

THE HMOOB WAYS OF OLD - NOW WE MUST STUDY

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THE HMOOB WAYS OF OLD - WE NOW MUST STUDY

These are stories of how the Hmoob lived in the old days from when our ancestors made us persons up to the present.

When we were born, our parents told us to make our living by making knives, axes, and machetes, and hoes to plant crops to feed our families, so we will have food for the next year.

We start making rice fields from March through April. After burning away the undergrowth, we plant crops such as squash, sugar cane, cucumber and others so will have food in the future.

When we have new crops, what do we do? First we must give offering to the house spirits and the spirits of our dead relations. We must kill two chickens to thank the spirits since the spirits made it possible for us to have food to eat. Thus we have to thank the spirits first. Then we are glad that we have a place where we can plant our lives in the future. If we have new crops, we still will thank the spirits more than that.

We the Hmoob tribe in this world, have known that the traditions which the ancestors showed us so that we can make livings are like this. We must teach our children and continue for the next centuries and the next race. Up to the present, we have known that our custom is that of making rice fields, forever and ever. So we thought it was not an important thing, though we do it until our death, it will never give us any good new things. We say that customs have been laid down by our ancestors. If we say new ways are good ways and will last for all our lives in the future, people still will say that these ways are not the ways of our ancestors, even knowing that those are not good. They will never be able to read and write words, never be the leaders of people, never know about the king, and will never know any customs of the world. We know only that after eating we must go back to the fields and return, raise animals, plant opium year after year, summer through fall. It is like a grinder which goes round and round and returns to the same place. Hmoob traditions are like this, so we must tell our race and our relatives the truth that now we must have new thoughts: must send our children to get an education so when they are grown up, they will be able to do what they want and they can do anything to make their living. Everything pains you only on your skin. The important thing is education to know about the customs of God, and to follow him. This is

the way we will have new lives and new ways, and we can see that there is a way to walk in the future and we will be comfortable, happy without end. God's way is the most important way. The ways which I described above are only the skin and they are not very important.

MAKING RICE CAKES

This is a description about the Hmoob methods of making cakes. What do we do when the new rice is harvested? When the new rice is ready to harvest, we go to gather it from the rice field, and dry it. When it is real dry, we take it to pound, or mill, then to soak. When it is good enough, we will steam it. We prepare a mortar pestles of curved wood which will be pounded by two persons.

When the rice is well melted and sticky, we take eggs using only the yellow yolk to spread over the rice thresher and the hands of the persons who are going to make cakes, so that their fingers will not stick. Then we take the sticky well-melted cake from the moter and make round cakes. We cut banana leaves to cover each cake to protect them from burning when you roast them. This is the method of making Hmoob cake.

MAKING A NEW HOUSE

This is a description about the customs of making a new Hmoob house.

When we are going to build a new house, we must sharpen our machetes, axes, and knives. We measure the lenth and width, the size of the building, all the posts and everything with which we will make that house. We use special grass to make roofing. When the building is completed, we must make a fire place. It looks like a stove, but we can put only a large frying pan on it to boil animal food and others. We make bedrooms, water buckets, chairs and sometimes use bamboo. We use these to serve our families. This is the custom of the Hmoob.

MOVING TO A NEW VILLAGE

This is a description about how we move and looking for a new village. We have to look at the mountainranges and views to see if they are good and there will be mountains around the village. The place where you will build your house, you have to look south and north, east and west to see if they are all in good view.

When you will build your house, you must do like this: count out as many rice grains as there are people in your family. Then dig a hole and place those rice grains in the hole for one night. In the morning, go back to open the hole. If ants have eaten those grains, it means that place has "Phi". If the grains are still the same as when you place them in the hole, it means that place does not have "Phi" and you can build your house there.

The rice grains are like the souls of your people in your family, who will not be sick if those rice grains are still in the same place. That place will be good for building house, you will have enough food and doing anything will be good for you. So in building a house you must look for a good place as described above. This is the method of building a new house and moving to a new village.

HORSE TRANSPORT

How can we use horses transportation to carry rice? We must make two wooden saddles, one to cover the horse's back, and one to put over to tie things on. We put the second over the other one to tie two baskets on. We have to balance the weights so each side will be equally heavy.

A BLACKSMITH

This is the description of the blacksmith. I am going to tell about myself first.

My name is "Ntsuab Vas Lauj," or "Yua va lo." When I was twenty five years old, I did not know how to make any thing at all. I could only ask other persons to make knives and other things for me. I am an orphan; my father died when I was a little boy, about one year old. When I grew up, I liked guns, knives, and axes, but I did not have them. When I was thirty years old, I went to learn how to make those things. I made a gun which is called "cucumber flower gun" and other kind of Hmoob guns. Afterwards I could make them very well. When I took them to sell, the high officials liked them too. People bought some of them as souvenirs.

I understand that in being a person in this world one must learn everything he can, have things one should have, and not borrow from other people. This is the way by which you will become famous. When you do something, you have to think carefully, you must do it as well as you can, do not be bad-hearted to other people, and make things as well as if you were making them for yourself. Everything must be of good quality, so when people use them in making anything, nothing will break, because things are of good quality. This is the method of making things to use in living in the world.

If anyone wants to be a blacksmith, what must he do? He must make a tube for a bellows and make it very clear and smooth inside with a plunger, lined with chicken feathers to put into the tube. Then he has to make his own tools such as a hammer, tongs, and so on, so he can continue his work in the future.

SHARPENING KNIVES

When you make a knife or machetes, you have to look for file to file them once for the first time. If you do not have file, you can sharpen them by using good and special rock used for sharpening knife. After you file the knife, you must sharpen it until you cannot see the file tracks, and the blade looks white and bright. Then you spread the sharp edge with wet earth, and burn it until it is red. If it is too red, we say it is "too old" or "too hard." If it is not red enough, means it is "young" and not "hard" enough. The best is red and yellow color together. Then you sink the sharp edge into water to make it hard. If it is too hard "too old" you have to put it over red coals to make it hot and make it become "young" or "soft." Then you spit on the sharp edge. If the spit cannot stay on it, it means that it has returned to the "soft" condition where it is and good enough.

After you sharpen the blade, you should try to cut hard things like bamboo or other hard things to test and see whether or not it is hard enough. Then you can make a handle for it and use it to do work, and then it will be useable. This is the method of making a knife.

"POJ TXOOG" or "PHI NOI"

Our ancestor have said that there are "Poj Txoog" and up to the present, people still believe that there are "Poj Txoog." These "Poj Txoog" live with tigers, and look upon the tiger as their grandfather. When a tiger attacks cattle, the "Poj Txoog" must go ahead as a look out. Someone might have a loaded gun on their way, and maybe their grandfather will be killed, or, maybe someone else might be watching for a way to kill the tiger. When the tiger has killed cattle, the "Poj Txoog" must be watchers to see if the owner had his gun around the dead cattle.

How can we kill the "Poj Txoog" and tiger? We must leave rotten eggs on dead cattle killed by the tiger. When the "Poj Txoog" come near to dead cattle, they will play with those rotten eggs and forget to take care of the tiger. They become foolish, and the tiger will go to eat the dead cattle. Then our

guns will shoot the tiger when it touches the lines we have rigged around the cattle.

When the tiger dies, the "Poj Txoog" will come to make dreams for a man who may be a fortune-teller or knows much about the "Phi". Sometimes they say "Oh, during our trip, our grandfather washed up one potato," which means he bit one of the cattle "and then we saw some eggs, so we forgot all about our grandfather. He touched the lines of bamboo and it burst and killed him." (They call guns "bamboo"). "So we come to tell you that this area has too many wasps and we cannot live. We have to leave here." This is a description of the "Poj Txoog."

This is a story about a man called "Txoof Sawm" or "Chong Sheu". He was a fortune-teller. One group of his fortune spirits concerned the "Poj Txoog"; he could talk with the "Poj Txoog" when he made "Neeb" or "Neng" that the Hmoob use to do when they cure a patient.

One night at midnight, two beautiful girls came into his house and his bedroom. They told him "Friend, we come to ask you to go to see our grandfather. He bit a cow and the owner made a trap, so we tripped a line and a bamboo spear stabbed our grandfather and broke off with half of it inside his body. We put him to sleep in a cave under a cliff. He has not been cured, so we have come to ask you to cure him. How will he be cured?"

Then Chong Sheu got up and went with those two girls in the dark. They went through three old rice fields and arrived at the cliff by dawn. He found a big tiger lying in the cave with rotting wound. A bamboo spear was broken off inside the tiger's body. He pulled out the bamboo and tiger roared loudly. The two "Poj Txoog" said "Grandfather, do not shout too loud. He will be afraid. Let him pull out the bamboo spear. If you are cured, we will continue our trip."

After pulling the spear out, the man stuffed some banana leaves in the tiger's wounds. Then those two "Poj Txoog" sent him back to his home. He woke up immediately, thought about his dream and told his wife and children that the "Poj Txoog" asked him to pull out the broken spear in the tiger's side.

The next night, the two pretty girls came again and told him that after he had pulled out the spear, their grandfather died. So they could not live in this world and had to leave and go to the other world. They just came to tell him that.

CROSS BOW

This is the method of making and the coming of cross bow. In the old days, our ancestors did not know how to make guns to shoot animals. They made cross bow with poison arrows and had special spirits to take care of them and wish them to have animals. They had to learn about the spirit in doing this. If you hang a cross bow on the front wall and it falls down, it means there will be animals passing by when you go somewhere. Sometimes when you go hunting and watch, maybe some big animal will pass by and you will shoot it.

When you get an animal, you must cut off the head and give it to the spirits of the cross bow.

When you are going to make a cross bow, you have to cut the bow or which you had cut and dried for few months. It must be very old bamboo, so it will be hard enough. We use ordinary bamboo to make arrows, then we call a "poisoned cross bow." You can also shoot large animals like gun, but they take long time to die. These poison comes from a special kind of tree resin. The poison is mixed with chilli, ginger, and of the venom. Then you catch a grasshopper and break its legs, soak it in the poison, and release it. If it can leap only three times before it dies, that poison is good. If not, it is not good. When you shoot a monkey and some else, it must sneeze immediately. On the second shot it will fall down.

When you cook the game, you must put salt in before eating. If you do not do that first, you will be drugged.

These were the old days of our ancestors. Later on, people knew how to make guns, but they did not know how to make the firing mechanism, so they tied incense on the gun. When they saw an animal, they lit the incense, which lit the powder and shot the gun. Afterwards they knew how to make the firing mechanism with a little piece of flint on it, so it shot a spark into the powder. This was the method of making cross bows and guns of the old days.

THIEVING

What do people hate? We Hmoob hate tigers, mosquitoes, ants, and other creatures which harm people. But, we peoples in this world are a kind of animal which can speak (smart animal) and we still hate others, like animals. Why are they hated like animals? Those people are lazy people; they do not like good things, they are not shame like animal. When they do not have food, they go steal from other people. At night they will go

steal from others, stealing eggs, chickens and so on.

What will the owners do when they see? They will tie them, hit and fine them. If one does not have money to pay them, what will he do? He must sell his family and inheritance to pay other for what he has stolen. So everyone must remember in mind that that person is a lazy person and steals things.

All the people who have hearts and are not like those animals have to understand that the bad things are the things that will be shameful. If anyone does these things, he will fall on his face, or, lose face! Losing face is not only himself but he will fall through his relatives of the same family name. Although they are intelligent and the leader of people they will lose face because of the single thief.

What will be done if he does not throw away those bad habits? We must expel him from our village. If he still continues to live this way, our things will be lost again. At last he will be put in jail and sometimes he will be killed. These are the rules which the Hmoo people have followed from the beginning of their race.

MAKING THREAD AND CLOTH

In the old days we Hmoo people did not know how to make cloth and up to the present. We did not have education and were very poor at the beginning of our race, but our ancestors could make some thread and clothes for themselves. They planted a kind of small tree and use it to make their cloth. When it was old enough, they cut and dried it, then peeled off the bark and tied it around a frame made of two pieces of crossed wood. Then they took it to a hand-operated loom and twisted until it was good, and connect the pieces into a long thread; boiling this and mixing it with ashes; washing it and mixing with wax and threshing. The thresher was made of rock and a wood long which is called "Zeb dau" and put over the thread until it does not have coarse fibers. Then it was led onto the loom and made into a piece of cloth.

After that the cloth is dyed to a dark blue color by using a special kind of colored grass. We must soak this grass in a wooden tank until it rots and then take out all the grass and use only the colored water. Then we burn 'green stone' to make lime, put the lime into the water, and filter it to produce a real color. Then take this color and dye the cloth until it becomes black.

When there were no Chinese and other merchants who went to sell cloth, they only wore their own clothing which they made

by themselves. If anyone wore a shirt with a piece of black cloth sewn on the sleeves, that person was a rich person. If anyone had a silver necklace of about half kilo hanging on his neck, they called him a rich man, and were afraid to talk with him.

Afterwards, our ancestors moved to Laos, and were able to make more money. When merchants went to sell cloth, they could buy it to wear, and they forgot weaving. At the present time, not many people know how to make cloth like our ancestors. They use only the other races' cloth to make their clothing.

NAMING A CHILD, NAMING AN ADULT

This is the custom for naming a child. When a child is three days old, we kill two chickens to make a "naming" ceremony or to call the child's soul called "Hu plig". We must call him that name until he is grown up and married. Sometimes we have to change his name if he is always sick. It means his soul does not like his name.

When he gets his first child, we have to invite his parents-in-law to his house. They have to kill a pig around 'six clenched fists' large. This is done by measuring with a string- the string is folded in half and tied around the pig. When the food is ready on the table, they must thank the parents-in-law. The old name must be given by his parents-in-law. Then he will have a double name. For example, a man called "Kai Lo" may be "Va Kai Lo," or sometimes they change the whole name. It depends on what they like. After that, they have to thank the parents-in-law, and give one shoulder of the pork to the parents-in-law. This is the custom of naming children and adults.

CHANGING A NAME

There is another custom about changing names when someone is sick, and that is getting another person's luck to protect and make the sick person well. If the man has not been sick since his parents gave him his name when he was born, it means his soul likes his name. When he is sick and the fortune-teller discovers that his soul does not like his name, his name must be changed. Sometimes his new name will cure him. We must request another person who has a different family name to protect him. We must request a piece of silver, which brings another person's luck to protect him, so that he will be in good health without sickness, is called "Lucky money." When he does anything, it will be good as those with the other family name who

protect him. The old name will not be used at all. This is a custom which our ancestors used to do in the old days and still continue now.

BUYING CHILDREN

The following description is about people who do not have children. The Hmoob expression for them is "Dry mother and dry father." When they do not have any child, they will go to look for someone who has an orphan, or anyone who wants to sell a child. They will buy that child to be their child. What do they think when they buy that child? They might think that when they are old, they can hear the sound of water, but they do not have water to drink. They can see the fireplace, but they cannot sit near it. They hope their child will help them by then. But do not be hesitated and must be careful about this.

There is a Hmoob proverb which runs: "Raise a chicken without mother you will have its legs, but feeding an orphan is like you are going to have an enemy. Raising a chicken without mother, you will have its wings, but feeding an orphan is like you are going to have opium relative." He may become your enemy in the future. How can he be your enemy? He is not your own blood, you only give him food, so sometimes he loves you, but sometimes he will become your enemy.

For example, a man called "Chai Woua" had no children. He bought a Lao child and a Lao Theung child to be his own. Afterwards he had daughters-in-law and grandsons. He was a rich man. When both of them were old, their two sons wanted to kill them. They wanted to take all of his money, so they killed both of their adopted parents; got all their things and burned the house.

This is an important point for people who do not have child and buy other peoples child to be their own. We have to be careful about this. Even though you raise them from when they are 'still red' they are not your own blood. If you are not careful, it is like catching a wolf to keep in your chicken coop, or catching a tiger to keep in your shed.

WIDOWS

There is a custom that a man can never marry another man's wife, except for a widow. Where are two or three brothers in a family, the older brother dies. If he was married, his wife becomes a widow. The parents may pity the daughter-in-law because she is hard-working and very kind. They give to the younger brother. The younger brother can marry their older sister-in-law, but older brothers cannot marry their younger sister-in-law.

On the night of the last day of the funeral, they request the old men, the widow's parents and brothers, and the cousins to consider. The man has to bow his sister-in-law who becomes his wife, and he also must bow to all the old men, since they have made the match for him and after that night, no man can play with the woman. When the funeral is over, the man has to kill two chickens and set out a table of food with cups of alcohol, and call all the same old men to sit at a higher place. Then the man who will marry bows to the old men, to show that he will hold his brother's family, and will marry his brother's wife. The old men will then give their blessings to him. When the old men agree, he receives from them their advice about the woman and then he can carry on his family in the future.

This is the custom of marriage between the sister-in-law and the younger brother after the older brother dies.

TABOOS CONCERNING DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW

These are the customs of the Hmoob; we do not know those of Lao. There are many different family names and many different customs. With some family names, the daughter-in-law cannot go up to the loft (attic) of her parents' house. If she does, the "Phi" will make her to be blind. The older and younger brothers' wives cannot go into each others' beds, and the mother and sisters-in-law cannot go into each others beds. They also cannot use one washcloth, but they live and eat together. The younger brother and older sister-in-law, and the older brother and his younger sister-in-law cannot sit near each other. They have to sit away from each other or there must be a person sitting between them. This is the Hmoob custom, but my thinking is that they were originally too strict. One was afraid the other would steal something when he went into one's bed. One was afraid that if someone else sat near his wife, he would play with her. They did this for many centuries until at last it became their custom. But this way is very narrow minded. When one has something, he will keep it in his bed from so someone else cannot go in. If a mother does not want anyone to eat her things, she will keep them over the loft (attic). The problem is they are too possessive. There are still customs like this in the modern time.

DEATH RITES

These are the Hmoob funeral customs. A person in this world when he is alive, we can call 'a person', but when he dies, we call him a spirit' or 'Phi'.

When a person dies, they may have to take a gun and shoot it, so he will not be afraid when he goes alone. When they shoot, they take it and say to the dead body that he must not be afraid because they will shoot the gun three times, so the dead

person can find his way to his grandparents. After saying that, that person takes the gun outside and shoots it three times, sometimes more.

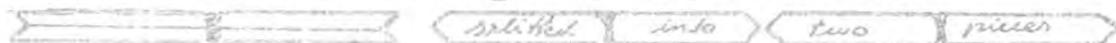
Then they discuss who they will request to help them carry the dead person. They request important people such as: the leader (the man who shows the way to the heaven for the dead), the man who cook food, the manager, the man who plays the "Khen", the grave digger, and others to help those people.

When those people come, they set up a table and fill cups with alcohol, putting them around the table and call them to sit around it. After they drink the alcohol, the relatives of the dead kneel and bow to one person at a time, requesting them to do the difficult jobs.

After that, the first work to do is that of the man who shows the dead man the way to heaven to see his grandparents. People in the world have never seen this at all, but they believe it, and the thoughts and beliefs of the ancestors had set the customs for the Hmoob to follow up to the present. It seems to have two ways.

When one is alive, he has one way to live, but when one dies, he has another way to go. He has to follow that way back to his grandparents in heaven. This is only thoughts or visions, some people still believe in spirits; the people who believe in God have thrown away those customs.

The leader, the man who shows the way for the dead to go to heaven, will call him as a spirit (ghost). People and spirits cannot speak to each other, so they must cut a piece of bamboo about five inches long, and split it into two pieces. We call these "Nuxhib ntawg." It looks like this



These are the way the "Phi" can speak to people. They hit the two sticks together over the chest of the dead body each time they want to know whether the dead will accept something they give him. The leader pours alcohol into a cup and gives it to the dead body, tells the dead body to drink the alcohol and that he will show the way to heaven to him. He hits the sticks together once again and pours the alcohol into a bottle for the dead body to take to heaven. Then he says to the dead body, "When you were alive, you were a person, but now that you have died, you are a spirit. You will travel back to your grandparents. You must thank the spirits of your house, the door spirits, so that they will release you to return." Then the leader burns some silver and gold paper to give to the dead body, to use to thank the house spirits for being allowed to go back. When he leads the

dead man outside, he tells the dead man to thank the spirits of that area, mountains, and the other spirits because they have not allowed him to go yet. When he was alive, he used their water, firewood, things. Then the leader burns some papers to the dead man so he can thank these spirits.

The dead man will be led through all the places he had lived, to the place where his parents gave birth to him. The leader tells the dead man to put on his clothes which he wore when he was born. His 'clothes' are the water which covered him before he was born and they buried it under the bed that his mother slept.

When he has done this, the leader will show him the way that he will go to heaven and he has to put on his threaded shoes which he will be able to walk through the mountain of caterpillar. They use a special thread to make a pair of shoes for the dead man. The leader tells the dead man that after he has passed those mountains, he must go through a cliff. Tigers will open their mouths as wide as the hole of a dragon, as large as a cave, so he must put his special thread into the dragons' mouths and rocks of the tigers. Then they will fall down and he can find the way to go through those places. The leader also tells the dead man that when he will arrive at a village, his cock crows the others answer, they will not be his grandparents. If his cock crows the other cock do not answer, they will be his grandparents. If their ears are as large as fans and their eyes are as big as cups, these persons are his grandparents. The father will jump on his skirt and he will be his grandfather.

These are the death customs that the leader show the dead man the way to heaven to see his grandparents. This is only a very simple one.

THE BLOWING PIPES "KHEN" AND BEATING OF DRUMS

There is another custom of death and the funeral-blowing and beating drums. After showing the way for the dead man, the man who plays the "Khen" has the second task. They hang a drum in the middle of the building. The second man plays the "Khen" in a way which is called "Qeej tu siav" means 'the praying of the last breath'. It is almost like the praying to show the way to heaven. When the first one is done, the second one will be started, which is called "Qeej tsa nees" means 'the praying of getting the body on the 'horse'. Then the mourners bring four sticks - two pieces as short as the body, and the others long so they can carry the body over their shoulders to make a 'horse' (stretcher) for the body. It is shaped like this:

They tie this together with bamboo and put that body on that

"horse" and tighten it on the horse. They hang it inside the building, in the pack. They call this "Tsa nees," which means 'to raise the horse!'. They kill a pig called "Npua tsa nees" or 'raise horse pig'.

After that, they have other work to do. They will have "Khen" stories played, stories called "Qeej noj tshais", meaning the story of eating breakfast, "Qeej noj sus," meaning that story of lunch, and the other one is "Qeej joh hmo," which means the story of dinner. They do as they did when the body was alive. They must have three kinds of story so they can call the custom of spirits.

If that dead body had a large family, he has many sons and daughters, daughters-in-law, and sons-in-law. His sons will have to buy cattle to kill for him. They will have to call other people such as the sisters, brothers-in-law, and sons-and daughters-in-law to come and see the body as he died.

The funeral has two names on two days, the first called 'hnuh qhua txws,' which means the day those people (guests) come together, and the second called "hnuh sam sab," which means the day they will bury the body.

Those people carry incense sticks, silver and gold paper, pigs, chickens and alcohol. They carry guns with them, and when they enter the village and near to the dead body's house, they shoot their guns to warn the people at the house. The people in the house must shoot one shot to answer them. When they get nearer to the house, the people who carry things start crying. The man who plays the "Khen" and those who carrying the pig and guns will come later. They shoot their guns as if they were making war. All the relatives, and cousins of the house carry incense and kneel down at the back door to bow in greeting those people who have come to see them until they come to get them up. Then they turn face to the body and bow each time after the man who plays "Khen" and a man preaching by words finishing saying one time. They do this until those two men finish their preaching.

During the night before the funeral day comes, they will call some people who knows custom very well to come to the house. They will set up a table with alcohol and those old men will sit around that table to talk about everything that the dead body had done before, and the liabilities he had. The important man of that group of people has to talk and give questions to them one by one because the others must not hear what he had said to one person a second before. They will have been doing this until they finish the problems.

Early in the next morning, on the day which called "Hnub sam sab" which means the day they will bury the body. They tell the cousins and sons to tie cattle on the posts which have specially been set up. Sometimes each son has to buy one animal, but this depends on who is rich. Those animals are given names like this: one is for his hard-working way, one is the price of his daughters, one is the sons! After that they carry the body out of the back door and carry it around the place where they will place it. If the body is a woman, they go around for five times. If the body is a man, they go around seven times. Then they hang the body between two posts which especially set up for him. Then the "Khen" blower plays his "Khen" to give the animals to the body.

Each group of people who come to visit must request a person to kill the animals they have, and take care of it. After they kill the animals, they give meat to the people who have come to help them; each person receives about two or three kilos or more. For the group of important people who come see the body and help the tasks will take the hump of each animal.

At about four or five o'clock in the afternoon, they will move the body to its grave. After they put the body in the grave and fill with earth to make a cemetery, the relatives kneel around a side of the grave and bow three times to thank those people who have come to help them.

After that they go back home, and they have to wash their hands before entering into the house. It means to wash away the bad luck they had.

AFTER BURIAL - RELEASING THE SPIRITS

There is another custom after burial of the body, to release the spirit. After the body has been buried for 12 days, one month, one year or more, they must release the spirit so go to heaven to be another person or whatever it can be. Why do they call this 'Releasing the spirit?' Because, when the man died, they killed animals for him and tied thread around his feet and hands, so he could not find the way to heaven. He is in difficulties, so that they must release his spirit in order to untie those things from his body and nothing will hinder him, and then he will have a way to join the 'other race'.

They go back and request the same people who came to help them when the man died, to come to finish their job. The people in the house thank them by giving them personally cup of alcohol in the case that when the man died, they came to help them to carry the corpse to bury. So they must set a table of alcohol to thank those people.

Then they take a rice thresher as they have spirit. They use pieces of bamboo to make a cross to set on the thresher, so that it looks like a person is sitting on it. They put a shirt or blouse on the figure if the spirit is a woman. They call it "Kauj vab", which means 'the round, circular thresher'. When this is ready, they request a person to take it to the way where they will put the spirit on it. The parents or cousins of the spirit must go ahead to the cemetery, to invite the spirit. When they arrive at the cemetery, they say "Today we come to receive you to our home and will release you to heaven, so you must go." They cry from the cemetery, back to the thresher which they set out on the way. The "Khen" blower plays his "Khen" and waits at the thresher for the spirit. Before they take the thresher home after they had put the spirit in, they kill a small dog and use its blood to rub the gate which they build on the way. They cut the dog's head off and throw the head and the body at opposite sides of the path. This means that after he died, he becomes a "Phu", so when they take the spirit into the house, they must do this to separate the cemetery spirits, so they can take only the good spirit to their home. Before they enter to the house, they give food to the spirit and then take the spirit into the house. They go around the fire-place three times and then place it beside the fireplace.

They kill a pig and make food for the spirit. The leader or the preacher talks to the spirit in different ways, not the same as when one dies. saying "Eat only what you eat, drink only what you drink. Do not give to the wild spirits if you do not finish all. If you cannot eat it all, pour it into your gourd bottle. If you cannot eat it all, pour it into your bamboo carrying tube. Take those to your grandparents; you will live with them in a cool and calm city, of lightened skies and dry earth, and you will have food" This is the way they say when the man died.

When they release the spirit, he says "Now you eat and untie your circular rice thresher, and untie your 'threaded shoes', so you can go to be another thing." This is the custom which they call "Untying the 'threaded shoes' and thread."

After 'giving food' to the spirit, they send it back to his home. Then the preacher comes to say to the spirit "Now we have untied all your animal strings, your 'threaded shoes', and you have to go back to your home; the termite will carry earth over to your home" and he hits the "Txhib ntawg," two pieces of bamboo, or the 'interpreter' one time to the spirit. Then they request the same person to carry the circular rice thresher to the gate when the spirit comes. Then they destroy the shape, they take the shirt and cakes back. They roll the rice thresher along the way to the cemetery. If it turns the right side up, it means that the spirit does not want to go yet. They will give a small cup of alcohol to the man who rolls it. If the rice thresher turns up side down, it means the spirit is happy to go. This is the custom which they call "Releasing the spirit so he can go to be 'the other race'."

APPEASING THE SPIRIT OF THE DEPARTED

There is a custom about the grandparents who have died, and who come back to ask for animals from their sons, and grandsons.

When a person is sick, a fortune-teller may discover that his grandparents would like to have an animal, a cow with horns so long they can reach the skies and a tail so long as to drag on the ground, so that person will be cured. They first burn a bundle of silver and gold paper, asking permission from their grandparents to look for a cow from the town of Chinese. They say they will let the mother become a slave and the father to be a coolie so they can earn money to buy that cow for the old 'spirit'. They ask that the old spirit take away the sickness, and say when the man is cured, they will go buy a cow for the old spirit.

After that, if the patient is cured, they have to look for a cow. It must not be blind, with a broken leg or without one ear. It must be good in every part of its body. The cow must not be striped, but red or black is acceptable. They then tie the cow to a post, and cut two figures out of cloth to resemble two persons. They name one the daughter-in-law who comes with the grandfather who takes the cow. They hang these in the house and tie to them the leash of the cow. After they present the cow to them, they kill the cow, and cut out the liver, lung, stomach, and intestines to give to the spirits, which they call 'tai'. When they give these to the spirits, they say only good things that the spirit must take away the sickness when he eats their food. Then they give this to the spirit of their house, and they go outside and give it to the spirits of the mountains and the spirits of the four corners of the world.

Sometimes after that, they may have to 'present' a pig to the grandmother. The pig, called 'npaa tai', must be killed at the midnight, and they will not let any girl or boy to see what they do because when children or women see it, they will laugh, and the spirit will hit their mouths and make it twisted to one side (i.e. paralyzed). Men eat that night and the women and others can eat the next morning. This is the Hmoob custom of making 'spirit cow' 'Nyu, dab' and npua tai'. The case of spirits hit ones' mouth and paralyzing it is true. I have seen many people like that, who looked at this spirit custom and laughed.

THE HMOOB COME FROM CHINA - WHERE THE DEAD GO

The Hmoob at first settled in China. The Chinese always threatened the Hmoob people so they could have their animals and things, and the Hmoob were killed or tied up. So the Hmoob people had to flee from China, from place to place until at last they arrived in Laos. They had crossed the red and green rivers before they entered Laos. So for people who came from China, when one dies, we must show him the way back to the place where he was born.

There was a woman called "Pog Ntxoov Nab" or "Po Zong Na" who was born in China near the 'sand river'. When she was 150 years old, she died, but before she died, she told an old man who knew where she came from and where she was born; how many villages were on the way, and how many rivers, (only the large rivers). They had to show her all the way back, so she could thank the spirits of those countries for the use of their wood, water and so on. She would not be able to cross those two rivers back, so she had to get money to give to the sailers to sail her to the other banks, because, when she came, she paid money to sailers. Then they gave silver and gold paper to her. Then when she arrived, she would be able to find her clothes and the place where she was born. They burned the paper to her to use to thank the spirits of each village where she had lived, until she go to her grandparents.

THE FLOOD

This is a story about the great world flood. The old people said that there were once millions of people in this world, but it flooded, and the people all died.

At that time, people made a drum and put a brother and sister in it. The people all died in the flood, except these two. When they came out of the drum, they found that there was no one left. They wanted to be married, but they were of

the same blood and ashamed. They did not know how to do to repopulate the world. The man said "If we cannot do this, we should take two pieces of rock; put together and roll downhill to see what they will look like. If they turn the right side up, we cannot marry each other, but if they turn the up side down, we can marry." Then they put two pieces of rock together and rolled them downhill. When they come to rest, one rock was under the other one, and the other one turned up side down over the first. Then they thought they could marry each other to make people and spread them all over the world.

Afterwards they had a child, but they did not know how large the world was. So they decided to send an eagle and a toad to look over the skies and earth. They sent the toad to measure the earth. When the toad came back after three days' search. They thought the toad would have gone around everywhere, but it had only sat in a track of a cow. They asked the toad, "Toad, how large is the earth?"

"Oh, the earth is as narrow as a footprint, it is not big enough for people to use. The earth is as narrow as a palm, it does not enough for people's families to live." answered the toad. The couple did not believe the toad. Then they released the eagle so it could look over the world. The eagle flew until its wings and tail were worn out and it still did not cover the world. When it returned, they asked the same question, the eagle said.

"The world is very large. I had not covered the world before my wings were worn out."

Then the couple was very angry and they hit the toad with a piece of wood. When the toad would die, it cursed them saying, "You people are evil-hearted, you kill me with that piece of wood, from now on, your children will die and people in this world will die as I die." Since then the people in this world have to die. "One is born, one dies."

When their son was born, he died. They sliced up his flesh and threw pieces away to each place, giving each one family name. Thus there have been many family names which has continued up to the present. We call these two persons "Nkaej iab thiab Nraug On" or "Go ia and Dau Ong."

This is true that waters flooded the world, but people did not have records. They did not know about letters, so they just remembered in their minds and told their sons generation after generation. Afterwards, people called it a 'legend'. But it was a 'legend' only for the people who do not know about letters, to keep in their minds up to the present.

This is a story of the ways of an orphan. Everyone knows that orphans do not have parents to take care of them. They sometimes do not have brother nor sister at all. Here is a story.

There once was an orphan whose parents died when he was a little boy. Nobody would give food nor clothing to him, and he did not have any shelter nor food. He requested food from other people, but they did not pity him. They give him their wheat hulls and their extra clothes. When he was hungry, he used those wheat hulls to make a little rice soup and looked for shoots and things to eat with his rice soup. At dinnertime, his heart 'bit hard' and he said "The released cow eats bitter grass. I, an orphan without parents and good food, eat wheat hulls soup with my tear burns in my liver. The released cow eats salty grass. I, an orphan without parents and good food, eat wheat soup with my tear bitter in my heart." His tears slowly rolled out of his little two black eyes through his pity cheeks and then dropped on the ground without returning like his parents who passed away and never returned. He thought of the poverty he had been having and the future that he could never see what would look like when he said such very sad words without hearing by anyone, except the writer!

This is a story that the old people could call 'a sad story of an orphan' showing the poorness and hardest time of orphans even up to the present generation.

I am talking about one step of words to teach orphans. Orphans do not have anyone who will love them, but whoever is one, does not need to be sorry. As the old words said, "We do not put rock over our heads, we do not tie vine around our waists, we will grow up, we have hands and legs, we will do everything as hard as we can, so that we will have food."

If anyone is an orphan and he wants his life to be perfect in the future, he has to think and plan what his life will be like. When he is grown up, he wants his life to be good, he has to have a wife to take care of his family. He will have children to serve him in the future when both of them are old.

When he will get married, he has to take thought, so when he gets his wife, she will be happy to live with him and take care of his family. If he does not think carefully at first when he gets his wife, she will not live with him as he does not have a house, no food, no cooking equipment and nothing. Sometimes she might divorce him.

When he is grown up, he must be a hard-working man. He must be one who 'washes his hands and feet'. He has to learn how to make a rice field, and plant crops. He has to learn how to build a house, he has to clear around his house, to build chairs, and tables, and buy cooking equipment. He has to raise animals and poultry to sell and earn money to marry a wife. If he does not do that when he gets married, he will have to become a slave to earn enough money to pay-for his wife.

Then his wife and himself will be happy. When he gets his wife, he has to help her in whatever she does. When she does something, he has to help her, and his life will be happy and good.

After his meals, he will have to sharpen his knives and machetes. His wife has to prepare food for their lunch. He will lead his wife to do their rice field and others. If their field does not burn well, they have to do it again, dragging the logs to the edge of the field. If he plants crops very near the edge of the field, it will only feed squirrels and birds. He has to plant any crops he can find. When the grass grows up, he and his wife have to weed so they can have crops in their field. When anyone can do like this, his life will be good, without any trouble.

When he has enough food, what should he do and act when poor people ask for things from them? Both of them must be kind, pity and love other people who are still poor and have not enough food for themselves. They must support anyone who comes to borrow or request from them without any interest from them. We, Hmoob never get any interest from the money we loaned to someone at all, except for someone in the present if he is a little stingy man. When he lends money to someone, he never gets any interest. This is the pure-hearted person that he has willings to help other poor people to get rid of their troubles. If both of them do not have enough things to give or loan to them, they should have a meal for them when people come to see them. When someone kills an animal and has good food, and they come to invite them, they should go, and then they should invite other people to come to eat and repay them. When they have meal in his house just once, then people will know and understand that he is a good man and hard-working. Moreover, if he does better and better and he is wise, he may become the leader. Whether he is a leader or not, he will be well-known. Other people will say something good for him. He will be famous and respected as well as the others who have high rank and high officials.

These are the words to teach orphans the ways they should behave and follow in their future. If they can do like this, I am sure that their lives will be good for them forever, and they will receive good words from other people.

SONS WHO GO ASTRAY

I am not going to protest the rich and praise the poor, but I am going to tell about boys who have parents and do not have parents. Boys who have parents have enough food, money, clothing and anything they want. They have cattle, and horses. They can have whatever they like. They have no need for things of other people, but we have to be careful of their future in this case. Opposite of the orphans who are poor, they are struggled to improve their lives.

I am going to describe about a boy who has rich parents and he does not need to be careful about learning and doing anything, at last he may become a poor man. Boys who have parents and orphans have to be careful, so that poverty will not be able to catch you.

Some boys have rich parents and everything they need they can have at any time. Although their parents are rich, those money and property are not those boys' own. They will spend their money without thinking. When they have everything, they do anything whatever they want. They do not listen to anyone even their parents. But, when their parents become old and pass away, these boys will spend their money just like turning their hands twice; their money will be gone. Some boys are smart, when their parents pass away, they spend their money to buy animals for their parents' spirits. After that they use their parents' money to do business to follow their parents' tracks and at last they become rich people as their parents.

Some boys are not careful. When their parents pass away, they have an inheritance and try to do business, but do not succeed. One may leap here and there sometimes, or, if he sees people playing cards, he may use that money to play. Sometimes he might lose all of his money. Some boys might learn smoking opium and use their money to buy opium to smoke. Sometimes at last they become beggars. This is the way that it may happen and it is also a point for the young boys must be careful and keep in their minds and keep their eyes open.

They must think that the money and lives of the parents are only for them. They must learn to work and look for things that will serve their lives in the future since they have not had any yet. They must make their living for their own lives,

How can orphans become rich when the ones who have rich parents might become poor? Because they are careful in doing their jobs or anything they can earn a little money. When they do anything for any high rank person or who ever can give them a little money, they must try to be hard-working boys. After sometimes they might be able to save money little by little and at last they might be able to do something big and good. They will have experiences in doing work. For the boys who have rich parents, after they spend all of their money, they will try to do something or any job, but they might not be able to do because they have never done and met any hard work, they never touched any handle of tool in their lives. Then they will become slaves for the orphans.

These are my lessons for boys who have rich parents and are not careful with their lives, and the orphans who are poor and what they should do in the future since they are orphans. If they use only the

parents' money, at last they will become poor.

WHEN A SNAKE OR BIRD COMES INTO THE HOUSE

This is a tradition which our ancestors laid for the Hmoob people to follow up to present. It is said that there will be a curse if a snake or a bird comes into a house. If this happens, the residents have to ask a fortune-teller to tell them why the snake has come into the house. Sometimes he may be parents who passed away want to have food or an animal, so they teased that snake to go let them know that they should give an animal to the spirits which are said to be their parents. If they do not do that, the spirits will make them sick and sometimes they will die.

The people who still follow the spirits do this when they see strange things come into their house. When their parents' spirits come back to ask for food from them, it means that when they were alive, they had given birth to them and fed them until they grew up, so they have to kill an animal to give to the spirits because the spirits wish them to have crops and take care of them, and they do not have sickness and go anywhere without trouble.

THE CREATION OF PEOPLE AND LANGUAGES

This is the story of the original people and language when God made people. People were made by a God, whom the Hmoob called 'Saub'. Saub made them and kept them in a gourd bottle. When those people would come out, Saub drilled a hole for the Hmoob, Lao, and Chinese. He heated an iron rod and burned a hole for the Lao Theung to come out of that hole, so the Lao Theung became black.

When these people had come out of the gourd bottle, Saub told them to learn languages from him. He taught all his languages to the Hmoob, Lao, and Chinese, except the Lao Theung who went too late. So he said "You come too late. I have given all my languages to the others. You must learn your language from a large rice field. After you clear up the field and it is dried enough, you burn it and your language will be like the sound of bamboos bursting when it is burning." Then the Lao Theung went back to clear up a large field and burned it. They learned their language from this, so the Lao Theung language is like bursting bamboo. (I am not going to protest the Lao Theung language. It is only a story).

These are the languages that were learned from the Saub.

THE SAUB TESTS PEOPLE

After Saub had made people in the world, he tested their minds to see whether they loved him or not. He decided to act as if he had died and see which people came to visit and cry. All of the people in the world went ahead, except Hmoob and the turtle, who were the last ones. When the Hmoob met the turtle he asked "Turtle, where are you going?"

"Oh, our Saub is dead, so I am going to cry for him," answered the turtle, "are you going to see him, too?"

"Yes, I am going to see him too," answered the Hmoob, "Why are you still here. All of the people have gone far?"

"Oh, my body is very heavy," answered the turtle, "and my legs are too short, so I must be the last as I am very slow." Then the turtle asked "Would you please wait for me. When we arrive, I will tell you what to say when you cry, so Saub will not curse you. The Saub has not died. He only tests people's minds. If anyone says something bad, he will judge him and sometimes that person will be killed. When you cry, you must say 'Saub, you are my parents, you made up the skies and earth, you made me up and now you are dead. I do not have skies to cover an have no earth to live. I will not have parents'. You must cry and say this, so that when he wakes up, he will love you. The people who have gone ahead, are in too much of a hurry. They will not know how to say and say bad. They might say 'Saub, now we are glad when you are dead. You had made the earth and skies for us. There will not be any person to take care of us. We can do anything we want, and now the earth will belong to us'. Those people who cry like this will be judged by the Saub, but you have to help me since I have told you about this. You do not eat my flesh. If anyone eats my flesh, he will be a wanderer like myself. Turtle customs are like this: when my mother had laid her eggs, and after we had come out of the eggs, we scattered everywhere. We traveled every place we can. So we are the wanderers." Then the Hmoob agreed and waited for the turtle.

Now some of our Hmoob cannot eat turtle.

These stories are translated by Gee Vue

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