

## Chumash Place Names Relating to Water

For 17 years my family have been singing the welcome song, "Hawa Yawi O Hoshima", Welcome Water Friend." This was a song put together by Michael Ward, Clarence Sterling and my father, Vincent Tumamait, Sr. It was intended to welcome people to the events and gatherings. Daddy would say "For you are as welcome as rain." No one ever imagined that this act of singing to the water would, and still calls the rain.

My Sister Gloria went to Chihuahua, Mexico. They were suffering a drought. She told her partner Francisco, "I am going to teach the kids Daddy's song and you watch in 3 days it's gonna rain!" Before she began she said a prayer asking God and Daddy to help these people. The children began to learn and sing the song, which they enjoyed doing. The first day it started to cloud up, the second day it began to sprinkle. My Sister in all her faith embraced this moment. By the third day it was pouring, the riverbeds were filling up, and it rained all day long.

Call it coincidence; call it what you want. We were told that it hadn't rained that hard there in 10 years.

The people we know today as the Chumash have been here for a very, very long time and in that time they have left behind an amazing amount of information that is still useful in today's world. Many Chumash families can trace their lineage to the vast and abundant land that we refer to as Chumash Territory. We are of the water; we use the power of the water; we appreciate the beauty of the water; the water is our Atishwin, our Spirit helper. We are inspired by the water in our songs and images. In the Chumash language the word for water is "O." It is that word for almost all dialects. In the Obispeno language it is "TO."

There are many Chumash villages that use "water" in their description of the place. All villages are by some type of water source, It may be a river or a creek. The water may be cold or so hot you can barely touch it. It may smell of sulfur.

And then there is the ocean which separated the people on the Islands from those on the mainland. The sea water was said to be the best medicine. All water on land went to the ocean, either on top of the land or down below. The interaction of my relatives with the ocean was extraordinary in the craftsmanship of the Tomol, the plank canoe, the unique tools for harpooning large fish, and even in their ways of giving thanks. At the whale Festival where the rationed whale meat was distributed, whales were tossed ashore by the swordfish people. The prayer is this:

**Take your ration and remember that she is our protectress. Were it not for her, during the stormy times at sea that she attracts the forces of the storm towards her in the high seas where she abides, the currents would come towards us and drown us all."**

As People we are dependant on water, but I feel it's what we have lost in this process of civilization, colonization of the people and the land that has made a devastating and lasting impact. Why not learn the ways of the first people and learn how they acknowledged the earth? To make an attempt should at least make us feel that we are trying to learn some respect in learning how to talk to water, learning how to gift water even if we are doing it wrong. If we may forget a step or two, I don't think the water will mind. It is how and where we put our "intent." For a generation this land has not had the words, prayers, gifts and songs that it was used to.

In old times we called upon the rain; we warned people of the of the weather, both droughts and storms. As egret feathers were cast into the air a formula was recited:

**”Tuhtuhuy Pima?am-rain,rain,you all go inside”**

Depending on the type of rain you wanted, you could call a forceful “Male rain” with thunder and lightning, or you might call upon a gentle but constant “Female rain.” This was achieved by the use of crystals, feathers, and stones of a particular size, shape and color, along with the use of the ceremonial pipe and songs and prayers. The words to the songs and prayers have long been forgotten.

In Chumash territory each village had their own specific areas of sacredness. These areas included mountain tops that were considered powerful. In these mountains are caves where only certain people were allowed to go. One purpose was the calling for the weather. The weather doctor would spend time in the caves asking the people in the upper world what type of weather was there going to be for the next year. It was said that the upper world sky people played a gambling game, a walnut shell dice game, in which Kaqanupmawa (Sun) and Slow` (eagle) were on one side and snilemun (sky coyote) and ?Alnaxyut ?i?aqiwo (morning star) were the other team; Awhayi (Moon) was the referee of the game . The game lasted all year long with the winner, or score being decided on the Winter Solstice. If Sun and Eagle had the higher score, sky coyote and morning star had to ante up human lives and drought. If Sky coyote and Morning star won, the other team had to give up lots of rain, deer, chia and lots of plenty for the people in the middle world. In other stories we talk about Frog being the Queen of all the waters. Many of the symbols that are painted in those caves represent the dialog of the weather doctor to the sky people.

A sure sign of rain was when a cloud was spotted over Santa Ynez peak. If the clouds came down over the peak, rain was sure to follow. It was said that if members of the “Brotherhood of the Tomal“ were out paddling and they saw clouds gathering around Anacapa Island, it was time to head back to the mainland, for rain was coming.

All this rain to replenish the earth, to provide life, it is life itself. We as humans are created in water. In the womb we are surrounded by water. Water is home to plants, insects, fish, and shelled people both fresh and salt water ones. Our uses of water have not changed much; we still need water to drink and we take our medicines with water. Chumash women wove baskets from plants that grew in the water. They continued to use water in this process, keeping the plant fibers moist while weaving. Once the basket were finished, clumps of yop(tar) were placed in the baskets along with hot rocks. The basket was swirled around so that the hot rocks melted the tar and lined the interior of the basket, thus making it capable of holding water, for instance to make your favorite tea. It takes a great deal of water to leach the bitter tannins and harmful chemicals out of foods such as the acorn and wild Islay(cherry) in order for them to be ready to cook and eat.

It was said long ago that when you awake in the morning the first thing you do is get into the water to bathe yourself. If you waited too long the underworld creature will get in and make it hot and steamy, and if you enter into water after them you would be lazy all day. Our sweat lodges were not of the hot rock design, they were a dry sweat, with a fire in the center of the lodge which was dug into the earth. After you finished your time in the lodge you then plunged into the fresh water.

For ceremonies you also needed water to mix with your pigments(paints) that were applied to the body in designs that symbolized the spirit of the animal you were dancing for.

Today Village name is still used in the different counties that remind us of the first people. Here are

just a few of the names that relate to water in many different forms.

**TAXIWAX-'LEAK'**  
**MISTAXIWAX-'WHERE IT LEAKS' SAN MARCOS PASS**  
**SAPUTIWAX -'IT SEEPS' SANTA YNEZ**  
**SOMIS- 'WATER OF THE SCRUB OAK' ARNAZ GRADE**  
**SA`PWATUHUY – 'HOUSE OF THE RAIN' VENTURA**  
**KO?O?- 'WATER' ZACA LAKE**  
**HELO 'THE WATER' GOLETA SLOUGH**  
**SILIMIHI – 'ALWAYS WATER ' SANTA ROSA ISLAND**  
**KA?ALISAW KA?O – HOT WATER ' SANTA PAULA**  
**LOMPO – 'STAGNANT WATER' LOMPOC**  
**?ALSON'- 'BITTER ONE' SUMMERLAND**  
**?UKSULO? - 'STINK WATER' GOLETA SLOUGH**  
**KA?ALUSYOXOC KA?O-'MUDDIED WATER' SANTA PAULA**  
**S`O?KUKU – 'DEVIL WATER' SANTA YNEZ**  
**S`IY`O LASKA? -'WATER OF THE COYOTES' SANTA BARBARA**  
**SIYO KINIK- 'WATER OF THE LITTLE HAWK' VENTURA**  
**MAS`O?A?OQOS – 'WATER OF THE SEA OTTER'**  
**KASOXSOL KAWI – 'URINE OF THE DEER' RANCHO VIEJO ,VENTURA**

At Kasoxsol Kawi, which is a cold spring, offerings were made to pray those who were sick. Some people drank from the spring; others sat in the curing water. One ceremony that took place was where an old man placed 4 sticks in the cardinal directions of the spring. He then scattered unstrung shell bead money, some chia seed and Xutash (red maid seeds) around. He stood North of the spring facing South and said:

**”Look at me God, standing here on the earth. Look at me well. What I am going to do is take the water, the water of the doe, so that a creature of yours might drink. We know that there is no other who cares for us so tenderly, only you. Look at one who is cold and give him warmth against the winter, and take away the rain and heat the earth so that what is called grass and all that people and even the bear cat might be born.”**

We were not farmers, but the people tended the earth. Native people did shape the land around them to help with the next season or the next year, to ensure abundance for all. With the arrival of the Spanish in the 1700's, one of the first buildings in Ventura was the filtration station just above San Buena Ventura Mission. Then came the great task of building the aqueduct from the Mission up to Poli Street, down Cedar Street along Ventura Avenue, down to the river, ending just around the Foster Park area to the west of Ventura. Throughout this period the Chumash had less and less time to live the lifestyle that they did before the arrival of the Spanish. Their continued use of water had changed. They used water to mix the mortar for the wall of the church. The water was used to make tile shingles for rooftops and brick floor tiles. The people now watered row crops and gave water to livestock. Chumash women did continue the art of basket weaving way past the turn of the century.

Water was diverted, dammed, and channeled for the sake of progress. It was used for agriculture, mining, logging and building. Native plants and animals were being killed to make way for the new world expansion because they were a threat to the new Spanish crops and livestock. In the process our water is suffering. Non-native plants that were introduced are killing our native plants and the fish

cannot get back to where they once spawned. One project tried to convince the community that the Ventura River was Dead. That next winter the River proved them wrong.

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