

Shamanism

Louis Gray, a  
shaman

A tsëmsiyán swénsk haláit who claimed curative powers in recent years.

Informant: Louis Gray, ganhada, ginʔadóiks, aged 72 in 1946 when he gave the following account. Head of the ginʔadóiks house of niʔskiʔmás.

" I was born under different circumstances, and born psychic, for I had a caul (pótlis) just as all my uncles were, and this had also made them psychic, so that they became swénsk haláits.

Then when I was a young man I became first a layman in the Methodist Church, then a teacher and lay worker. I was stationed at Skeena Crossing (gidzagúkla and at Greenville working for the Methodist church.

While I was at this work I began to feel that I had different powers than ordinary people. I could fore tell events before they happened and I had visions in which I was told I was to become a haláit. I left my work for the Methodist Church and devoted all my time to haláit work. My aides were a moksgwetkuniʔúks (white owl), a móksʔwútsa (white land otter) and a mókspʔón (white sea otter).

These aides told me what to do and told me what ailed different patients. The Upper Skeena people were mostly being bewitched, and there it was called xiyéns (influenced--x; leaves--ʔiyéns), which is the equivalent of haldaogit among the tsëmsiyán. I was able to detect this with the help of the aides, who told me who was doing the bewitching and how their power could be overcome.

( Beynon's note: the following information came from Dr. John McDonald, a former medical practitioner at Kincolith).

There was a patient at this time suffering from intestinal troubles, not serious but painful. He told the man to take a cupful of

Epsom salts followed by a cupful of oolichan oil. After the doctor left the patient made up his mind to consult Louis Gray, who was in the village at the time. The sick man was very religious and he had heard that Gray used the Bible as a source of his power, so he did not hesitate to consult him.

Gray came and had the patient placed in the centre of the room, took out his Bible and read some verses concerned with healing the sick. When he had finished this he prayed and then opened a suitcase he had brought along and took out his rattle, dancing apron and bear-claw headdress. Then the patient became angry and told Gray: "You opened your proceedings by scripture and prayer and now you revert to heathen practices. I will not have that. Go."

Gray replied: "I did not come here of my own will. I was called, and it is not for the patient to dictate the manner in which a doctor should act." With that he gathered up his paraphernalia, and as he left advised the patient: "You will be well if you take some Epsom salts and a cup of warm oolichen grease."

Beynon's note: I myself remember when a man was missing after having accompanied a large party to get supplies from Prince Rupert. The young man was known to be a heavy drinker. Many of the party returned to Port Simpson, but the others remained at Prince Rupert to search for the vanished man.

The group of searchers went to Louis Gray, who repaired to the home of the missing man and placed chairs around the room. He sat down and covered himself with a robe and went into a trance. When he came out of it he announced: "The young man is well. He has

gone on an amorous adventure with a girl he knew earlier. I can see him waving to everyone. He will be home soon.¶

Strangely enough everyone believed Gray. A month later the badly decomposed body of the young man was found in Rupert harbour.

Some time later Gray was brought to court for practising haláit, and was bound over to preserve the peace.

But this made little difference, and he was still in demand by many people. I tried at different times to get him to practise on me, but he refused, telling me very frankly that he could do me no good because I had no belief in him.

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