

Swensk kalait

general

TEX (Kass
shaman)

The swénsk haláit

Informant: Emma Wright (léx) Aiyansh, Nass River

swen -- blow, sk -- actual act of blowing. The name is /presumably/ derived from the haláit's practise of sucking the portion of his patient's body where the pain is, after he has finished his dance, and then blowing the thing which he is supposed to have removed out through the smoke hole.

The informant heard this account from her uncle, who was the person concerned.

^{/shamans/}
The medicine men were the ones who actually went about curing. They ~~had~~^{/rights to?/} inherited the powers, and the powers were acquired over a long period of sickness during which they almost died. They were revived only by the supernatural help of their aides.

One instance of a haláit (swénsk) on the Nass having acquired this power:

A former léx, a laxskik chief, whose uncle was a very famous swénsk haláit, was at this time a young man. He, (léx) was visited by visions of a white owl, a white weasel, and a white land otter. These brought him many messages that he was a man in possession of much power.

So léx began to go out by himself a good deal, up into the hills at the rear of his village at gilaxtámks. One day when he was way up in the hills he heard behind him a rushing sound as of flowing waters. Looking behind him, he saw what appeared to be a great sea of foam, almost engulfing him.

léx began to run very fast, but then he stumbled and fell prostrate on the trail. His memory left him, and when he regained

consciousness he was in his own sleeping place in his house.

He had been picked up on the trail, apparently déad, and remained in this state a long while. All of the best swénsk haláits were called in to try to restore his strength and cure him.

The head swénsk haláit announced: "He is now coming into his swénsk haláit powers, and if he can survive this he will be a great swénsk. Otherwise he may die."

léx was very ill, near death. Finally he began to recover his strength, and the visions occurred again; the white land otter (məs'wúts), the white owl (məsqutku'núks), and the white weasel (məs'melksfík).

These beings told him in his visions that he was possessed of great powers, and that they were his aides. They said they could help him in curing his own ills and those of others who would come to him.

léx began to recover rapidly, and he now had as an amulet a small bone shaped as a weasel. This he used on his patients, placing the amulet on the part of the body where the sickness was. The amulet told the supernatural aides, who in turn came to léx in visions to tell him what was causing the patient's sickness.

But in order to acquire full supernatural powers, léx had to go to the 'wetstá haláit (kwakúł -- vicinity of Bella Bella) and then he would be greater than all others.

When léx was able to be about he made preparations to go to the wetstá haláit to get this power. On this voyage he was in continual touch with his three supernatural aides; the white land otter, the white owl and the white weasel. They warned him of the various traps other haláits had set for him in order to destroy him.

As they travelled downstream, the haláit saw a huge windfall

of trees obstructing the river, although this was not visible to the others in the canoe. Léx guided the canoe around the windfall, thus escaping the trap that had been set for him.

Next his white otter aide came to him and said: "Your rival swénsk haláit at git'fks has caused a huge whirlpool which will take this canoe down. This will be visible to you only, but you can guide the canoe around the edge of the whirlpool and thus escape." All along Léx's route he encountered traps that swénsk haláits from the many villages he passed had laid for him, but always with the help of his aides he was able to pass safely.

Finally they landed at the village of the wetstá chief humdzi't, who was the head of all haláits. Léx was immediately taken into the chief's house and humdzi't placed him in a trance. For a long while Léx lay apparently critically ill and then many great haláits came to work on him. When finally Léx was well again, after humdzi't had danced over him and given him a ^{globular} rattle and a skin drum, humdzi't told him: "You are now a great swénsk and you will be in demand by your people, for you have greater powers than the other swénsk haláits, who in many instances are pretenders."

There were no more traps set for Léx on his return to his own village and he returned home safely, and lived to become very famous on the Nass and in the Upper Skeena villages.