The Old Peoples’ Voices Speak of the Thunderbirds Flight – Values Which Drive our Ceremonies

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http://tywkiwdbi.blogspot.ca/2012_11_01_archive.html
Woven Coast Salish Blanket Yr 1803
The Thunderbird speaks about change…

- Ritual & cleansing instruments
- Elders Teachings as powerful voices
- Symbols of Wealth which echo power and prestige
- Regalia as protection, plants as protection
- Songhees village and illegal logging
- Photograph Philip and Bill reporting to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Committee, Geneva Switzerland. Beginning of our work to ‘echo’ elders teachings
“The Thunderbird speaks of transformation and change....”

...when danger comes or preparation is necessary prayers are evoked to strengthen our ‘work’. Recall amongst the Cowichan prayers to the Creator brought a thunderbird to remove the killer whale from their fishing ground. Prior to asking the Creator for help salmon was in such short supply – there was danger of starvation. What kinds of stories can you use with your work?
In flight, “the movement of the wings creates ...thunder and when it glances from side to side, lightning is emitted.” (Philip Cook, William White, 2001:331)

The power, the prayers are captured in tools made by men for women – the spindle whorl or sulsultan. Tools for making nobility blankets.
The Anthropologist W. Suttles learned from our Ancestors that our teachings (Sinyews) “…related to four sources of power and prestige – \textit{the vision, the ritual word, the ancestors, and wealth}.” (Suttles 1983:69)

They are wearing nobility blankets meant to protect and to surround. What kinds of protective ritual gear are made in your area? In your area what kinds of regalia are produced by women for this purpose? Can you name four things that are sources of power and or prestige?

Chief George and his daughter in 1902
Teach your children the importance of keeping still, watching and listening carefully….”

- Have you experienced this?
- What do you think this means?
- Asking old people in your area how do you say we prayed for you – this can begin a process working with strengths?

“Ni ct tiwi’ulh tal u”

- The weaver is secluded for 30 days while she weaves the nobility blanket? She is also celibate as is the carver for her tools.
Dave Elliott, Sr. speaking of the elders/sulalewh said “your Elders were your teachers. The Elders had lived a long life and so had much experience and much wisdom. ...the teaching started at a very early age....Our people were the richest people on earth.” (Poth 1983, 1990: 77 - 78) A quote to help with dialogue and or teaching.
“Remember to treat people with respect, with kindness. Be careful words have power and can hurt as well as heal? Dingaka who use the ritual word to heal and protect.

Chief Adam Dick said ‘that if you hurt someone you have to fix it by the end of the day.”

- Have you heard this before? What words were used? This seems to be hard today?
- How can you use this value with your work?
Wool headgear meant to protect children when they were named. In this case (Steve Sampson Sr.) made the wool headpieces for the Opening Ceremonies for the Commonwealth Games. They were last used in 1910.

See Who is Standing With You! The Traditions teach us you are not alone and you come from a large family.”
“..the most important item of wealth was the blanket woven of mountain-goat and/or dog wool.” The products of men and women and blessed with the ‘ritual word’ (prayers or songs) these were given great power. Power from the Ancestors or from the Creator. (Suttles 1983:70)
This photo was likely taken during the period of the Potlatch Oppression, 1884 – 1950, in which Indians were not allowed to: sing, to dance, to speak in public without permission from the Indian Agent. To potlatch involving giving names, inheriting ceremonial rights (masks and rattles) and to hold memorials was subject to arrest. Indians with permission could wear ritual regalia for 24 of May Parades. (White, nd)
Mountain goat wool “We traded with our neighbors to get mountain goat’s wool.” (J. Poth 1986)
Chief Joe Capilano and other Chiefs wear Swuqwulh/white nobility blanket as symbols of their authority. They get ready to petition the Kind of England 1909 over the loss of their lands and resources.
“It is important to help out, to help others. This is how our communities are strengthened.”

- Have you heard this value before?
- What can young people learn about this?
- What can you think of that will help young people develop an understanding of this value?
- Nem’ch alu xwcel? Where are you going? (Chiefs Delegation preparing to travel to England to see King George about their land losses. All of our Ancestors were challenged by land losses.
“We do not rush ..things should happen when we are ready. Part of the process meant to fully hold ancestral teachings…”

What questions do you have about this?
How could you help young people learn and understand this?

Mary Harry
Drying wool 1985

Mary Harry
Cleaning wool 1985

May and Josie Sam of the Tsartlip Band
wash wool

Spinning the wool
Dave Elliott, Sr. speaks about illegal logging in Songhees.. Nucumuxw

- *Nucumuxw* were cutting timber to make masts for their sailing ships. Loggers were removing them by the shipload. He said, “they loaded up four big canoes with warriors, ..with fighting equipment and battle dress, painted faces...
“….they stood offshore …four canoes facing the beach, warriors ready to fight, battle dress on and faces painted for war.” They said, “tell your boss to take his men and his tools and go back to Victoria and cut no more trees.” (c.1850) Janet Poth, 1983:70

Painting Coast Salish Canoes

Jane Needham RBCM 1865-1870
“Know where you come from, when ‘darkness’ comes draw on the teachings of the old people.” rites and ceremonies

Today pieces of a families’ older Swuqwulh might be used for new items? What are they? What does that mean do you think?

Let’s talk about this photo? What do you see as different than today? When was this held and what was happening? Or what occurs in your territory?
Ihixwum ‘i’ xwiyune’m! please listen

When we interviewed elders at the beginning, this is the kind of phrase we looked for. In a teaching environment we wanted to connect to their understanding very early or at least displayed prominently.
“Our Ancestors named places where berries could be found...hunting & fishing sites, medicine plants, places of solitude..even in the cities.
“Elsie Claxton recalled clams were covered by Salal branches and Stx’alem fronds before being pit-cooked and before they were roasted on skewers over the fire.”

N. Turner and R.J. Hebda:45
1913 Government agents described this area as unoccupied. This was dangerous as they then believed it was unused. However they also described medicinal plants that would have been harvested.

_Sword ferns gathered away from the immediate villages provided food or to be used for ritual protection_

Hatch Point Reserve - 91 Acres unoccupied
..another piece about 3 acres in grass,…more grown up with ferns than the other (Meeting with the Malahat Indians. McKenna McBride Commission, 1913)
Stx’alem/stx̱e’lem / Sword Fern

Applied to a sprained ankle, or pain associated with arthritis the leaf will provide relief. It was also used 6-8 leaves steeped with hot water first to soak a sore foot, or in your bathtub. For W. White this provided immediate relief.

“In the spring rhizomes were dug up, cleaned and cooked in open fires or pits. Once cooked then peeled and eaten usually with seal or bear grease or salmon eggs.” Elders to Turner and Hebda 2012:45
Tu suwey’qe — the men visible  Gertz 1996:59

- Speaking of Sword Fern Dave Elliott said, “Before the first dance of a new dancer, Sword Fern were scattered on the floor by the two or four men who had picked them” For these reasons Stxalem were “considered to be sacred and treated with reverence.” (Turner and Hebda 45)
After one of our first gatherings at the end Theresa Smith said to Bill

- “you should go out and have fun.” She read my energy…likely a skill many of our elders have?!
- My nephew Pete who was a replacement for our brother…he brings joy like his mom to our lives….
- Have you had this experience? What does that mean in terms of work with young people?
“Know too, that after serious work the old people also believed in humor as a protective mechanism?

- After these sessions, Kim Adam, Samuel Sam, and others always went out for coffee and a meal….there we joked, laughed with each other. This was a way of regenerating our energy. Strengthening ourselves.
- Have you experienced this? What can you say about this?
References

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