



Photo Frank Lamonea

# Mati Waiya

**Q.** Will you explain a little bit about the Chumash Indians and also about the basic laws of the Chumash people?

**A.** In our culture we have to recognize the balance and the lessons of our natural, spiritual and physical world. We believe in the upper world (the sky), the lower world (the ocean), and the middle world (the land). As we are growing up both physically and spiritually, we learn from our elders about understanding the three basic laws: the laws of limitations, moderation and compensation.

**Limitation:** We realize that we are only going to live so long, then we are going to die. We only can be so strong and do so much. The more we can understand about what we can do and our abilities, the more we can accept who we are as human beings.

**Moderation:** If we go harvest from the ocean or the land, we take only what we need and we give before we take because we realize what we take is a gift. We leave some for tomorrow, for the future and for someone else.

**Compensation:** If you want to do something for your children, for the land, or for another person, do it because it's inside your heart and don't expect anything in return. Compensation can come in many forms; it can be a child, or happiness, or health, or wealth. It often comes when you need it most, and you least expect it.

We apply these three laws mentally and physically, and we live by them. We also believe in awakening one's spirit by teaching the values of Respect, Honor, Humility, and Awareness of our natural surroundings. We believe in living as sustainably as possible, and we respect our plants, our ocean, and our wildlife. Another thing about the Chumash is we honor our women. Our women, our mothers, our daughters, our sisters, and our wives. They bring us into the world, and they give us life. Chumash people have recognized that since long ago,

and many were our leaders. Men have a tendency to take a life. Our mothers teach us about love and how to care. They nurture us. The world is as fragile, and we respect the wisdom of our elders, and our women.

**Q.** What advice can you offer to people about what they could do to help our world environment and ocean?

**A.** I think we have forgotten the simplicity of life. We have gotten very comfortable and accustomed to the luxuries of modern life. There was a time when we harvested our waters from the springs and creeks, and we would appreciate each drop because there was an effort to go get it. There was a time you would appreciate the food and plants you would harvest because there was an effort. Today, we turn on the faucet to get water, or turn on the switch to get light. We don't even have to pray for the creatures we consume and the meat that we eat. We go to the store and it is all packaged. We've lost our respect and appreciation for those things that are part of every day life. It is going to take all of us together to protect and heal the pains that we have caused in this world, to the oceans, to the habitat and the things that we depend on. When people start praying, and dancing, and practice giving thanks again into their life, they can have a better understanding of life itself. If we would pay attention, and not be so greedy and be more mindful about the impacts that we have, the sensitive life around us that we continue to tread on like polluting our air, contaminating our fish,

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[www.wishtoyo.org](http://www.wishtoyo.org)

and disrespecting the history, then people can live in peace and harmony. There is peace when you see whales migrating, speaking their ancient language that they have exchanged with one another for thousands, possibly millions of years. Mankind, on the other hand, is never satisfied, we're insatiable, we always want more. We are rarely content, we are always changing what we think we need. If we could invest in a future that we will never see, then we will be on the right track. Our children, and their children deserve what our ancient ancestors had. If we all thought like that, we would be fine.

**Q.** What does it mean to you to be a coastkeeper for the *Waterkeeper Alliance*?

**A.** We became the 54th Keeper, and I am the first Native American to be part of this international alliance. It is very encouraging to see people in this group who actually care so much about the water and our environment. It wasn't too long ago that we relearned how to hug a tree. It concerns me that some of the environmentalists, and experts, may have turned their duties into a business; however, I can see the role that it takes, and the efforts that it takes to enforce laws. To see people care about this environment and commit themselves for something they believe in gives me hope. I think it is about time that more people open their eyes to this type of commitment.

When we look around and see the threat to the environment, and the health of our waters, it has an impact to our resources. People are getting cancers from our native community, from the reeds and the materials they use for our cultural values. If you look at the species that are disappearing, and find the contamination that we are discharging into our oceans through our rivers, you have to learn the laws in order to bring change. We could go in a court room and bring our sacred materials, but they don't understand that in court. They only understand the biology, the science and the laws. So people that are counting on their leadership, whether its local, state, or federal government, are wrong. Each and everyone of us has to step up, and step forward to protect the health of our waters.

The *Waterkeepers* allow protection, and we can all share international resources with each other. It is a network of eco-warriors that fight for the health of our waterways. There are not a lot of groups out there that step up like this. It is an honor to see the different groups out there fighting for our true right, and that is our true freedom, not a document that our government imposed on us that tells us about our freedoms. Our freedom is the health of those oceans and rivers. That's our true freedom, our birthright that we have and our obligation to protect, to respect, and to steward. We need more people to help, and we all need to realize that water is the bloodline of the world and of our very existence!

**Q.** Do you have any last thoughts you would like to share?

**A.** We may have been separated by race, religion, creed, wealth, or whatever has caused wars in the world, but there is only one world and one people. We need to engage together. It is a responsibility, and something we should never forget. If we stay connected, and true to this life, then we could have sense of the environment, and its suffering. We need to continue to send out the positive vibration of that spiritual world. When you send, you receive, it could be negative or positive. Right now, we are all suffering along with our environment. We have to make a conscious effort to work toward faith, and trust, and strength and hope. We are deteriorating our own core because we are destroying our own world, and that is not healthy. We need to live, and appreciate our lives, moment to moment. We need to get back to living more natural, more sustainable lives, and to take care of our Mother better, our Mother Nature.



Photo Luhui Isha