

Origin of the Sweat House

Long ago, in the days of the animal people, Sweat House was a man. He foresaw the coming of human beings, the real inhabitants of Earth. One day he called all the animal people together, to give each one a name and to tell him his duties.

In the council, Sweat House stood up and made this speech: "We have lived on Earth for a long while, but we shall not be in our present condition much longer. A different people are coming to live here. We must part from each other and go to different places. Each of you must decide whether you wish to belong to the animal beings that walk or that fly, that creep or that swim. You may now make your choices."

Then Sweat House turned to Elk. "You will first come this way, Elk. What do you wish to be?"

"I wish to be just what I am, an elk."

Let us see you run or gallop," said Sweat House.

So Elk galloped off in a graceful manner, and then returned.

You are alright," decided Sweat House. "You are an elk."

Elk galloped off, and the rest saw no more of him.

Sweat House called Eagle to him and asked, "What do you wish to be, Eagle?"

"I wish to be just what I am, an eagle."

"Let us see you fly," replied Sweat House.

Eagle flew, rising higher and higher, with hardly a ripple on his outstretched wings.

Sweat House called him back and said to him, "You are an eagle. You will be king over all of the birds of the air. You will soar in the sky. You will live on the crags and peaks of the highest mountains. The human beings will admire you."

Happy with that decision, Eagle flew away. Everybody watched him until he disappeared in the sky.

"I wish to be like Eagle," Bluejay told Sweat House.

Wanting to give everyone a chance, Sweat House said again, "Let us see you fly."

Bluejay flew into the air, trying to imitate the easy, graceful flight of eagle. But he failed to keep himself balanced and was soon flapping his wings.

Noticing his awkwardness, Sweat House called Bluejay back to him and said, "A jay is a jay. You will have to be contented as you are."

When Bear came forward, Sweat House said to him, "You will be known among human beings as a very fierce animal. You will kill and eat people, and they will fear you."

Bear then went off into the woods and has since been known as a fierce animal.

Then to all the walking creatures, except Coyote, and all the flying creatures, to all the animals and birds, all the snakes and frogs and turtles and fish, Sweat House gave names, and the creatures scattered.

After they had gone, Sweat House called Coyote to him and said, “You have been wise and cunning. A man to be feared, you have been. This Earth shall become like the air, empty and void, yet your name shall last forever. The new human beings who are to come will hear your name and say, ‘Yes, Coyote was great in his time.’ Now what do you wish to be?”

I have lived long enough as Coyote,” he replied. “I want to be noble like Eagle or Elk or Cougar.”

Sweat House let him show what he could do. First Coyote tried his best to fly like Eagle, but he could only jump around, this way and that way. He could not fly, the poor fellow. Then he tried to imitate the Elk in his graceful gallop. For a short distance he succeeded, but soon he returned to his own gait. He ran a little way, stopped short, and looked around.

“You look exactly like yourself, Coyote,” laughed Sweat House. “You will be a coyote.”

Poor Coyote ran off, howling, to some unknown place. Before he got out of sight, he stopped, turned his head, and stood – just like a coyote.

Sweat House, left alone, spoke to himself: “All now are gone, and the new people will be coming soon. When they arrive, they should find something that will give them strength and power. I will place myself on the ground, for the use of the human beings who are to come. Whoever will visit me now and then, to him I will give power. He will become great in war and great in peace. He will have success in fishing and in hunting. To all who come to me for protection I will give strength and power.”

Sweat House spoke with earnestness. Then he lay down, on his hands and knees, and waited for the first people. He has lain that way ever since and has given power to all who have sought it from him.