

Overflow (to) — Ullq'rluni

Caskan ullq'rtuq.—Your cup is overflowing.



Photo: Alutiiq Museum coffee mug, AM888

The Alutiiq verb *ullq'rluni*, to overflow, is typically used to describe something running out of a container. You could use this word to warn that your soup is bubbling out of its pot or that water is spilling over the sides of the bathtub. *Ullq'rlunika* can also be used to mean flooding—a river overflowing its banks or the ocean inundating the shore.

Floods are a widespread theme in Indigenous legends. Cultures all over the world have tales of catastrophic flooding. Like the biblical story of Noah, these legends often describe a flood as a form of punishment that leads to renewal. Some of these legends reflect syncretism, the combining of Indigenous and Christian beliefs by cultures exposed to missionaries. Other legends preserve local history. Because legends are designed to pass information to the next generation, they often record rare or unusual events and their outcomes.

In 1872, French anthropologist Alphonse Pinart recorded a Kodiak Alutiiq legend that discusses a flood. The tale tells of a man who tired of his wife and abandoned her on a rock in the ocean. The man went home and married another woman. The abandoned wife was rescued and also remarried. One day, the woman asked her new husband to take her to see her former spouse. When she found him, the woman accused him of trying to kill her. In her anger, she turned into a bear and killed her former husband and his new wife. Soon after, the sea flooded the village. The bear-woman swam a long time till she came to another world. Here she threw kelp on the shore to create bushes for shelter and food.