

Alternate Justice Centre



Traditional Practices Workshop

November 7-9, 2016 the Justice Centre hosted a "Traditional Practices Workshop." There was a great turn out and a lot of great conversations. Below are some questions and answers that arose. Please note that this was an information gathering/sharing workshop. We do not proclaim to know all the answers and polled the community for their information and views. The questions or answers are not directed at anyone, nor are they meant to be offensive to anyone.

If you would like to watch the full workshop, it is available on Nak'azdli's YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvQBkayZGL_TIT_cpjQ9S3Q. Please subscribe to Nak'azdli's channel while you're there and enter to win some great Nak'azdli swag!

Medicine

Who is Teaching/mentoring? One can learn from participating when medicines are being picked or processed. The Nak'azdli Health Centre, for example, provides this type of activity.

Is Medicine gifted to someone? Or is there a fee? There is no fee for medicine, although you can gift the person making you medicine (IE: give lotion to make more medicine, tobacco).

Would the medicine still work if the person preparing it is not leading a healthy lifestyle themselves? Firstly, the person taking the medicine is expected to "believe in it." Also, the person processing the medicine should be leading a healthy lifestyle.

Could there be a reaction when using both "Indian Medicine" and "Western Medicine?" Like any medicine, you should check/inform your doctor. To date, our medicine people are meeting

with physicians (doctors) to discuss the medicines, what's in them, how they work and how they can interact with each other).

Can Women take traditional medicine when they are pregnant? It is best to consult with your physician as some medicines do counter act with each other

Traditional Justice

How was the community 'policed' before? The Elders state that before the Western Justice system was introduced we managed ourselves. The community played a large role in this self-management. For instance, people do not want to bring shame to themselves or their family. They would avoid doing things that brought shame to them. Although, in the event that 'something' happened, a root cellar was used as an impromptu jail cell. In the event that a terrible injustice occurred, it was known that the offender could die because of their own actions. There are stories of a group of 5 men going out to the bush and only 4 men returning).

Was there Watchmen? Yes. They helped monitor the community to ensure everyone was behaving. In the event that someone was misbehaving the Watchmen would report this.

What role did the Church Chief play in administering justice? The Role of the Church Chief was important. Look over community as a whole. Similar to Judge. They spoke in church about how to lead good/healthy lives.

Where Healing Circles used? The Potlach system dealt with all types of "business," including justice related matters.

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Shame Feast; when is this done? For minor or serious offences? The group could not agree if Shame Feasts were our practice. Although, there are known cases of people being shamed. The decisions to shame someone is based on the seriousness of the offence. People are not shamed for minor offences but for more serious incidents. The examples of shaming provided were: hosting a potlach to restore harm, having Dene'za, Elders and other people of importance speak to you.

Shaming and Banishment; who has to prove the person should be shamed/banished? The type of event/incident will determine if the person should be shamed or banished.

How long does the shaming/banishment last? There is no set/specific time frames, it is dependent on the offence/incident. Dealt with in a timely manner. Once it was dealt with the matter was not brought up again, it was considered resolved.

Sentencing; who decides? This depends on the generation you were living in and the type of issue. For example, in the "old days" Church Chiefs, Dene'za and the community could have input. There are different levels of shaming also. The examples shared included: Being put in a corner, having to stand in front during Church services or Shunning a person from the community.

Bahlats/Potlach System

(Submission by community member)

Funeral and Wake Observances Partying in the deceased person's house after the wake and funerals. They party loud and all night long, Drinking and drugs, loud music. Seems so very disrespectful (like they are happy the person died and partying because they are GONE!) It's wrong! Also the Head Stone at grave site dragging & drinking. So very wrong –alcohol at the Graveyard. Having a party after the wake/funeral is not a traditional practice.

Dragging the Headstone- Dragging of the headstone does not require alcohol. Drinking during this event is not a traditional practice. The "tug-of-war" (between the two clans) that you are witnessing is symbolic of the struggle to 'let go' of a loved one. Dragging of the Headstone turning into a drinking game. Consider the graveyard a sacred place, like the Church.

Expanding the Graveyard- Some people believe that if you expand the graveyard it will be filled.

Body in Community – People partying, loud music, people asking the family permission for Bingo to proceed?

R-E-S-P-E-C-T A lot of discussion was held around respect, respect for each other, respect for trap lines, respecting elders, respecting our animals and environment.... RESPECT EVERYTHING!

Why did we cover mirrors/pictures? Why don't we do this anymore? Nadnilh....look back at you = death

Inviting People to a Potlach (IE: using Facebook vs. personal invites) This business is an important part of the Potlach process. It is traditionally done in person.

Drinking at a wake acceptable? (IE: outside fire) No, this can be considered disrespectful. Consider that there is a body in the house, this becomes 'sacred ground' and should be treated with respect.

Party after a funeral acceptable? This is NOT a traditional practice and it is frowned upon by many

Is it proper to ask to be hired? No. Prior to death some people have already chosen who is to be hired. It can be considered an honour to be asked to work.

What happens when mistakes are made during hiring? (IE: hiring 2 speakers) The hosting clan must right their wrongs. If two people are hired to speak, for example, one person must be chosen to speak, but both parties will receive compensation.

Upon a death, what do you do if you do not have a clan? The family of the deceased will often take care of this business.

When someone is hired as a bookkeeper do the family/clan members push and check if all the money is accounted for? What are their responsibilities? Do they buy stuff for the Potlach? Do they pay for things for the Potlach (IE: Gifts)? Bookkeepers are not formally monitored. They are trusted, using the honor system, when handling the money. Bookkeepers are expected to note (write down) who has made contributions. Generally the family of the deceased (and clan members) buy and pay for things at the Potlach, including gifts.

What happens when a person gets food poisoning at a dinner payout? The poisoning is not believed to be intentional, or is of unknown origin, therefore there is no known recourse in this event.

Why do they have fires lit outside during wakes? This is not traditional, it may be for practical purposes (to keep warm).

What can we do about people threatening other people during a Potlach? Speak to the Dene'za or Tse' ke za and seek direction.

What is a smoke party? Why do they call it a smoke party? Not familiar with "Smoke Parties"

Crossing the floor; if two people are together and belong to the same clan, can one cross the floor, how is it done? There are a number of steps to follow to "cross the floor." A clan must agree and buy the person in order for them to

"cross the floor." A Potlach will be held to complete this process

Naming

Who decides who will receive a name? Names are passed on or given to you. Other Dene'za can have input.

What is the process of getting a name? Names can be given to you, or you can "take on" someone's name (upon their death). A person will announce to the community that they intend to take a certain name. A Potlach is held, where the host is the person taking the name.

Can a person be stripped of their name? Who decides this? Can they ever get their name back? Yes, a person can be stripped of their name. Other Dene'za can have input if you should be stripped of your name. You can get your name back, the specific process is not exactly clear, but would involve restoring the harm caused and hosting a Potlach. There does not seem to be time limitations on this.

What about the names that are not being used? Who decides who can take these names? Is it based on the eldest? Male/female, family lineage? Go through the Dene'za.

What's the difference between having a name and being a double header? Having a name is held in high regard. There are many responsibilities expected of this person. Being a 'double header' is belonging to two clans.

Do double headers have responsibilities? Responsible to both clans.

What are your responsibilities if you have a name? There are many responsibilities. For example, attend potlaches, contribute, live an honourable healthy lifestyle, and help any way you can.

Adoption

What are the procedures to be adopted into a clan? IE: children with no clan Permission must be granted to enter into a clan. There is a process; (short version) 1) ask permission, 2) announce it 3) host a Potlach.

If you are bought by another clan do your existing children follow you? Do children born later become part of the 'new' clan? Upon being 'bought' by a clan all your existing kids remain with the clan they were born into. Any newborns will become part of the clan the mother was bought into.

When you are bought by another clan does the other clan have an opportunity to buy them back? How long does this take? Yes, the other clan can "oppose" the transfer. To my knowledge, there is no time frame set to complete the transfer

Cermonies

Cutting hair —why and when does this happen? There are two different times when you would cut your hair. One is for mourning (the loss of a loved one) and the other involves a child coming of age.

Widow redressing After the year of mourning is up, the Widow will be dressed in coloured clothing. She is no longer expected to wear strictly black clothing. She will be brought back into the hall and walked around.

What other types of ceremonies do we have? We have 17? Ceremonies Most common practice is the Death Potlach, and taking a name.

How do you step up and take a name? Does it have to come from your family line? Names are generally given or earned. Names come from your family.

General

Seating at a Balhats (IE: children) Children

should sit behind their guardian. It is an opportunity to learn about the Potlach system.

Hawal; when is this done? Hawal is NOT meant to repay a loan. It is more of payment for a service (IE: making knives for someone) or in the event that you are "short of money" the clan can help you. It is not to repay loans in any way.

Should words and beats of songs be changed? No, words or beats of songs should not be changed. They are made for specific people or causes.

What and why is a song owned when it names a clan? Songs are written specifically for certain people or occasions.

Who is allowed to wear regalia? Not answered.

Is Sweats part of our cultural practices? No

Is the Medicine wheel part of our culture? No

Is Smudging part of our culture? No

Are Dream catcher's part of our culture? No

Are pipe carrier's part of our culture? No

Is the Sundance part of our culture? No

Keyoh

Lending vs. gifting of Keyohs: One of the reasons that we marry people from opposite clans is that we then have access to more hunting/ gathering territory. In the event that your Keyoh is not productive, you can use your partner's Keyoh. Lending your Keyoh is not unheard of.

Overlap of Keyohs Historically, Keyoh boundaries were not disputed. Or if there was a dispute the Dene'za would help resolve the issue.

What is the protocol when hunting in someone's territory? Being on another person's Keyoh, without permission, is highly disrespectful and wrong. This was taken very seriously "in the

old days." Permission must be granted to be on another person's Keyoh.

What if someone is on your Keyoh? One can seek direction from the Za'ne.

Questions from the Workshop

If we follow our grandmother's side, why are there some families that marry move to the husband's community? Don't they move to the woman's community? Moving/transferring to another's community is not mandatory, but can be personal preference.

Parents were stricter, is this cultural practice?

No, being stricter is not cultural practice. Parents may have been stricter in an effort to avoid bringing shame to one's family.

Dene'za and Tse'ke za: if they come from different Nations, can you still ask questions on how to do something? Is there a protocol around this? What if there isn't one that is available, who do you go to? Are Dene'za and Ts'eke za's recognized place to place? Yes, you can ask for information from different Dene'za's. If a Dene'za or Tse'ke Za are not available you can seek advice/information from an Elder. Yes, Dene'za and Tse'ke za's are recognized in other communities. This is a title that you hold. It is akin to be a "nobleman / noblewoman."

Can we start a clan meeting if you're not a Dene'za or Tse'ke za? (Because reviving the system is important). Yes, you could. But it is best to have Dene' Za / Tse'ke Za involvement as they are our guides and hold knowledge about protocol. 🌱

Letter from Josie Felix:

Potlach: process of change evolved? Develop a plan to go back to our old way of doing Potlach, to discuss with our young parents. We did this all their life (of doing Potlach). Yes it is a lot of change. If we change back to the old way, our younger generation is going to change and learn more about the Potlach.

Three things that should be discussed: bookkeeper, Hawal and speaking. [In the old way] there was no bookkeeper. Clan [members] would save their own money at home, putting it away in a safe place [until the day of the Potlach]. If someone is speaking and you are from a different clan and you try to speak out, this is wrong. [You speak when you are from the same clan]. And do the same, help out, sort out money for pay out. People come and go putting in money. It depends how much money is collected, put it in an envelope. There was no Hawal at that time.

Mention these three things:(LaLa) Clara Pierre talked about it's not right.....I see young people don't go to Potlach. Any reason why? Maybe no money for Hawal, or the young people don't like Hawal. For our young generations' future, they should know our way of life, WITH RESPECT.

If a person has outstanding credit she/he pay back out of their own money. Put in an envelope and seal it. If she/he let the clan know she need help, they give money.

Banish fire burning outside a wake. Prayers and respect for family. People go in and out. Pray quietly because our elders said be quiet (name) is on their journey. (I wish I could speak in person, I could speak in Dakelh.)