

Knowledge of Native Elders--ANS 401  
Jonathan & Rosie David  
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Summarized by: Mike L. Wade

Question #1: Long-ago, how did the Athabaskans trade with one another, or what sort of system did they use to exchange gifts with one another?

Long time ago, the Athabaskans used all sorts of items as trade commodities, such things like sheaths for knives--made out of moose skin, caribou blankets, birch bark baskets, etc... Long-ago, the Athabaskans also used to trade fur items to traders for items like guns, ammo, tobacco, and so forth. Sometimes the Native people had to stack the fur up until it measured half the height as the item in which they wanted to trade for. Take for instance, if a gun stood 3 1/2 feet tall, the person who wanted the gun has to stack his or her furs up 1 3/4 feet tall in order to trade for the gun.

Another way in which the Athabaskan people of long-ago traded or received goods was through the exchange of good with friends. If a person wants to become your friend or best buddy, he or she gives you a gift, and that means that the two of them are best friends for life. This is called *setlaanh*, in the Athabaskan language. Rosie gave an example of this, when she told the story of dancing in Anchorage. She was there and a girl told her to go out there in front of all of those people, she didn't know what was going on but she went out. The girl's father gave her a blanket to give to Rosie, in order to show their appreciation. In turn Rosie gave the girl a necklace that was around her neck. This was a sort of *setlaanh*, and Rosie said that her and that girl would be best friend for as long as she lived.

When ever a man or a women were going to make a potlatch they never told anyone. They just kept it to themselves and went along and prepared for it. When a person was ready to make a potlatch, they said--we are going to make tea. This meant that they were going to have a potlatch (A Memorial Potlatch). It usually takes awhile in order to get ready for one of these potlatches, that is why the people need time to get ready (stock up on food, blankets, mittens, and so forth). The potlatch means different things to different Native groups (the Athabaskans see a potlatch one way, while the Tlingits of southeast see it another way). But for the Athabaskans, a potlatch is not something done in order to show off wealth, unlike that of the Tlingit culture.

There is a video tape out called ~~Hubert~~ *Hubert*, which was done by Curt Madison that is about a memorial potlatch on the Koyukuk river. Which I am told is very good.

Question #2: Is the memorial potlatch like that of a funeral?

The memorial potlatch is not a funeral, for at the time the person was buried there was a funeral potlatch. The memorial potlatch is held about a year or a year and a half after the death of a person. So they are two different kinds of potlatches. Today the memorial potlatches usually run a week or so, with the main events happening on the weekend. This is done in order for the people that have to work, can attend. In the Athabaskan culture there are all sorts of

different kinds of potlatches, but the most important is the memorial. On Thanksgiving there is another pretty important potlatch, where people gather and enjoy each others company. another important part of a potlatch is the talking and the singing of the old people. Every potlatch has its own very unique song that goes along with it. At the winter solstice potlatch, a sled goes around to each household in the village, and people are expected to put what ever they can in the sled (Be it flour, sugar, moose meat, tobacco, etc..). If by chance a person does not put anything in the sled. he or she is put in there and thrown up and down like the whale toss in Barrow.

Question #3: Is dancing at the Native Arts Festival different than that of dancing in Minto?

In the Native Arts Festival, the dancers are limited to the amount of time each group is allowed on the stage. But in Minto as with any village, the dancers can go as long as they wish, and in some cases go all night long.

Long-ago before the Athabaskans had the moose hide drums, they had or used sticks to make the rhythm. They were about a foot or so long and they were beat together like that of the drum today.

Question #4: Did the Athabaskan people have any stories or legends about the planets?

There are several different stories about planets in the Athabaskan culture. There are big dipper stories along with stories about the sun and the moon. So I guess the answer is yes. Also, Jonathan did not like the idea of man walking on the moon, or in any way messing with the sky. It was bad luck, and could only bring about bad things. This was also true with nature itself. The Athabaskan people felt it was bad luck to mess around with nature, so they didn't. This is why, young girls couldn't go out at night, in fear that they would look at the moon (Bad Luck).

Story of how the Athabaskan people got sun light:

The brown bearman had the sun, and wouldn't let anyone have it. The people lived in a world of darkness. They tried time and time again, but just couldn't get the sun from the brown bearman. So one day, crowman (Dotron?) said he could do it (for it he would be greatly rewarded). So crow man went over and made himself into some ashes and got into the water of brown bearman's wives water, and she drank it. Later these ashes became a baby. The baby was born in record time, and crowman (baby bear) grew fast. The brown bearman knew what crowman wanted but was not going to let him have it, so he watched crowman very carefully. Soon crowman started to crawl around and he spotted the sun, and he wanted to play with it. But brown bearman said no, crowman couldn't play with it. Brown bearman's wife, said let him have it. But everywhere crowman crawled, brown bearman watched him. Finally crowman got the sun and was playing with it. Brown bearman watched him very carefully. Crowman threw the sun up and down, each time getting higher and higher to the smoke hole. Then finally the brown bearman got sleepy and fell a sleep. Crowman went "gak" and flew out of the smoke hole, and let the sun go letting light on to the world. And this is how the crowman gave us sun.