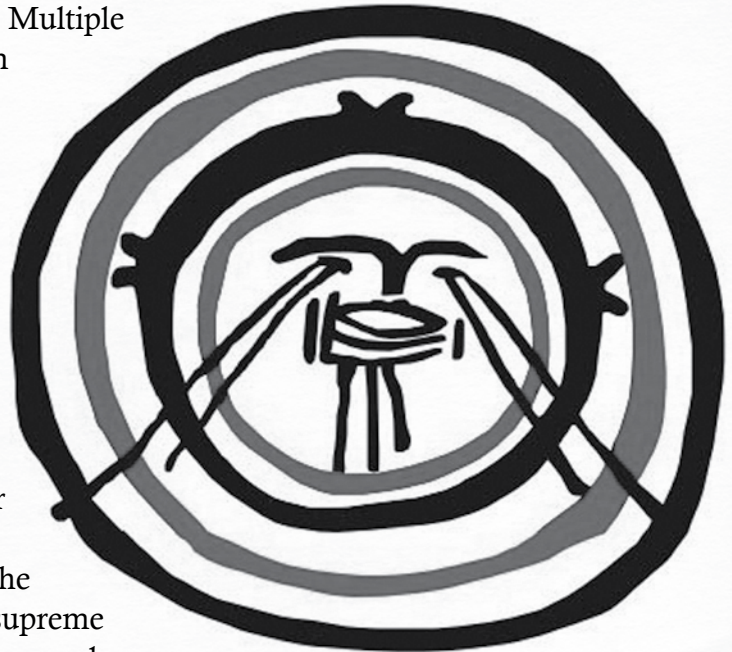




THE ALUTIIQ UNIVERSE

The Alutiiq universe contains many layers. Multiple sky and under sea worlds form a continuum of spirit realms that influence life on earth. Alutiiq people traditionally believe that all things - creatures, objects, places, and natural phenomenon like the wind - have a spirit. A human conscience characterizes these spirits. The word for spirit - *sua* - literally means "it's person", illustrating the human dimension of all things. To have a spirit is to have a person inside, and this spirit can take human shape. For example, animal spirits can peer out from their bodies or remove their skins to show their human form. In addition to the spirits of earthly things, there are also two supreme spirits on earth, *Imam Sua* - person of the sea, and *Nunam Sua* - person of the land. These beings control all creatures and can be called on for luck in hunting and fishing.



Painted image from a prehistoric, wooden box panel (AM197.95:859, Karluk One Site, Koniag, Inc. Collection, ca. AD 1700. Painted in red and black, this image may depict Llam Sua, the Alutiiq supreme being, in the fifth sky world. Lines extending from the eyes may represent the spirit's penetrating vision, or possibly rays of light. The Alutiiq people believed that Llam Sua could see and hear everything, and sometimes identified this spirit with the sun. Drawing courtesy the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center, Looking Both Ways project.

Above the earth are five sky worlds. *Llam Sua* (the universe's person), the invisible spirit of all things, lives in the fifth and purest sky world. *Kas'arpak*, the spirit who created all birds and animals, lives in the third sky world and assists shaman by relaying the wishes of *Llam Sua* to earth. The first sky world, closest to earth, contains the moon, the stars, and the northern lights. Like earth, this world has forests, rivers, and animals. Stars are believed to be the eyes of spirits, peering down through holes in the ground and the moon is the spirit of a man who wears a different mask each night.

LEARN MORE:

The Chugach Eskimo, 1953, by Kaj Birket-Smith. Nationalmuseets Skrifter, Etnografisk Raekke, VI. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

Ukgwepet - "Our Beliefs," 2001, by Aron Crowell and Jeff Leer. In Looking both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People, edited by A. Crowell, A. Steffian and G. Pullar, Pp. 189-121. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks.