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Living with the Hopis

One of the Hopis proverbs says, “Before you take any decision, consider its effect on the next seven generations.” Hopi means “the peaceful people,” and the history shows that throughout the years, they avoided the violence. According to the 2010 Census, there were 19,327 Hopis in the United States.⁹ They lived in pueblos and adobe houses that were made of clay. Agriculture and farming was a part of their everyday life. Even though they were influenced by others, they retained their culture. They have their own religion, art, and diet.

Hopi religion and beliefs are based on animism. They believe that all things, animals, trees, rivers, plants, have a soul and spirit. Hopi practice the Cult of Kachina. “The Kachinas represent the powerful spirits of deities, animals, or natural elements who can use their magical powers for the good and well-being of the Hopi tribe, bringing rainfall, healing, fertility, and protection. Each of the Kachinas hold different powers.”² There are around 300 different Kachinas. Hopi know how to distinguish them, and what roles every Kachinas play in the Hopi life because they are exposed to them from their childhood. Some names of Kachinas are Aholi, Bear, Clown, Crow Mother, Eagle, Eototo, Fox, Kokopelli, Morning Singer, Mudhead, Snow, Sun, Wolf, and Wupamo Kachina. The most important Kachina is Eototo which is “the chief of all Kachinas and knows all of the ceremonies.”¹ He is also called the father of all Kachinas. He is responsible for controlling the seasons. Eototo and Aholi Kachinas are responsible for bringing the rain. Bear Kachina has the power to cure the sickness. Clown Kachina bring entertainment during the ceremonies, and his

purpose it to show “how overdoing anything is bad not only for the individual but for the people as a whole as well.”¹ Kokopelli is a symbol of joy and happiness. Some legends say that he starts Spring and ends Winter. “When he comes, the Sun comes out and snow melts, the green grass grows.”¹ Snow Kachina brings snow and cold to Hopi.

Hopi honor the Kachina during the different ceremonies, that are conducted over the year. Every month, they have different ceremonies. The Hopi cycle starts in November, when all prayers for peace occur and men ceremonies are held. There are two seasons in the Hopi`s calendar: non Kachina season, and Kachina season. The non Kachina season lasts from the middle of July to middle of December, and a kachina season starts in the middle of December and lasts until middle of July. The Kachina season occurs in the colder time of the year when Hopi need the help of Kachinas. In December, the first Kachina returns to Hopi village. In January, Hopi have a ceremony called Paamuya. It is a “festive and celebratory time that is anticipated throughout the winter season, with dances occurring inside the kivas at night.”⁵ In February, during nine days, Hopi celebrate Powamuya and the Bean Dance occurs at this time. The kachina brings the bean sprouts and the length of the sprout predicts the growing season. The longer the sprouts, the better the season. The kachinas that are popular for this month are Aholi, and Eototo. In March, the Osomuya occurs and Hopi invite rain and hope for future growth of crops by dancing during the night. In April, Kachina arrives to the village to encourage boys and men in foot races. Kachina leaves “a gift of food” and “the message for rain for the spring planting seasons.”⁵ May is the time for planting. First crop is planted, and Kachinas come to the village to dance and bless the crops. In June, corn and other significant crops, to Hopi people, are planted. In June, rain starts to fall, which helps with growing the crops. The Corn Dance is the most popular dance during the month of June. The most important ceremony occurs in July and lasts sixteen days. It is called the Niman

ceremony or the Home-Going Ceremony. It is the end of the season of Kachina, and all Kachinas return to their home on the San Francisco peaks near Flagstaff for the rest of the year. ⁸

They will return to Hopis in December. After the season of Kachina, the non-kachina season begins. At this time of the year, the Kachinas do not appear physically in the villages. They also do not perform their powerful ceremonies. Many social dances occur in August as a gratitude for crops. The months of August, September, and October are months of dances and celebrations. In October, men harvest crops and women prepare food for storage.

Hopi have different types of dances. In January, a Buffalo Dance occurs. Men and unmarried women can participate. “The Butterfly Dance is a Hopi ceremony petitioning for rain, and health for all living things, thanking the beautiful butterfly for pollinating plant life.”³ It is a thanksgiving ceremony for all the harvests and crops. It is held in August and September and is presented after the Snake Dance, which is another prayer for rain. Snakes are honored by the Indians who believe that snakes are “emissaries to the Rain Powers.”⁴ The ceremony lasts nine days. The date for this ceremony is not set, and the exact day is not known until ten days before the ceremony. White people do not know what determines the date.

Hopis are known for the Kachina dolls which are “carved representations of the katsinam, the spirits essences of ancestors, plants, animals, clouds, and, indeed, everything in the Hopi universe.”¹ Traditionally, the dolls were made of cottonwood root single piece, however, recently they can be made of cottonwood branches or other trees that are more easily available and they can be made from more than one piece. Even though the Kachina dolls can be made of a few pieces, the dolls that are created from one piece are more favorable. After they are carved, they are painted in white and then colored. The most important part of the doll is the mask, which depends on the type of the Kachina. Each Kachina doll looks different and has its own specific marks.

“Kachina dolls were, formerly, to be played with. Now they are considered by the most Hopi children as too valuable to be played with, and they wind up mounted on the walls.”⁶ Another craft that Hopi men practiced was weaving. They weaved white cotton robes for brides using the cotton they cultivated. Hopi men were silversmiths too. They practiced the technique known as silver overlay. Hopi women specialized in crafts based on the mesa they lived. On the First Mesa, women mastered the craft of pottery. However, the Hopi pottery was made without the use of pottery wheels. Women molded the clay in their hands. Once it was dry, they polished the clay using a stone and painted it using a strip of yucca as a brush and paints made of minerals and water. On the Second Mesa, women made a round coiled plaque, “by wrapping thin bundles of yucca tightly with yucca strips that have been dyed four colors – black, green, yellow, and red.”⁶ On the Third Mesa, Hopi women were involved in making a circular plaque from wicker. These plaques were colorful and very often had a traditional symbol on them.

The religion, and art were important parts of Hopi’s lives. Another factor that is not less important, is their diet. They believe that abstinence from some types of food is necessary, and they practice fasting. They think that it helps them with their relationship with the Creator. “Hopis usually fast for four days before any sacred ceremonial,”⁷ during which they do not consume salt, fat, meat, nuts, or dairy products.

Traditional Hopi diet includes beans, corn, wheat, chillies, meat, native greens and fruits, and grounds. Hopi grew around fourteen different types of beans. “The Hopis eat the beans fresh or, more often, dry them for later use.”⁷ The Hopi grew three types of teparies: white, black, and light brown. In addition, string beans like green beans, kidney beans and pinto beans were cultivated. The Indians used a bean paste “instead of pine pitch to anchor turquoise in jewelry.”⁷ Lima beans were not popular, however, they made a nice addition and change to Hopi menu.

Another food, corn, is significant in life of Hopi. They give a corn special attention, and treat it more than a food. "Hopi corn has twelve rows of kernels and comes in a variety of colors including, white, blue, red, yellow, and speckled."⁷ Different colors of corn have varied applications. While white corn is most popular and used for flour, hominy, tamales, and prayer offerings, red corn is used for parched corn and it was used in the past as a dye. Blue corn is used in breads, sauces, and drinks, and is more nutritious than other variety of corn.⁷ Yellow corn is used for cooking and in ceremonies, and very often replaced the white corn. Some dishes that are made of corn include: gruel, mumuozpiki, blue marbles. Gruel is made of water and blue cornmeal, and it is "Served to patients on soft diets and is often requested by older Hopis when they are hospitalized. Mumuozpiki is a breakfast dish that is made of chamisa ash, blue cornmeal, and water. Blue marbles, a breakfast dish, "are served in a bowl in their cooking water along with dried onions, fresh or dried chiles, fried salt pork, or strips of beef."⁷ Another food that is unique to the Hopi culture, and that is made of corn is piki. It is a thin cornbread that can be served either as a snack or lunch. For a lunch, it would be served together with onions and greens with a small dish of salt water on the side to dip the piki in it. For a snack, however, it would be served with coffee or tea. The bread is made on a special smooth stone that needs to be in a certain size and shape. The stones are handed down from generation to generation because it takes a long time to prepare them. Even though, Hopis prefer bread made of corn, they also make breads made of wheat.

Another food that is very important in Hopi's diet are chiles. They grow different types of chiles, red, green, dark green, yellow. What is interesting, is the fact that different regions grow the same chiles in different flavor. They grow chiles like Anaheim, Chile Tepines, Cayenne, Jalapeno, Hungarian Yellow Wax Chile, New Mexico, Pasilla, and Serrano.

As in most Indians, Hopi believe that meal without meat is not complete. They used to hunt for a meat, however, now they can only do it in the season since the hunting is prohibited by law. They eat small game such as rabbits or prairie dogs, and hunt for deer, elks, antelopes.

Wild plants such as greens or fruits, are inseparable parts of Hopis dishes. Some plants can be eaten raw, while others need to be steamed or dried. The Hopis burn some of the plants and use them “as ashes to color foods such as cornbread.”⁷ The burn plants are called culinary ashes. Besides that, they color the dish, they also provide additional nutrition to the food because many of them are rich in essential minerals. Some greens that they use include dandelion, kwaakwi (native grass), and Russian thistle. Fruits include yucca, prickly pear, wolfberries, or suvipi berries.

Many Hopi dishes are made of variety of gourd, and most important once are pumpkin and squashes. They used the gourds as food, and made used of their shells as “spoons, small bowls, baby rattles”

In conclusion, religion, art, and diet are significant parts of Hopi`s lives. As other cultures, they have their own traditions and habits that they were able to maintain even though they were influenced from outsiders throughout history.

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