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Parrish, Otis

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## REPORTS

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### *Khela: A Father's View*

OTIS PARRISH

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Otis Parrish, currently a senior at California State College, Sonoma, is a son of Essie Parrish, the present Kashaya Pomo spiritual leader. The Kashaya Pomo are one of seven Pomo groups of North Central California. The Kashaya reservation is located in Sonoma County.*

The afternoon wore on and the dark of the overhead clouds floated by outside. This particular Sunday on the Kashaya reservation would be forever etched in my memory. We had come back for a very special reason—to start the first stage of the ceremony that would mark my eldest daughter's growing older and entering into womanhood. As we sat there that afternoon in my mother's house talking about the reason we were there, I was becoming more and more conscious of the life-long teachings that have influenced me.

My wife's concern for our daughter's coming into womanhood had prompted our sojourn. This year my daughter was to be 12 years old; her time for starting menses was almost here. Years ago, my mother, who is the Kashaya *yomta*, had cautioned my wife and myself about the need to have a water-blessing ceremony when our daughter's time drew near.

On this day, before my mother started the ceremony, she asked for a large branch of pepperwood. I went out and cut one from a young sapling. When I came back, I asked her if that was what she wanted. She replied that it was and told me to break four small branches off the large one. After I did this she took the

branches in her right hand and started to pray in our Kashaya language, signifying the start of the ceremony. She prayed for about two minutes. Then she started to sing her doctoring song. Then she prayed again. Then she sang the doctoring song again: *yo wemma yo haye*. She then prayed again and sang again. And once more she prayed and sang. She sang four times as well as prayed four times.

As we sat in silence, each one of us seemed to be deep in thought. I can't really explain the sacredness of this ceremony we were participating in. All that is Kashaya was coming forth. The long years of my mother's training and experience were showing through in the way she carried out the ceremony. As I sat in silence and watched, a feeling of unity was rekindled again. As I saw many centuries of ceremonial practices still being performed, the tenacity of the Kashaya people awed me. I felt a proudness engulf my person as I watched, heard, and understood.

"We don't know what's in the water down there. You parents should see that the water for her is ready before she gets *khela*.<sup>1</sup> She has to have the blessed water ready because I might not be there later," my mother had said. On this day we had finally got around to doing what she had instructed.

After she finished the ceremony, she cautioned my wife, "When the little girl gets *khela*, put her to bed and see that she covers herself all up. But be sure to take some pepperwood branches, these that I have here, and before you put her to bed, put the four branches under her. That's to protect her from the evil."

"And while she's in bed she should not talk

to her brothers or her father; that's the rule, that's the strict one. Don't let her listen to anyone when they leave your house; let her close up her ears so she can't hear anything, 'cause it will bring them bad luck."

"Be sure when you or her sisters feed her to remember she has to have special utensils to eat out of; keep them separate from the others. She can't eat any greasy foods, fruits and vegetables newly in season, meat, fish, milk, eggs—only boiled potatoes, boiled rice, and her blessed water—that's the way the rules are."

"Before, when Annie was alive,<sup>2</sup> there were different rules. But those were her rules—mine are different now. We don't do the same rules now. What I mean is the rules are the same, but hers were stricter."

"Now, when she (the girl) is done with the *khela* part and is ready to take a bath, we have to sing for her again while she takes a bath. That part her Aunt Bernice will do.<sup>3</sup> She's the one who knows the songs good. Those are very important—the songs have to be sung the right way or everything will go wrong for the girl."

"Another thing, when this last part is finished, you parents have to give a sacrifice even in your own home, just with Bernice. You have to give a picnic—you have to cook different kinds of foods—meat and all that. And then give Bernice a sacrifice—whatever you want."<sup>4</sup>

"Until all of this is done your little girl will not be safe," she said, as she finished cautioning my wife. My wife and I agreed to take care of all necessary details.

As we sat there in silence for a moment, she looked at us and said, "I have one more rule for you. When the girl has to come back to the reservation from the valley,<sup>5</sup> she has to be careful. She shouldn't go close to a large body of water or a river. This part is the most important and dangerous. When she comes up here to the reservation, I want you to take someone along with her in the car—someone who knows the song, me or Bernice—or I think

Violet<sup>6</sup> knows that song. When you come over from Healdsburg, when she crosses over the river, we have to sing that song. There's one really sacred place on the Skaggs Springs Road. There is a big rock from across the Warm Springs Creek.<sup>7</sup> You have to stop there and sacrifice bread to the rock. That's right there at White Oak Ranch, near where I used to get basket roots."

"After the trip is finished, then it is OK. After all of this is done then she is free; she has become a little woman."

As my daughter sat there her eyes reflected sadness as they met her grandmother's eyes. Their eyes met for a fleeting moment in a sadness that's beyond description. Then my mother spoke to her granddaughter and said, "Now it will be your responsibility to watch yourself. Your mother will tell you how to take care of yourself." My daughter had now become an independent person. This was the start of a totally new person; the young, little girl image would fade. I, her father, who so cherished that part of her life, would now have to see her as a new person, a young woman. Her grandfather was much luckier; for him she would always be seen as the little girl.

Before the onset of menses, a father can cuddle and hold his daughter, that is socially permissible. And it is no big thing to scold her for not doing women's work. A father often takes the little girl's side in disagreements between mother and daughter. And the little girl can always sway her father any way she wants.

When I look back to when I was growing up, I realize that I have been doing the same thing with my little girl that Kashaya fathers did in my childhood with their little girls. Just as I enjoy this particular relationship with my daughter, so did those other fathers with theirs. I say to myself as they said to themselves, "I don't have that much time with her, so I'm going to enjoy this little person because after menses starts she's going to spend more of her

time with her mother.”

The saddening aspect of the child-father relationship is knowing that once menses start the closeness of that cute, beautiful little person will take another form. The post-menses period is a new awakening. New perspectives are used to define one's own daughter. Though this has to be done, it is done with reluctance by Kashaya fathers, including me.

The sacredness of this whole new person is now looked at differently: the mother is directly responsible for guiding the young woman and the father can now only influence her through the mother.

The close, cuddly, cheek-pinching relationship is no more; the idea of cuddling a sacred person such as this young woman is not permissible now. It used to be so much fun to hold the little girl and sing her baby song to her. She would always nod her head to the rhythm of the song and either smile at me or just bury her head on my chest as I held her close while singing her song.

As I awaken to the reality of having my first daughter become a young woman, I wonder about what my wife and daughter feel as they adjust to this new context. My basic worry is that, though my wife is Indian—her background being Dry Creek Pomo from way back—she had been raised according to non-Indian ways and had never herself experienced the traditional Indian view of the onset of menses. However, we have lived together for 17 years and these years have been a time of learning for her. We have led traditional lives on and off the reservation and I and my parents taught her about our Kashaya ways. So, as my daughter's time approached, my worry about my wife's ability to handle the situation was unfounded. I had misjudged her ability to integrate Kashaya ways into her own ways of thinking.

I had also overlooked the many times my mother would talk about *khela* with us. (I

think she considered it my responsibility to insure that my wife learned the rules, although she never said that to me.) She instructed my wife in the right things to do, the ceremony to be done first, what plants were important to this ceremony. She would say, “The girl has to be given a bath by her aunt, who will sing the Whale song—that's the song for dedicating the water for her so she will be cleansed and nothing will harm her. Then you have to give a feast, a sacrifice from you to your daughter to stay pure.”

Then she said, “When all this has been done and before she can go to a beach, her grandfather will do a ceremony for her and other girls; but that won't be until the weather is good. All the girls are taken to the open field above the beach. Here they stand facing east, and Grandfather sings a special song. While he is singing, they walk backward towards the ocean. When they get to the water's edge, Grandfather says a prayer for the girls. After this is done the girls are free to go to the beach anytime, except when they *khela*.”

These were the kinds of rules my wife has learned. I'm saddened that our people may be losing our traditions concerning menses. I'm saddened that I can no longer hold my first baby girl. I also have two younger daughters coming of age now, and I'll be losing them soon. My only wish is that I'm able to sing the sacred songs for their daughters as my father did for his granddaughters. But, I may not be chosen to learn those songs; perhaps one of my sisters will be. If so, I may not be able to sing for my granddaughters.

*California State College, Sonoma*

## NOTES

1. *khela* is the term for menstruation.

2. Anne Jarvis was the Kashaya Pomo spiritual leader, or *yomta*, from 1909-1943. Essie Parrish has been the *yomta* since then.

3. Bernice Torrez is Essie Parrish's oldest living daughter.

4. In this context 'sacrifice' refers to the expenditure of time and money involved in the preparation of food and to payment for performance of a ceremony.

5. Santa Rosa Valley.

6. Violet Chappell is Essie Parrish's second oldest living daughter.

7. It is taboo for young girls not to pass by this rock without performing a ceremony. If a girl does not observe the taboo she will see a large snake, either wrapped around, or draped over the rock watching her. When this happens the snake will reappear to the girl during times she menstruates.



## *A Query Regarding The Possible Hallucinogenic Effects of Ant Ingestion In South-Central California*

THOMAS BLACKBURN

An increasing number of anthropologists have turned their attention in recent years to the topic of altered states of consciousness, with the result that an extensive list of pharmacologically active substances capable of inducing such states has now been compiled. However, virtually all hallucinogenic materials reported so far in ethnographic contexts have been botanical in origin, even though the wide range of substances and techniques (e.g., sensory deprivation, pain, etc.) used in various areas of the world argues for lengthy and extensive experimentation with most facets of the environment on the part of many gener-

ations of native scholars. Reports of apparent hallucinogenic agents of a non-botanical nature should therefore be of more than passing interest, particularly when the ethnographic context involved is California.

In 1917, John P. Harrington of the Smithsonian Institution worked extensively with two Kitanemuk informants (Eugenia Mendez and Magdalena Olivas) at Tejón Ranch, and recorded some 1500 pages of ethnographic and linguistic field notes. These notes (which are presently on file in the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley) contain a number of references to means of acquiring supernatural power. In common with most groups in the southern half of the state, the Kitanemuk employed both *Datura* and *Nicotiana* species as narcotic substances with useful medicinal and mind-altering properties. But they also seem to have utilized certain species of ants in a similar fashion, as the following passage attests:

You cannot get to be *ʔatašwinič* by eating well—you have to go three days without eating or drinking. They do this to save the boys from getting killed. They gave them red ants to eat. For long ago there used to be lots of fighting . . . Sometimes did it to several boys at a time. Sometimes a sole boy merely requested it—went to an old man who knew how to talk and that old man would take the boy to the hills at some secluded place and pray for him there . . . The boy does not eat nor drink for three days. On the morning of the third day the old man goes with the boy out into the hills, to any place (not to a shrine, but to a place where he will be alone, will hear no one talking), and there gives him the ants, the boy lying down as he takes them, the old man throwing them into the boy's mouth with his fingers while the boy inhales. The old man gives the boy many thus. The bear or whatever animal desires to kill the boy (that is the expression, means he has like a dream or sleep). This animal gives the boy the boy's *virtud*.