



Close to the Heart of Doh Ki

Kiowa People - USA

There was a man who the Kiowas say was one of the greatest Kiowas who ever lived, but no one remembers his name so only for the purpose of this story I will call him Kahn Hayn (ph) which means 'No Name' in the Kiowa language.

Kahn Hayn was orphaned as a young child and he didn't marry. He didn't have any offspring and no immediate family, so his status in the tribe is described as being *kali ah*, or 'poor'. But he was a great hunter and a warrior, and he had a big heart and he was always working for the greater welfare of the Kiowa people and helping to provide for those who were less fortunate than him.

When Doh Ki [also known as *Doyem Daw-k'hee* or 'the Earth-maker' (Boyd 1981:2)], or God, put all the people on the earth he placed them here and there in different areas according to how well they could fit in, in those areas. But after that was done there were still several groups of people, different tribes who didn't have places to call a homeland, and the Kiowas were among this group of people.

One day a bush spoke to all these people and called them all together in one area. When the Kiowas arrived at this spot they discovered that the voice was the voice of God, or Doh Ki. Doh Ki explained to this gathering that he had one place left on this earth that didn't have anybody living there. But to get to this place, one of them had to go through a very difficult and dangerous journey to arrive there.

Doh Ki then had these people move to a place that Kahn Hayn thought was somewhere near the end of the earth. There was no vegetation there, no animals, no insects. Nothing moved about the ground or in the air. There was only dirt and rough stone formations, and here and there clouds of steam shot out from holes and fissures in the ground.

Doh Ki called everyone around one of these steaming pools, and that was the most disturbing sight in this desolate place. There was a large deep cauldron of boiling water that surged and smashed against the jagged rock walls. It made a loud fearsome thumping noise, the cauldron did. It sounded like a great beast was just below the surface fighting to break free from the cauldron and tossing waters about violently.

Most of the people ran away immediately from the dreadful sight and sounds, and only a handful of chiefs and warriors from the various tribes stayed there, and Kahn Hayn and a few other Kiowa men were among them. Doh Ki then pointed down into the cauldron and told the remaining men that the surrounding land would belong to the tribe of any man who would dive down into the crashing waters. This created a good deal of excited discussion among these men and some began to back away because of fear, and many left because they felt this land, this country was useless and it wasn't worth risking their lives for.

Because of his strong belief and faith in the goodness of God, of Doh Ki, Kahn Hayn knew that there was more to this, to this offer, than what they were seeing and hearing, because Doh Ki didn't play tricks on the people. He constantly tested them, but his rewards were always good and lasting. Kahn Hayn related his feelings to the other Kiowas and said he had decided that he would try this thing, he was Kah Ahn and if this didn't work out right he wouldn't be leaving any family behind, and there would be no one to mourn his passing.

So he stepped over to the edge of the cauldron. He looked around one last time, but there was not much to see in this desolate landscape except his fellow Kiowas watching him with expressions of dread and apprehension. He then looked down into the boiling water, he closed his eyes and pushed himself off and down into the unknown.

Kahn Hayn first felt the extreme heat of the water, this started a small panic within him. The thumping sound that they'd heard was

instead above the cauldron now, [there] was a terrible pounding all through his body and made his head feel like it was about to burst. He had a sense that he had dived deep into the hot pool and his thoughts were raised in about what he was supposed to do next. He was wondering if there was something in this pool that he had to reach for. and if so he had to find it real soon because his lungs were beginning to ache, and his skin was getting numb from the heat of the water, and he felt like he was blistering from the intense heat of the water.

Now, all of a sudden, while he was going through all these different emotions, something else struck him, just horrified him, and increased his panic. When he entered the water he was tossed about so much that he lost all sense of directions. He wanted to open his eyes to try to find his bearings, but he was afraid that his eyes would be burned like his skin was being burned, and he also felt himself being banged and scraped against the sharp, rough walls. But he couldn't tell, from the angle of the walls, he couldn't tell if he was near to the surface or deeper down into the cauldron, his air was starting to give out and all of the heat and pounding was causing him to lose all hope for his situation.

So just as he felt himself losing consciousness he decided just to let himself go to whatever death had in store for him. So he stopped his moving about, his thrashing, and he let himself go limp and he waited for death to overtake him. He didn't realize that at the time he was near the surface of the water of the cauldron.

When he stopped struggling his body floated up and broke the surface into the cool, sweet air. As he rolled over and began to gulp in the fresh air, he felt himself being lifted from the water by a lot of hands, and the next thing he heard [was] a lot of excited yelling and victory cries that the Kiowas were making.

And then he opened his eyes and he saw the most beautiful sight any human has ever seen. Doh Ki was not around any longer, nor were all the oilier tribal people who were gathered around as he dove into the cauldron. The only ones that were there were the Kiowas, and they were all trying to explain at once about the miraculous thing that Kahn Hayn had accomplished. The landscape was no longer barren and desolate but was now filled with a thick, rich forest of tall, beautiful trees. The distant mountains were partly covered with snow and small streams and creeks

flowed down from the mountains, and they turned into rushing rivers which in turn cascaded into large bodies of water lakes. Also, there were now many large and small animals of all types moving through the forest, across the landscape, and on top and along the waters and waterways. The place that Kahn Hayn left as he dove into the cauldron was now transformed. This became the land that Doh Ki spoke of. This was now the most beautiful and abundant of all places on the earth, and this became the Kiowas' homeland.

Following this journey that Kahn Hayn made, the Kiowas stayed and feasted and celebrated for days and days, and they made many prayers in gratitude to Doh Ki for his gift that he gave to the Kiowas. Kahn Hayn became the chief of the Kiowas, (...)

The Kiowas lived in, around this area for many years, and when Kahn Hayn finally died the Kiowas took him back to that cauldron and they buried him nearby. And then, gradually, the Kiowas began to move away from there into other areas.

They say that because of what Kahn Hayn did at that time, and because of the Kiowas' deep faith in Doh Ki, that the Kiowas would always be preeminent, or paramount, to all other peoples, all other tribes, and that we would always remain closest to the heart of God.

Orbah Hah. That's all. □

Transcription from an audio recording by SC, enrolled member of the Kiowa Tribe (1993), in Nabokov and Loendorf (2002).

Public Domain. 

Comments

This version of the Kiowa myth comes from one SC, a Vietnam War veteran and an enrolled member of the Kiowa Tribe. In personal communication (Nabokov and Loendorf, 2002, p. 58), SC said that this story was set in 'what we call the Yellowstone period, up until the Kiowas moved down to the southern Plains area.'

SC explained that this story had been told to him, during the winter of 1986, by one ST, a Kiowa elder who had preserved the tribe's memories.

SC said that when he heard the story from ST's mouth, it resonated to him as if he had also heard it from his own father, a traditional storyteller. But ST's version seemed to have preserved much more detail, because '[he] also described the location [in Yellowstone Park] to me' (ibid.).

Peter Nabokov and Lawrence Loendorf (2002), researchers at universities in California and New Mexico, respectively, would audio record 'Close to the Heart of Doh Ki' from SC's mouth in 1993, when he was 47 years old. Eventually, he would tell researchers that the Kiowa had called Yellowstone *Tung Sa'u Dah*, 'the place of hot water.' Nabokov and Loendorf added that

... he identified the specific location or "cauldron" where the protagonist he calls *Kahn Hayn* ("No Name") had his near-death experience as The Dragon's Mouth, next to Mud Volcano, north of Yellowstone Lake. (p. 61)

The Kiowa people are known to have inhabited the area around the Columbia River in Canada in the 18th century, and later descended to the upper Missouri River and Yellowstone. Later, in their search for deer, buffalo and elk in order to survive, they would go eastward to the Black Hills, where they would meet the Lakota (Sioux), with whom they failed to come to an understanding. Of the animals they hunted, 'they had a use for everything. Nothing was ever wasted,' says Steve Quoetone, a enrolled member of the Kiowa Tribe (Feldman, 2020).

The Lakota would expel the Kiowa from the territory, who would then head south to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. There they came into contact with horses, an event that would completely change their way of life. Around 1790, after reaching a peace agreement with the Comanche, they settled in the vicinity of the Arkansas River, until finally, in 1865, the United States government forced them to confine themselves to their present reservation in southwestern Oklahoma (ibid.).

Today, the Kiowa number around 11,000 people.

Sources

Boyd, M. (1981). *Kiowa Voices*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press.



- Feldman, B. (2020). Kiowa Tribe. Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication. University of Oklahoma. Available on <https://www.ou.edu/gaylord/exiled-to-indian-country/content/kiowa>
- Nabokov, P. & Loendorf, L. (2002). *American Indians and Yellowstone National Park: A Documentary Overview*. Yellowstone National Park, WY: National Park Service, pp. 58-60.
- Parsons, E. C. (1929). Kiowa Tales. *Memoirs of the American Folklore Society, XXII*. New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., Agents, p. 15.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 12b: Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Preamble – Universal Responsibility: Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world.

Principle 1b: Affirm faith in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical, and spiritual potential of humanity.

Principle 2b: Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

Principle 11c: Strengthen families and ensure the safety and loving nurture of all family members.

Principle 12: Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.

The Way Forward: It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility.

The Way Forward: Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals.

The Way Forward: Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play.

