

TRADITION

When the Dineh, the Earth People, emerged into this world, they were taught by the Holy People the right way to conduct the many acts of their everyday living, how to gain a livelihood, how to build a hogan, and the myriad activities of their lives; and above all, how to adapt to their environment for good or evil through the harmonious use of ceremonialis. Springing from the Creation Story in which the development of man is established, the legends contain the origins of the ceremonies, the answers to fundamental questions, and the reasons for the many taboos. There seems to be no clearly defined Supreme Being in Navaho thought, however there is the knowledge that through ceremonial rituals certain of the Yei (the Holy Ones) can be encouraged to assist with supernatural powers. It is the Yei who regulate whether good or evil comes to the Dineh, but not all the Yei are good, so there is constant supplication to win favor of the good Yei, and to override the influences of the evil.

Misfortune, accident and illness are caused by disharmony, either direct or through social controls known as witchcraft, and every effort is made to overcome these, and to propitiate and create perfect harmony with the good. This is accomplished through the complex and intricate patterns of ceremonialism. Performed by the esoteric medicine men who have the knowledge and the influence, these ceremonials are the embodiment of natural consequences and abstract symbolism, expressed through song, through the dry paintings (sand paintings) and through the correct use of ceremonial objects and substances.

When a patient is uncertain in determining which ceremony is necessary to produce the required healing, there are diagnosticians who perform this service. These are the hand tremblers, the star gazers, and the listeners who consult the patient and through their ability, determine the course to follow.

When it has been decided which ceremony is to be given, the medicine man who knows that particular ceremony is summoned and preparations are set in motion. There are more than fifty ceremonies, or chants, of varying range and complexity, all stemming from the Creation Story, and all leading to the restoration of harmony. Everything must be done in the prescribed way as told in the legends. ^{so it} ~~It~~ is the spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical needs ^(and in this order) that are treated to attain this desired harmony and consequently healing.

The most revered ceremony, a relatively simple one, is the Blessing Way, the Hozhoji, the center of Navaho religion, in which Changing Woman plays a predominant part. This does not require the elaborate ritual of most of the others, and may be performed by any one who knows it. As its name implies, it is an act of balance, a blessing for a person, a place, or an act, such as the commencing of a new blanket, and it comes from Changing Woman, regenerator of life, the everlasting one.

~~There is a long list of~~ ^{many} smaller rites, such as the puberty ceremony, the initiation ceremony, the marriage ceremony, and numerous others, ^{are conducted frequently} The great ceremonials, ^{such as} the Mountain Chant or the Night Chant, with their variations, are less frequently given. ~~These are very costly affairs and require much preparation. As these ceremonies last for nine days and nights, while others are three or five day ceremonies.~~ While the first days of these chants usually concern only the patient and family, it is on the last day that great numbers of Navaho come from far and near to watch the final night and partake of its benefits. During these large ceremonials, sand paintings are executed within the specially built hogan for the rituals. Directed by the medicine man, his helpers create the proper design by ^{trickling} ~~sprinkling~~ sand of different colors through the fingers onto a base of neutral colored sand spread over the hogan floor. Commenced in the morning, it is completed in mid-afternoon when the patient is brought in and placed upon it, while the medicine man takes sand from

and sprayed them with the herb mixture. The Reciever's party also prepared a pot drum. The Stick Receiver was now in complete charge of the ceremony. We did not stay beyond this point at this particular ceremony, but we knew that there would be a rest period and the eating of a meal.

When the ritual ^{is} ~~was~~ resumed, toward evening the Reciever selected ^s an unmarried girl to be the custodian of the Stick, and following her, both parties moved to the dance ground where, as at the first site, the First Four Songs ^{are} ~~were~~ sung over the pot drum as it ^{is} ~~was~~ tapped. Following this the people group themselves around the drummer, and with a swaying motion sing a great variety of songs. ^{The dancing commences as} ~~Some will dance with girls~~ who are present. Each girl ~~will~~ choose a man, and standing behind him, move ^{is} him in a circle several times, then reversing the motion, If a man wishes to be released he must pay ~~xxxxx~~ his partner before she will let him go. ^{This} ~~It is a very simple dance, which~~ continues throughout the night. Toward dawn, the Receiver again takes the Stick and standing in the midst of the circle awaits the daylight, when he takes it inside his hogan while both ^{groups} ~~sides~~ join to feed the entire assembly which may have grown large during the night.

^{During} ~~The~~ following morning, relatives and friends of the Receiver bring small gifts of tobacco, food, money, cloth and other items heaping them on a blanket laid out for the purpose just inside the hogan. The members of the patient's group gather outside to serenade the Reciever. The leader once more sings the Four Songs at the entrance while the drum is beaten, then other songs continue. The Receiver ^{throws} the gifts out of the smokehole in the roof, regardless of who may catch them. This is the only Navaho ceremony where an exchange of gifts takes place. It is considered symbolic of appreciation that the earth's ~~xxxxx~~ productivity has been restored.

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The Blessing Way

In addition to the blessing of every new hogan, this ceremony is also conducted whenever a new building is completed on the reservation. At the time of the opening of the large new school at Crown Point, I went over for the occasion. There were many visitors, both white and Navaho gathering for the dedication ceremonies and there was much preparation of food.

As the scheduled hour approached, the school children marched into the new building, joining the visitors to form a large semi-circle just inside the western door of the main entrance hall. Then as rugs were placed on the floor, the medicine man (Manuelito Begay) and three singers took their places on the rugs, the ceremonial basket containing sacred corn pollen and a special pouch holding stones from the four scared mountains, ^{? cups} was placed before them, ^{and} as their chanting began. There are no special features to this ceremony, only the reverent, simple prayers of benediction for the use of the building and the blessing of those who partake in its purpose.

In ^{all} ~~most~~ ceremonies one must leave by the eastern ~~exit~~ ^{door} (~~if~~ ^{be} there ~~is~~ one ~~in~~ any other direction). At this ceremony, Herbert Blatchford was present, and when it was over, I saw Herbert step quickly behind the ^{so that no one could use it} chanters to lock the western door. Then all went out to the courtyard ^{through} ~~the door to the East~~ ^{been} where chairs and benches had ^{been} placed for the dedication ceremony to be conducted by the school officials. The school band played, the children took their places, parents and visitors found theirs, and the usual ceremony for such occasions took place.

When this was over, the Navaho lingered to talk before going to have their feast. It was here that ^{we} watched women making fry bread in the most enormous skillets I have ever seen. A spirit of gaiety was present with everyone having a wonderful time, ^{as} great quantities of fry bread melted away & gallons of coffee disappeared.

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soft grey-green sage brush took their places. We put up our tent on the outskirts of the activity, Timothy helping us eagerly. He was full of excitement for he had never seen a Fire Dance. We spent the afternoon watching all the preparations for the day and night to follow. Near us was a huge shelter, newly constructed, where busy cooks were already preparing food for the entire assembly. Here we learned that the patient giving the ceremony and his family furnish food for all who come. It is customary, however, for visitors to contribute by bringing flour, sugar or coffee, and we were most courteously thanked for our donations. We watched the butchering of sheep and goats, saw huge kettles being prepared for cooking mutton and goat meat, saw specially constructed stone and mud ovens where women were baking great quantities of bread. We saw men hauling water, men hauling wood, not only for the cooking fires, but for the ceremonial fires during the night to follow. We watched the making of a great wood pile near the ceremonial hogan. It seemed ^{large} ~~large~~ enough to last a whole community for an entire winter, yet it was completely consumed the following night. As we came near the hogan we heard the voices of the singers as they performed the eighth day rituals. We were afraid we might displease our host if we approached so we listened from afar. It never occurred to us that we might have asked to see the ceremony, and that possibly we might have been invited to watch.

As evening came, a crowd gathered, standing in a circle to watch rehearsals for the dance to be performed the following night. This lasted for some time, then there was a silence as a man stepped out into the center near the firelight. In his high pitched voice, which carried easily for considerable distance, he spoke long and earnestly, then suddenly we heard two familiar words, "Washington" and "Roosevelt". We had forgotten that it was election day; it was

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During these large ceremonials, sand paintings are executed within the hogan specially built for the rituals. Directed by the medicine man, his helpers create the proper design by trickling sand of different colors through the fingers onto a base of neutral colored sand spread over the hogan floor. Commenced in the morning, it is completed in mid-afternoon when the patient is brought in and placed upon it, while the medicine man takes sand from