

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## OLYMPIC FLAME

Ancient Greeks' [story of Prometheus](#), which says that he stole fire from the Gods and gifted it to humanity, connects the origin of fire as a sacred element.<sup>1</sup> Originally, a [skaphia](#)<sup>2</sup> was used to ignite the Olympic flame, but today, the parabolic mirror is used as it is more reliable. The sun's rays, which light the flame, connect people to the natural world and to the sacred element of fire and light.

The Olympic Torch that holds the sacred Olympic flame connects with the fire/light inside each of us, as well as the light we turn to for guidance in the night sky that is filled with stars, and motivates humanity to aspire and not give up. The Olympic flame's stories, values, and ceremony are connected with the symbolism of fire. For many, the flame is also symbolic of life and the competitive spirit. This is also true for many of the Hall of Famers whose lessons learned through sport stretch far beyond the podium/playing field, becoming guiding lights for life's other obstacles.

## EAGLE FEATHER

An eagle feather is lifted up towards the sky much like an athlete raises up the Olympic Torch. For many Indigenous groups, the eagle and its feathers are highly revered and considered sacred. Many believe an eagle feather connects to the spirit and love of the Creator. When the eagle feather is held up to the sky, connection and honour is uplifted to the Creator and spirit world. To receive an eagle feather is an honour and there are protocols specific to various nations when it comes to having the rights to acquire eagle feathers. Some nations also have clans represented by the eagle.

Eagle feathers are used for ceremonial purposes and may also adorn regalia. There was a point in Canadian history when ceremony, regalia and other prohibitions were enforced under the Indian Act. Spiritual leaders and any "Indian" caught participating in ceremonies such as Sundance and Potlatch would be persecuted and face jail time. Under the Indian Act, non-indigenous people could also face persecution if they solicited funds for First Nations legal claims or let First Nations into establishments like pool halls.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> International Olympic Committee. (2013). Retrieved from olympic.org:

<https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Documents/Document-Set-Teachers-The-Main-Olympic-Topics/The-Olympic-Flame-and-Torch-Relay.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Your Burning Questions About the Olympic Torch, Answered*. (2019, February 9). Retrieved from Smithsonian Magazine: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/your-burning-questions-about-olympic-torch-answered-180968120/>

<sup>3</sup> *21 Things You May Not Have Known About The Indian Act*. (2015, June 2). Retrieved from Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.: <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/21-things-you-may-not-have-known-about-the-indian-act->

## SACRED FIRE

Fire is considered sacred; it is connected to ceremony and often used to begin an event. Fire keepers tend to the flame of a [sacred fire](#)<sup>4</sup> to ensure it does not go out. It is believed in many circles to be a gateway to the spiritual world and those who have passed on. Respecting fire is part of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Not only is fire used in ceremonies, but traditionally, it was also used to cook, provide heat, and light.

The [lighting of the qulliq](#) is practiced by Inuit Peoples, which, in the present day, is done to begin events and acknowledge Elders and ancestors. It can be seen as a symbol of survival and culture.<sup>5</sup> Light of the sun and stars also connect to the element of fire. The light of the sun is necessary for human beings' overall happiness as it provides us with vitamins along with food for plants and medicines needed for our overall holistic health. Canada's Sports Hall of Fame had the opportunity to connect with Elder Meeka Kakadluk who shared the lighting of the qulliq for the digital book's soft launch. You can access a recording of the blessing [HERE](#) (YouTube: <https://youtu.be/xS2agUnsKNw?t=1390>).

## NIGHT SKY

The light from the moon and stars also connect with cultural ways of knowing and being. Many Indigenous Peoples have deeply rooted spiritual connections to the night sky. Beliefs, ceremonies, teachings and stories passed down through generations connect to the stars and moon. According to Wilfred Buck, a Cree Elder who shares star night sky teachings, we come from the stars.<sup>6</sup> Learning about the night sky can ignite a sense of purpose, hope, reconnection and understanding that each person is connected not only to each other, but also to the universe.<sup>7</sup> Stars are considered our oldest relations rather than simply a ball of gas.<sup>8</sup> The night sky was also used for navigation to help guide people much like how maps are used today.

## HOPE & PERSEVERANCE

There is a light like the sacred fire within us and it is in our heart.<sup>9</sup> The metaphorical flame pulses through our bodies and activates hope, perseverance, determination, willpower, dedication and love. The sacred fire is placed in us by the Creator. Like a sacred fire used in ceremony, the sacred fire within needs to be cared for. Sometimes in our journey through this life on earth our inner sacred fire may

<sup>4</sup> Tribal Trade Co. (2018, May 28). *What is a Sacred Fire? (Spiritual Meaning of Fires in Indigenous Ceremonies)*. Retrieved from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJXcC6Pfqc4>

<sup>5</sup> Iļisaġvik College. (2021, May 11). *Lighting of the Qulliq*. Retrieved from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRyDOdtp4V8>

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, C. (2019, September 6). *Relearning The Star Stories Of Indigenous Peoples*. Retrieved from Science Friday: <https://www.sciencefriday.com/articles/indigenous-peoples-astronomy/>

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, C. (2019, September 6). *Relearning The Star Stories Of Indigenous Peoples*. Retrieved from Science Friday: <https://www.sciencefriday.com/articles/indigenous-peoples-astronomy/>

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, C. (2019, September 6). *Relearning The Star Stories Of Indigenous Peoples*. Retrieved from Science Friday: <https://www.sciencefriday.com/articles/indigenous-peoples-astronomy/>

<sup>9</sup> Dunkley, S. (2017). *The Flame*. Retrieved from Children & Youth Services Planning Committee: <https://kflchildrenandyouthservices.ca/indigenouslearningcircle/the-flame/>

start to dim. During times like these, we may feel sad, defeated, insecure, helpless, unloved and unmotivated. We must learn to nurture the sacred fire within our heart, which can be challenging when it feels like external experiences are extinguishing our inner flame. By caring for ourselves holistically and understanding the core elements of being well – emotional, spiritual, physical, mental, and cultural – our sacred fire can shine bright like the stars, which themselves are like a flickering flame.

The Indigenous Sports Heroes' stories showcase how the sacred fire within them continued to shine even when experiences like racism, Residential Schools, and injustice attempted to smother their internal flames. Not only can we find ways to empower our sacred fire, but we can also help to uplift and rekindle the fire of others.

## IDENTITY/NAMING

Our sacred fire, and connection to our spirit that helps keep us well and walk in this world with confidence, can correlate with feelings of belonging and connection to identity. Negative attitudes, stereotypes, policies and laws continue to be used to attempt to control the cultural identities of Indigenous Peoples and smother the sacred fire within.

Children were stripped of their names and families were assigned non-indigenous names and numbers in an attempt to eradicate connection to culture, and track and secure control of Indigenous Peoples. Names that are perceived as being different from the Western norm, continue to be ostracized and can create entry points for overt and systemic racism.

Indigenous Peoples' sense of identity and belonging can be connected to names. Names are at the heart of culture.<sup>10</sup> Eurocentrism, Residential Schools, and policies such as [Project Surname<sup>11</sup>](#) and the [Eskimo Tag<sup>12</sup>](#) system forced the attempted extinguishment of Indigenous naming traditions.

Original Indigenous languages' names are very special. Names are given to children and often passed down through generations, holding stories, connecting to the spirit of the child, nurturing identity and helping guide people through their time on earth. Names influence who we are and also how we are perceived.

Naming ceremonies take place within many Indigenous Peoples' traditions. Many original family names prior to colonization have been severed, yet many Indigenous Peoples continue to hold naming ceremonies. The names given at these ceremonies are usually different than the names used on birth certificates. These names may not appear on current government documents, but are held close to the heart and carried with them throughout life and as they journey to the spirit world.

Many of the Sport Heroes featured in the digital book have also been given Indigenous names with very special meanings, which can be viewed below.

<sup>10</sup> Alia, V. Names, Numbers, and Northern Policy: Inuit, Project Surname, and the Politics of Identity. (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> The Canadian Encyclopedia. (2021). *Project Surname*. Retrieved from The Canadian Encyclopedia | Historica Canada: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/project-surname>

<sup>12</sup> Here's My Canada. (2017, February 2). *Here's My Canada: Sheila Watt-Cloutier's Canada*. Retrieved from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-b373nCHlk>



### WANEK HORN-MILLER

Karakwinontha (Mohawk) – She Brings the Sun Inside

Tawaskamik ô iskwew (Cree name gifted by Chief Wilton Littlechild) – Centre of the Earth Woman



### CHIEF WILTON LITTLECHILD

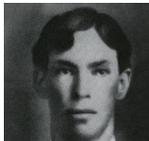
Mahihkan Pimohtêw (Cree) – Wolf Walker

Osâw kihîw (Cree - Chief Name) – Golden Eagle



### TOM LONGBOAT

Gagwe:gih (Onondaga) – Everything



### HARRY MANSON

Xul-Si-Malt (Coast Salish) – One Who Leaves His Mark



### ALWYN MORRIS

Ohnathakowa (Mohawk) – Tall Standing Pine/Big Pine

## SPORT

The Indigenous Hall of Famers' stories exude intrinsic and extrinsic<sup>13</sup> perseverance. Achieving greatness in sport is not an easy feat for anyone. Being born Indigenous raises many external issues like discrimination, forced disconnection from culture, family, language, and land. All of these factors attempt to douse the sacred fire within, which contributes to feelings of low esteem, identity loss and sense of belonging.

Trauma, and intergenerational trauma<sup>14</sup>, that stems from colonialism has left a legacy of pain and suffering in which some turn to ending their own life through suicide and addiction. Prior to colonization, suicide was not a concept known to most Indigenous Peoples; in fact, most Indigenous languages never even had a word for suicide.

Despite oppression and attempted genocide, it is the sacred fire within and the connection to spirit, as seen through lifting an eagle feather to the sky, that has nourished continued existence of cultural ways of knowing and being that are rooted in love for each other, the land, and the Creator.

<sup>13</sup> Kendra, C. (2021, April 13). *What Is Extrinsic Motivation?* Retrieved from Very Well Mind: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-extrinsic-motivation-2795164>

<sup>14</sup> The Healing Foundation. (2018, July 26). *Intergenerational Trauma Animation*. Retrieved from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlqx8EYvRbQ>

One way to uplift youth, to help break the cycle of trauma and rekindle the sacred fire within, is to help reconnect them with all the beautiful things about being Indigenous. This, of course, includes traditional ways of knowing and being that are rooted in love and nurturing of one another and the natural world. Sharing stories that showcase Indigenous Peoples who have survived and thrived, such as those featured in the digital book, can create a sense of belonging and connection. Uplifting one another, and standing up for and with Indigenous Peoples, will contribute to a healthy future for all of Canada.

Sport in Canada has, and sometimes continues, to perpetuate negative attitudes and discrimination towards Indigenous Peoples. Yet, there are [many ways](#)<sup>15</sup>, including everyday personal actions, as well as small and large initiatives, that can contribute to uplifting and fostering pride in Indigenous youth, and helping all of Canada work towards eradicating racism on and off the field.

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<sup>15</sup> *Indigenous Ally Toolkit*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Montreal Indigenous Community Network: [http://reseaumtlnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ally\\_March.pdf](http://reseaumtlnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ally_March.pdf)