

The Importance of Dance in Our Lives

We dance to celebrate life, to show appreciation for all the gifts bestowed upon us by Gigame Kanal, the Creator God, in our lives today, and all the generations past since the beginning of time. The dances reflected our daily lives but were represented as bigger, greater and more wonderful.

Dance was, and continues to be, a very important aspect of who we are as Kwakwak'wakw. It encompasses all four areas which make up our living beings. Dance is spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical and dances should be appreciated and accepted as they are presented. In many ways, dance reflected our everyday lives ~ whether it was hunting, traveling from village to village in canoes, singing praise to the salmon, the mighty grizzly or giant sasquatch. Dancing allowed us to re-enact segments of our daily lives but with greatness and solemnity ~ the Rites of Passage, which is the Hamat'sa Initiation Ceremony, or a young girls first menses, a baby's first haircut, a marriage or standing up a new Chief. Ritual or ceremonial dancing was, perhaps, the most important manner by which we were sustained as a People. For everything that happened in the Bighouse, there was a dance (or, dancing) to go with it. For everything we do in the Bighouse we do to acknowledge and reaffirm who we are as a People ~ knowing our true beginning. And knowing our true beginnings makes us who we are today.

Earth (Mortal) World, Sky ~World, Spirit World and Undersea World.

The Kwakwak'wakw believed very firmly in the concept of the Four Worlds, and this was evidenced in their dances of the T'seka, or the Red Cedar bark, Ceremonies. All the important dances and ceremonies were conducted in the T'seka for the most part because the dances and ceremonies were spiritual in nature, or sacred. Influences from all four worlds were evidenced in the dances and the masks, representing legends and creatures of the sky world, animals of the forests of the mortal and spirit world, and legends and animals of the Undersea Kingdom. All the dances of the T'seka somehow illustrated the concept of the Four Worlds as they had meaning to the people. Masks were made with very specific purpose to help put forth ideas, and to help make something which was primarily symbolic in nature, seem as real as possible. The ancients (Kwakwak'wakw) held clear and meaningful beliefs regarding themselves and their world, and all this was accounted for in the ceremonies and the masks used in these ceremonies.

Turning Left

Dancers turn left upon entering the dance floor to symbolize going from the Real (Earth) World into the Supernatural World. They turn left again directly before leaving the dance floor because they are leaving the Supernatural World and re-entering the Real World.

Dancing Around the Fire Counter-clockwise

Dancers move around the dance floor for the same reason they turn left at all the corners. We turn left to remember and to pay reverence to all things upon which our beliefs are situated and that stem from life's cycles. Dancing around the sacred fire is just a bigger and wider circular motion, continuing to turn left. Dancers move around the sacred fire, which is the center of our supernatural World, in a counter-clockwise fashion, much like the planets revolve around the sun.

Remember Your Corners

During ceremonies of the T'seḱa or Red Cedar bark Ceremonials, all participants, Chiefs, Attendants or dancers always remember to turn left. Turning left is a vital aspect of all proceedings in the T'seḱa , never to be forgotten or overlooked, but always remembered. Dancers are instructed to "pay attention to your corners". We turn left at all four corners to remember (pay reverence to) all things in Life upon which our beliefs are based. And with this act we begin to understand why the number four is sacred, and holds such significance to our People, and has done for thousands of years, since the beginning of time.

- 1) The Four Worlds -Earth World, Sky World, Spirit World, Undersea World.
- 2) Life Cycles: Birth (Babyhood), Childhood, Adulthood, Old Age(Death)
- 3) The Four Directions: North, South, East and West
- 4) The Four Seasons: Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall
- 5) Parts of Self: Physical, The Emotional, Intellectual, Spiritual
- 6) Parts of a Tree: Leaves, branches, trunk and the root system.
- 7) Parts of the Day: morning, noon, suppertime and night time.
- 8) Four Elements: earth (where we live, get food), wind (the air we breathe), water (without it we perish), fire (receive warmth and sustenance)

Dancing Barefoot

We dance barefoot in the Gukwdzi, during ceremonies, to symbolize our continued connection to the Earth.