MYTHS

Ga-do-waas, His Star Belt, the Milky Way

Iroquois/Hodenosaunee

The Iroquois, according to Arthur Parker (1908), believe that when a person dies his or her soul takes a path along the “great sky road,” (i.e. the Milky Way), and that each soul is guided by its own star.

For the full introduction to this story and for other stories, see The Allyn & Bacon Anthology of Traditional Literature edited by Judith V. Lechner. Allyn & Bacon/Longman, 2003.


Ga-do-waas dwells in the top sky, and with his four eyes watches every corner of the earth.

At one time, Ga-do-waas was an earth dweller and a hunter, but because of his presuming to celestial power and destroying all the game, he was transferred to the heavens, and watches the gate through which each soul passes to immortality.

When Ga-do-waas assumed his duty as soul watcher, he removed his hunting belt, which possessed the charm of enticing game, and decorating it with stars, cast it into space, where it spans the entire heavens and illuminates each path to which he guides a soul.

So luminous is this path that its blended light reaches down to the earth and divides its rays, stationing one at each lodge where a human is dying, that the departing soul may not lose its way as it leaves the dead.

No human has seen these rays, they are visible only to the soul. The south wind accompanies the soul till it reaches the gate where Ga-do-waas watches, and as it passes the portal of this journey place, he reaches into space and grasps a star which he fastens in the belt, thereby to guide the soul on its journey.

When the soul has crossed the entire heavens, Ga-do-waas removes the star from his belt, and returns it to its appointed place in space.

Though each soul may pass through various transmigrations before it departs from its lower existence, it can not enter the Land of the Creator till it has crossed the star belt of Ga-do-waas. The Milky Way, to the Iroquois, is a procession of stars, each guiding a soul. If there is a confusion in this procession, it is because some soul is disturbed and out of the path; but the star, which never loses its way, will search for it and return it to the course.