

# IYOMANDE

## THE AINU BEAR FESTIVAL

*A DESCRIPTION OF AINU BEAR FESTIVALS AS FIRST  
WITNESSED BY THE WRITER SOME  
FIFTY FIVE YEARS AGO*

### 1. *The Name for Bears.*

As a rule the Ainu call bears *kim-un-kamui*, a name which means "the superior creatures which dwell among the mountains," *kim* is a common word designating the hinterland mountains; *un* is a locative particle meaning to "be" or "dwell," and *kamui* means "superior creatures," and is applied to gods and demons indiscriminately; it is any creature of a superior or inferior order, whether that order is good or bad. In this instance he is a good creature, and, being the strongest animal the Ainu know of is regarded as "the king of the forest."

### 2. *The Bear's Boss.*

But one is surprised to find that there is another animal who is supposed to be a kind of chief over the bears and to rule them. He is called *sekuma-pause-kamui*, which means "the superior creature who calls *pau* among the mountain ridges." *Pau* is an onomatopoeic expression for the call or bark of a fox or wolf. *Pau-se* is to give forth such a bark. *Sekuma* is the common designation given to mountain ridges. When this creature comes down to visit his bear subjects, he is said to take the form of bruin, and to be clothed in most beautiful dark-brown garments, garments here standing for skin.

### 3. *The Name of the Bear Festival.*

The religious ceremonial killing of any living creature of the brute creation is called by the general term of *iyomande*.

by the Ainu which means "sending away." This word carries no idea of death by killing in it but rather a sending of the spirit away—a despatch. I have personally known of not only bear-cubs being so despatched, but have also known of foxes, badgers, crows, hawks, jays and even little sparrows being subjected to the *iyomande* ceremony. The bodies of all such creatures are indeed slain, but their spirits are sent away alive out of their bodies to visit their ancestors. And the spirits are supposed to return later to be again "sent off." The flesh is eaten and the blood drunk so as to obtain the special virtues and powers of the creatures partaken of. Such ceremonies are their intercommunion with their creature gods and one another in spirit and essence.

4. *The Bear Feast is the great Racial Religious Ceremony of the Ainu People.*

The bear festival is the outward expression of the greatest racial religious act of ceremonial worship of the Ainu brotherhood. The cub to be slain is specially raised for the occasion. The rearing of the creature is the high privilege of the house mistress. She cooks the food it is to be fed with and has the responsibility of its welfare. When a cub has been so young as to be unable to lap up pap prepared for it, he was allowed to run loose at will about the house and was fed at the breast of the housewife like one of her own children. The Ainu have now a keener sense of the fitness of things, so that the younger folks absolutely deny it to have been so. This is, perhaps, as it should be; nevertheless I have actually seen it done. Fifty years ago, and less even, I saw that when a cub became too big and its claws too strong and sharp for it to be allowed to run free, a large cage was constructed just outside the house and he was confined in it till the appointed time of the *iyomande* festival.

5. *In the Cage.*

The cubs were very well fed and cared for while in the cages. They were frequently visited by the villagers, saluted,

and kindly spoken to. They usually lived in the cages for one or two years when they were considered fit to form the viands for a feast. When the time came for the *iyomande* or "sending away," bruin was taken from his cage, worshipped, baited, and shot in the heart and throttled. His flesh was then eaten, his blood drunk, and his skull finally found a resting place on the top of a forked pole outside the house where it was at times worshipped. The side where the skull was elevated was deemed very sacred and called the *inau-shan*, i.e. "the clump of sacred wands."

6. *Invitation to the Feast.*

A short time before the day appointed for the festival to take place, word was sent round to the nearby villages inviting the elders to attend and take part on the day mentioned. A common form of invitation runs as follows:

"I, so and so, of such a place, am about to send away the dear little cub to its home among the mountains. Come ye friends and masters to the feast. We will then unite in the great joy of sending the mighty one off. Come."

7. *The Sacred Liquor.*

Near the day fixed for the ceremonies to take place, millet is mixed in cold water and set to ferment inside the house just near the east-end window, in line with the top of the hearth. This is a very honoured place in the home. This millet brew, when properly fermented, is to be drunk as the sacred wine of the feast. Its special name is *kamui-ashkoro*, "ferment for the superior one," the "superior one" being the victim itself.

8. *The Arrival of the Guests.*

This being the greatest high-day the Ainu have the people assemble in great numbers, clothed in their gayest attire. The women wear their ear-rings, beads and the breast ornament called *shitoki*, and also have the tattoo marks round the mouth, arms, and fingers nicely touched up. In some instances

one may see some of them with a line tattooed across their foreheads, but not in every district. Some of the women come a day or two early so as to help the mistress pound the millet and make the dumplings. They all seem to be very happy at this work and tell one another the news meanwhile.

#### 9. *The Day of the Feast.*

As the guests arrive they enter the house and sit round the hearth, the men in front and the women behind. Millet dumplings are seen boiling over the fires and toasting among ashes upon the hearth. The smell of these is not at all bad to a hungry man. Many willow shavings are to be seen hung about the house as decorations, something like the mistletoe and holly in Europe at Christmas-tide. A great number of *inau* wands have been peeled by the elders and stuck in the hearth and at various places about the dwelling as offerings to the different tutelary deities. After this has been done most of the wands are reverently taken up and carried to the outside of the east-end of the house and set up at the *inau-san*, i. e. "wand domain." This having been accomplished two long thick poles, which have been already provided are laid near the *inau-san* base.

#### 10. *The Farewell Worship of the Cub.*

Presently the men file out of the house wearing their ceremonial crowns, which are made of willow shavings and cloth, and solemnly approach the cage containing the cub. Here they do worship before it. The women and children follow and sing and dance and clap their hands.

Soon all form themselves into a large circle, the men sitting in front and the women behind. After all has been thus arranged one man goes to the bear and tells him that if he is a good and proper creature he will appear again later to be treated as he has hitherto been, and is just about to be, namely to provide viands for and partake thereof together with them at another festival.

#### 11. *Address to a Cub when about to be killed.*

The following is a good specimen of an address made to cubs when about to be killed:—

"O thou precious little high one! We salute thee. Hear now. We have nourished thee and brought thee up with great care all because we love thee so much. Now, as thou hast grown big we are about to send thee away to thy father and mother. When thou comest to them speak well of us and make known to them how kind we have been to thee. Come back to us again and we will then have another feast together, and once more send thee off."

#### 12. *The Cub taken from the Cage.*

Having offered prayers after the fashion of the above specimen a couple of men go to the cage and catch the victim in a noose made in a strong cord and haul the creature up to the top of it and force him over, making him fall to the ground. Here others immediately pass cords over the head and under the shoulders, one on each side, and hold securely on. The cub is then led to and fro before the expectant visitors who tease and bait him by shooting at him with blunt arrows, which they call *hepere-ai*, "cub arrows," and try to work him up into a passion. The excitement and noise made by the people is very great. The wilder the animal becomes the better pleased the guests become. Sometimes the bear is brushed down with a stick having a tuft of *sasa* (a kind of arundinaria) attached to its top. When his struggles show signs of becoming weak a stake is driven into the ground to which he is securely tied. This stake is called *tush-op-ni*, — "tree for tying up."

#### 13. *The Throttling.*

At the conclusion of the baiting the struggling cub is dragged along to the place of throttling. While being so dragged two young men rush forward and seize him by the

face and ears and others catch hold of his fore and hind legs. He is thus taken to two poles lying on the ground, having had an *inau*-wand thrust in his mouth at which he bites hard. In some places an arrow is shot into his heart and all the blood carefully caught in a vessel and drunk warm by the elders. As soon as this has been accomplished the head of bruin is placed over one of the poles while the other is pressed over the neck. This being done the people rush forward and press the top pole down on the neck till every sign of life has ceased. The two pieces of wood used for this are called *ok-mumba-ni*, "neck-pressing poles." In some places, however, the creature is not given the *coup de grace* by the arrow till after the throttling has commenced. It is a cruel, revolting, and degrading ceremony altogether, and nothing good can rightly be said of it.

#### 14. *The Animal's Carcass brought into the House.*

After having been thus cruelly slain the victim is generally skinned outside the house near the *inau-shan* before the window. The whole carcass is skinned excepting some three inches of the snout, the ears, and the paws. It is then brought into the house through the east-end window which has previously been broken down to the ground to admit of ingress, and reverently laid at the head of the fire-place before Fuji the ancestral goddess of fire, upon whom also *Ekashi* the male ancestor of the people looks with pleasure. By some he is actually brought out of his corner and stuck up by his wife's side so that together they, i.e. the fire upon the hearth and he, may rejoice with their offspring, the Ainu. The dead meat is carefully placed upon a mat which is called *inau-so*, "fetish seat." Here he is well ornamented with *inau* shavings called *inau kike* i.e., "fetish shavings," as signs of honour and consecration to himself. Earrings and beads, old swords and other treasures also find a place among the ornamental riches and treasures, some of which are called *shintoko*, "things of beauty" and others *tombe*, "things which shine," i.e. "things pleasant to the eye." Yet, although the skinning

of the animal and the cutting of the meat takes place *outside* the house, in some districts, it is done *inside*. The actual place, whether inside or out, does not seem to matter so long as it is done by the east window.

#### 15. *The Cub Himself joins in the Feast.*

The cub then having been slain and set in order, portions of the meat of his body are cooked over the fire upon the hearth. Here Fuji, the goddess of fire, and her daughter *shu-ko-ran mat*, "the maid of the cooking pot," already mentioned, come to ply their cooking skill, which is invariably good,—of course. A portion of his own flesh, cooked, is cut up into fine pieces and placed under his snout. This goes by the name of *not-pok-omap*, "that placed under the chin"; together with this is a little bowl of the soup in which the flesh has been boiled. This is called, the *marapto itangi*, i.e. "the cup of the feast." Besides these a moustache-lifter together with a bundle of dried fish is neatly bound up into a parcel, and placed beside the meat; also some millet dumplings and ceremonial liquor are with careful solicitude added to the elements. The cup of the ceremonial liquor is called the "cup of the feast" because it is the wine cup of friendship and good cheer and best wishes such as is implied in a toast drunk at a dinner party, or when the loving cup is passed round.

#### 16. *The post mortem Worship of the Victim.*

After all has been arranged the head celebrant of this eucharistic and very material, yet in essence very spiritual feast goes and sits cross-legged before the decapitated cub-head and worships after the following example:

"O divine cub, we present thee with these sacred wands, dried fish, dumplings and precious liquor. We offer them to thee. Take them with you to your forebears and say to them: I have been right well cared for a long time by an Ainu father and mother. I have been preserved by them from harm, and have

grown up. Now I came to thee. I bring with me many various good viands for a feast. Pray let us eat and rejoice! If you say this they will all be pleased and happy."

Another address I heard was as follows:

"My beloved cub, pray listen to me. I have cared for thee for a long time and now present thee with wands, dumplings, and sacred liquor as well as other good things. Ride thou upon these wands and carry with thee the good things presented to thee. Go to thy father and mother. Be happy. Cause them to rejoice. Upon arrival, call together multitudes of divine guests and make a great feast. Come again unto us that we may once more rear thee and enjoy another festival with thee. I salute thee thou dead cub: Depart thou in peace."

#### 17. *The Stock for the Feast in the other World.*

After this has been done, more millet dumplings and fish, already threaded on skewers, are placed beside the cub's head. These I was told were for the spirit feast in the bear world in the spirit regions. For, said my informant, it would never do for a cub to appear before his ancestors without a present sufficient to provide viands for a good meal and cup or two of *ashkoro*, i.e. "ceremonial wine." And so the cub is sent off well provided.

#### 18. *The distinctive Head-dress worn by the Communicants.*

Having once seen a bear festival one cannot forget the head gear worn by the people. The men had crowns of willow shavings, some of which had the heads of bears, foxes, and birds carved and set in the front. These were called *ekashpa-un-be*, i.e. "things on the heads of the old men." They were in no way regarded as regal but simply ceremonial and showed the tribe and status of the wearer. Those worn by the women were made of ornamented cloth and called *chipanup*, i.e. "head-tiers."

#### 19. *A preliminary Address made by the Celebrant at the Feast.*

A little time after the flesh, wine, and soup have been set under the snout of bruin, and all have become silent the master of ceremonies, sitting before the creature says in a loud voice: "The little superior one is now eating, come ye friends, let us worship." He then takes the cup, bows to it, raises it on high, drinks and divides the contents. All are supposed to communicate. This cup is called *ipuni etangi*, i.e. "cup of offering."

#### 20. *Besmearing with Blood.*

After the cup has been partaken of more *inau* are made while the rest of the meat of poor bruin is stewing in the pots. Some of the entrails are then cut up fine, sprinkled with salt and eaten raw. This, like the drinking of the blood, is said to be for the purpose of obtaining the prowess and other virtues of the bear. Some of the men besmear themselves with drops of the blood got from the fresh meat before being cooked. This process is called *yai-iko-ushi*, i.e. "besmearing one's self with the bear." This is said to insure success when out hunting. It is an ugly custom and unclean.

#### 21. *Communion with the Victim.*

When the flesh in the pots has been sufficiently boiled it is shared out among the people present. It is thus that each of the confraternity obtains communion with his beloved little divinity, as he calls the victim. Even the children partake both of the flesh, soup, and sacred wine, and I have seen *sake*, brought for the occasion, poured into the mouths of infants even. Such, then, is the way in which the Ainu people show their social and religious fellowship with one another and their creature god, bruin. I have seen every particle of the cub, bones excepted, eaten even to the entrails. The bones are kept by the hostess who stews them for private use. When done with they are taken out of the house and placed by the *inau* cluster by the east-end window where the skull has been set up for worship.

22. *Special Tidbits.*

The special tidbits of the victims are the fat and whites of the eyes, and the brains. These are mixed together, and after being boiled and chopped up fine are given to heads of the people and particular guests. This is called *chitatap*, i. e. "chopped up." The eyeballs, that is to say, the black part of the eyes are carefully wrapped up in willow shavings and placed by the *nusa* clump towards the east. Here I will add that bear and other skulls which appear in this clump are called by the special names of *akoshiratki kamui*, "divine preservers," and are invested with life even though they be as dry as chips.

23. *The Name changed.*

As soon as a bear has been killed at a feast he is no longer called a bear but a *chinukara-guru* which means "the seer," and then "guardian." After being shot and throttled, when the soul of the poor beast is supposed to be ascending from the body to heaven, some of the grave old men, sitting in a row, shoot a few *hepere-ai* to the north-east part of the skies, as a parting salute. This is one of the great mysteries of Ainu religion which I have never yet heard them explain. But it is curious to remark that the name of the north star is *chinukara-guru*, as though *Ursus major* is considered to be the guardian of the Ainu people. The lower conception is that the cub, when killed, returns into the mountains to be sent back again as another victim for a feast. But it seems to the writer that a belief in the bear's soul going to *Ursus major* or perhaps *Ursus minor* as to a heavenly home is the true explanation.