

## Religion and View of the World

The Eskimo had several deities including *Hila*, the spirit of the wind, *Tatqiq*, the spirit of the moon, and the most important one, *Nuliayuq* or *Arnakapsaaluk*, the old woman who lived at the bottom of the sea and controlled the sea animals. *Nuliayuq's* wrath could be incurred if the elaborate rules separating land and sea animals were not observed. For instance, sewing of winter garments of caribou skin could not be commenced until the people moved into snowhouses in the fall and had to be completed before seals could be hunted through breathing holes. In many areas it was forbidden to eat the flesh of caribou and of sea mammals on the same day and it was forbidden to cook meat from land and sea animals in the same pot. Special procedures had to be observed when each animal was killed and its products used. Another series of restrictions surrounded the activities of menstruating women.

Most Eskimo appear to have had a belief in souls that lived on after the death of the body, and several tales exist describing the afterlife. People who died by violence went to the Land of Day where life has unlimited pleasures and where animals of the land are hunted. People dying natural deaths went to the Narrow Land, which is also a pleasant place, and where animals of the sea are hunted. Some were detained in the house of the sea goddess to expiate violations of the rules of life before being sent to either the Narrow Land or the Land of Day. It is said that the northern lights (*aurora borealis*) represent the souls running across the hard snow of the sky while playing ball with the skull of a walrus. There are, of course, variations from place to place in these beliefs and the stories that depict them.

The shaman or *angatkuq* was a man specially trained in the lore of the spirit world who was believed to have special powers that enabled him to intercede between the spirits and the world of man. Much of the misfortune that befell people was attributed to breaking of tabus and one of the jobs of the shaman was to determine the offender. The *angatkuq* was called upon to cure the sick, forecast weather, bring game and, periodically, to give demonstrations that served as proof of his powers.

Much of the oral literature of the Eskimo related to religious beliefs and the spirit world, but many tales concerned epic heroes such as *Kiviug*, whose exploits seem to have been known throughout the Eskimo area. Other tales were known locally only. Through studying their songs and tales we can learn much about the Eskimo views of the world.