

LEADING THE WAY

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The Wisdom of the Navajo People

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Male Puberty Ceremony

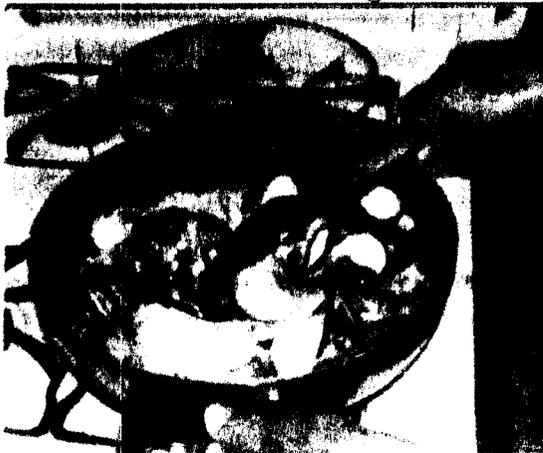
Just as we have the *Kinaaldá* for girls, we have the *Táchééh* for boys. Once a boy's voice changes, it is time to prepare him for manhood. The *Táchééh* is used to initiate a boy to manhood. It helps form the young man's attitude and character.

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NAVAJO SWEATLODGE:

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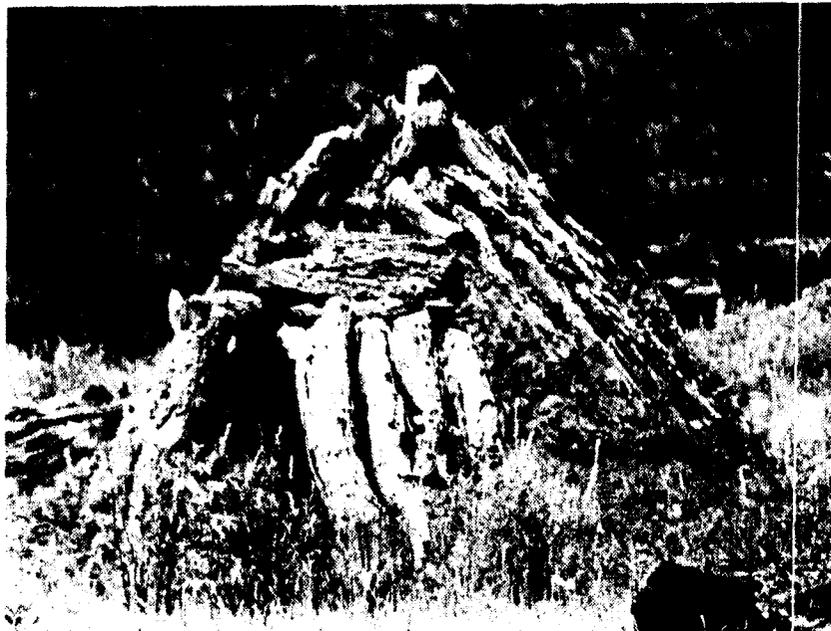
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Here's your medicine, Grandma!

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Male puberty ceremony--Cont'd from cover pg.



An old *táchééh*

The sweat returns you back to your mother's womb. In the sweat, the Earth symbolizes your biological mother. The sweat is done to eliminate marks or contamination that occurred while you were in the womb. It also eliminates marks that stem from the non-observance of ceremonial rules, such as the four day restrictions or taboos following a ceremony.

In the Male Puberty Ceremony, the sweat is done to help prepare a young man for adulthood. The young man runs like the *Kinaaldá*, only he comes back from his run, he enters a heated *táchééh* immediately without catching his breath. The sweat hinders his ability to breathe. This is an introduction to learning endurance.

The young man is like a seed that drops on the ground after the plant matures in the fall. The seed must face the cold temperatures and winds of winter before it finally germinates in the spring. In the *táchééh*, a sense of strength is planted in the young man. This helps him face life as it comes. It helps prepare him for any hardship that comes along. It will carry him on through old age.

The Male Puberty Ceremony reinforces the concept *T'áá hwo ajit'éego*. One way to understand the root meaning of this concept is to consider how a child is when he's beginning to crawl or walk. He sometimes has trouble figuring out what he needs to do. If he sees a toy or something attractive, he will try to touch it or grab it.

If he can't walk or crawl successfully, he somehow figures out how to roll over, kick, and move towards the toy. Who taught the child to do this? It is something that is built in him. He just needs to take the initiative to figure it out. The young man at puberty still has this spark inside him. *The táchééh* teaches him to use this spark in adulthood

Preparation

If you do not already have a sweathouse, gather materials and try to build it in one day. Ideally the sweathouse should be finished by Noon. (See next month's issue of LEADING THE WAY for guidance on how to build a sweathouse.)

Secure someone to conduct the ceremony.

Anybody can build a sweathouse, make a fire, sing songs, and conduct a sweat. To conduct a sweat, someone must know the sweathouse songs and/or protection songs. The protection songs can come from different ceremonies. Ideally they will be about Monster Slayer, Big Snake, Bear, and Lightning.

The Big Snake, Big Bear, Mt. Lion, and Little Lightning were given to the Navajo people as pets when Changing Woman created mankind. As the first four clans were migrating to the Four Sacred Mountains, these animals could not get used to being pets. They started getting restless.

Finally the people said, "Go ahead and go to where your natural habitats are."

When the pets consented to go they declared, "We have protection songs you can use for help during those times when the road of life is hard. There are things in life that are not kind."

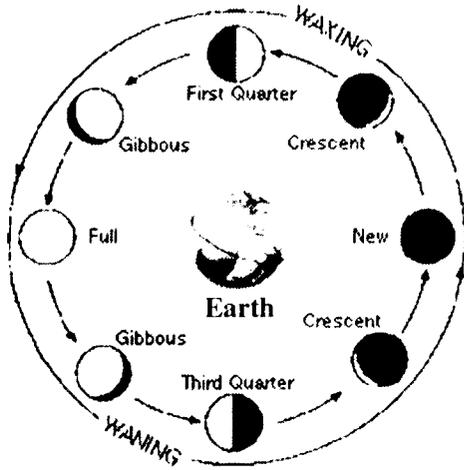
Additional protection songs include those associated with the Twins at their father's *táchééh* (*Naayéé'jí Sin*), Monster Slayer and Born-for-Water songs from the Enernyway Ceremony, and others.

There is not a fixed agenda for the Male Puberty Ceremony. Whoever conducts the ceremony can develop a special plan for the young man. The important thing is to

know the stories and to respect the song standards. Songs must be sung progressively in line with the stories and in sets.

Set a date for the *táchééh*. Usually it is done within the first quarter (*dah ihta*) of the moon. It is important to tap into Nature's power to assist with the individual's blessings.

The traditional healing community tries to work with all of Nature in the process of healing. It times activities to parallel the movements of the Moon's cycle, Sun, and all of Nature. The application of pollen from the tip of one's toes to the top of one's head parallels the movement of Nature when the ceremony is scheduled during the first quarter of the moon.



Notify family members about the ceremony so they can make plans to attend and support the young man. Only males are allowed to enter the Male Puberty Ceremony. Traditional Navajo sweats never include males and females at the same time. Normally the family invites its elder male relatives and respected teachers to counsel the young man.

The Ceremony

The fire is built one and one-half to two hours in advance of the ceremony in order to insure that the rocks are hot. All of the hot rocks will be placed inside the *táchééh* to the north part of the sweatlodge because bad things are believed to come from the north. The exact number of rocks is not an issue. What is important is that the sweathouse is hot enough. This is done before the young man returns from his run.

The young man enters the *táchééh* immediately upon return from his run. All the men are already seated inside the sweatlodge, and he sits in the northwest part of the sweatlodge with the facilitator on his right.

Traditionally everyone entered the Sweatlodge naked as they were at birth. Nakedness symbolizes the time when you were in mother's womb. Today our sense of modesty is

different and many young men prefer to enter wearing shorts or a bathing suit.

When you sweat, you sweat out unwanted things and blow them away from you. All sweathouse songs ends with "ee yee hée" followed by a loud "paa" four times to blow away any contamination.

The medicine man or person running the sweat begins the ceremony by smoking tobacco. The first puff of smoke is done towards the Earth. This is done to recognize the animal homes under the Earth. The second puff is done to recognize the homes of the earth surface people (humans). The third puff is done to the Sun's home, the fourth puff to the Moon's home. The fifth puff is done to the East Mt. where *Diyin Dine'é* live, the sixth to the South Mt. where *Diyin Dine'é* live, the seventh to the West Mt. where *Diyin Dine'é* live, and the eighth puff is done to the North Mt. where *Diyin Dine'é* live. With the ninth puff you blow smoke into your right hand and bless yourself. With the tenth puff you blow smoke into your left hand and bless yourself. Now you swallow the smoke four times. Finally, you can puff some smoke onto your personal items and smoke at your leisure.

Now the medicine man or others in the Sweathouse sing protection songs.

The Male Puberty Ceremony can be held for one day up to four days. The following outlines the teachings for each round. Days two, three, and four review and build on the teachings from the first day. Family members teach and reinforce what the medicine man shared.

First Round

In the first round, the medicine man talks to the young man about the purpose and stories of the Sweathouse. He teaches about birth, respect for his mother and Mother Earth, and humility. He relates the Earth to the young man's biological mother and shares how to appreciate your mother and the clan you got from your mother. Another emphasis in this round is the importance of taking care of one's self.

Second Round

Traditional hunting with a bow and arrow set

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Male puberty

--Cont'd from pg. 15

the stage for introducing the concepts of strength, endurance, and making a living to a young man. The medicine man also cover the young man's physical needs (*yódí altaas'éí*) and his emotional needs (*nitl'iz altaas'éí*).

Awareness of nature is a key teaching in the second round. Teachings about how to use and respect nature in a state of harmony are covered. Prayers and songs about nature could be recited and sung.

Practicing an awareness of nature takes a lifetime to accomplish, same as maturity does.

Third Round

The importance of activity and industriousness are covered in the third round. This applies to the young man's school and social life.

Horses are good tools for teaching here. How you listen to your horse and how you treat your horse says a lot about your ability to succeed in life.

Ceremonial songs are like horses. You treat the song like it has life. You need to get in touch with it consistently so you get to know one another. As Salabye's grandfather Peter Yellowhair used to teach, "You don't treat the songs like they're nothing. You need to practice the ideas and concepts of a song to really learn it."

Jobs, school, or anything a young man chooses to do require consistent work in order to achieve success.

Fourth Round

The fourth round concentrates on the creation of beauty in and around the home. *Shí hee alilee naashá*. (Because of this, I travel about in a holy way.) You need to work with this to create a good environment where you live.

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Photo courtesy Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site. HUTR 9523, circa 1910

The last Sweathouse songs are about the door curtain. The story tells us how the Owl provided door flaps and a special skin for the first Sweathouse. At the end of the first sweatlodge ceremony the Owl sang, "*Biiyaadóó shil'íshjáago naashá!*" (As I go about life from here on, I am aware of everything!")

After the door flap opens with the last round, *dats'ooos* or frost drops can be collected while sprinkling corn meal into a basket. Put this cornmeal in water to cool everything down, including your body, your spirit, and the Sweathouse. Put things back to a normal temperature.

The Ceremony concludes with everyone sharing a meal.

Editor's Note: John E. Salabye, Jr. is a Blessingway Chanter. He is *Naasht'ézhi Táchii'nii* born for *Tólich'ii'nii*, with *Tsenjikini* his chei clan and *Tsi'naajini* his nalii clan.

Salabye learned the Male Puberty Ceremony from his grandfather Peter Yellowhair from White Cone, AZ. Yellowhair, who was born around the turn of the 20th Century, was *Tsenjikini* born for *Kiyaa'áanii*. He practiced the Blessingway, Enemyway, Featherway, Hoof Rattleway, and Upwardreachingway ceremonies. Salabye used to chauffeur Yellowhair around to ceremonies as a teenager, and he apprenticed with his grandfather for seven years to learn Blessingway.