balance (*tapiskochinikewin*) with one's surroundings.

The principles of *Nehethowuk* customary law are as follows:

1. ***Kwayaskonikiwin***, (reconciliation) which means that the conduct of a person must be reconciled with ***Kihche'othasowewin*** (the Great Law of the Creator);

Everything placed on N'tuskenan was placed for a purpose. The plants and animals gave our people all their gifts in exchange for respect. Now, the laws that are hidden in every leaf and rock have been violated and the agreed upon laws and customs are no longer followed. These laws might be ancient but not archaic but eternal. All the human races are subject to the same laws. For every action there is an equal reaction. Thus humans who do not respect creation and the Great Law will be penalized; accidents, sickness, disease, heart attacks, insanity, and even death will happen to the violators.

2. ***Kistethichikewin***, (respect) which means that the conduct of a person must be based on the sacred responsibility to treat all things with respect and honour. In the context of the duty to consult, ***Kistethichikewin*** means that a person must show respect to all the four orders of creation. The four orders of creation includes N'tuskenan or some will refer as Mother Earth as the first order with her life blood, the water (nepi). For without water, there would be no plant, animal, or human life. The plant kingdom is the second, for without it there would be

no animal or human life. The animal kingdom is the third. Last and clearly the least important is the human kingdom. It is we who owe the greatest duty of respect and care for the other three orders. That was a covenant of unity at the time of creation. Without the four orders, we will perish. And so, our role is not to subdue but to learn how to interact so that we can try our best to accommodate (nuheputhehiwewin) ourselves to the existing relationships and the interdependence. According to our Nehetho world view mankind's interests are not to be placed above those of any other part of creation.

3. *Tawinamakewin*, (consent) which means that a person is welcome. In this context, *Tawinamakewin* means that an entity requesting access to the land and its resources has a duty to consult including consideration of the well-being of the inhabitants. Therefore, the inhabitants will consider the request for access.

4. *Aski Kanache Pumenikewin*, which means that the conduct of a person must be in accordance with the sacred duty to protect *N'tuskenan* (the land, life, home and spiritual shelter entrusted to us by *Kihche'manitou* [the Creator] for our children *michimahch'ohc* (since time immemorial). There is a duty to respect and seek *Ethinesewin*.

**Our human duty is to strive constantly to attain a state of mind and spirit that both acknowledges and manifests understanding at every instant and in every act.**

**5. *Ethinesewin*, which means traditional knowledge, including the influence of moons and seasons on climate, weather, animals, plants and *Ethiniwuk* (individuals) as well as seasonal.**

**Our special gift as Nehetho people involves understanding the complex relationships between the four orders of creation and all the things that exist within them.**

**6. *N'totumakewin*, (the art of listening) which means that a person must seek not to be understood but to first understand. *N'totumakewin* establishes a duty to teach as well as to understand and to share as well as to seek *Ethinesewin*,**

**7. *Ayakwamisiwin*, (to be cautious about life) which means that a person must be cautious of his/her actions where there is uncertainty.**

**Our special responsibilities involve preserving the health of N'tuskenen, (N'kawenan-our mother) her lifeblood, and the plant, animal and human kingdoms. Where there is certainty, there is uncertainty. Where there is reality, there is unreality. There is the reality of the tangible and the intangible. The physical and the spiritual world are real and these two aspects are of one reality. Yet, there are**

laws which govern each of them. Violating the spiritual laws can affect the spiritual world. A balanced life is one that honors the laws of both of these realities.

8. *O'chinewin*, which means that what a person does to nature will come back to that person.

Creation sustained each other and was responsible for each other. This was the law that was agreed upon. The animals ate the plants and herbs, and the humans ate the animals. When we eat the flesh of the animals, we were getting good medicine and natural power for a long and healthy life. If there is a violation then there will be reciprocity.

9. *Aniskowatesewe Kanache Pumenikewin*, which means that a person must act in accordance with the sacred responsibility to protect heritage resources; to protect our sacred sites; to protect our ancestors resting places and their tools.

Some of the areas, we called our sacred sites e.g. Dancing Circle, our ancient ones have left their spiritual items, ancient burial grounds as their as their landmarks and their direction to us that the land is ours. The sacred sites and historic places including their names are our landmarks. Only the Nisichawasihk people will know what is there for us to identify – others will not know or understand.

**10. *Kanatethechikewin*, which means that the conduct of a person must be in accordance with the sacred responsibility to ensure that *Ethinewikuna* (human remains) and *Aniskowe Apuchetawina* (artifacts; the things we use while here on Earth) must not be disturbed;**

**11. *Asehewewin*, which means that what a person does to *Ethinewikuna* (human remains) and *Aniskowe Apuchetawina* (artifacts; the things we use while here on Earth) will affect that person's whole being.**

**12. *Nehetho Tipethimisowin*,(nationhood) which means the exercise of sovereignty. The conduct of all persons must be consistent with *Kihche'othasowewin* (the Great Law of the Creator) and must reflect decision-making roles in accord with *Nehetho Tipethimisowin*.**