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# GO-JII-YA

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**Written by Levi Pesata**

Go-jii-ya, the Jicarilla Apache celebration is a feast and ceremony held annually. It is held over a three-day period which climaxes on the fifteenth day of September.

The people start putting up camps as early as the tenth of September and other necessary preparations begin on the thirteenth.

The race track is prepared and the kivas or ceremonial corrals are set up the thirteenth of September when the people arrive. The running area is laid out from east to west. The ends of the race track are marked by two holy, spherical, and elongated rocks. These two rocks are blessed and prayed over by the medicine men on the fourteenth day of September and then the festivities officially begin.

The Llanero (Red Clan) and the Ollero (White Clan) form the basis of the sides. The terminology is Spanish and translated Llanero means "Plains People" and Ollero means "Sand People".

Following the blessing of the holy rocks, each clan follows on horseback, a lead horseman carrying their clan flag. They circle the race track to the beat of the drum. The Red Clan has a red flag with a crescent moon centered on the banner. The White Clan has a white flag with a yellow sun centered on the banner. The standard or flag pole for each clan is an aspen tipi pole that has been used in a home. Both clan flags and/or banners are tied to the standard along with two fresh ears of corn and two eagle feathers.



From the track, the Red Clan ride off to the North and the White Clan ride off to the South to their tryout areas. From the tryout areas each will race against their own clansmen to select the fastest runner to begin the race against the leader of the opposing clan.

All contestants will race, but the fastest one from each side begins the race by racing against each other and followed by the other runners in the order they came in at the tryout or preliminary.

Boys, even though they are not good runners, are supposed to run at least once in a race. Boys who do not participate will be sick and poor. The boys are blessed and helped by this ceremony.

### Reasons for the First Ceremonial Race

The reason for the first ceremonial race was that there was too much food of both kinds - meats and plants - at the same time. The food was all mixed up and the people did not know how to use it. The food did not come in season then as it does now.

Sun and Moon decided that food must be divided up and that there should be seasons for the different kinds of food. So they agreed to run a race. Moon bet her fruits against Sun's animals.

Sun won the first race and his side was able to hunt all kinds of animals and had a great deal of meat to eat that year. Sun and Moon agreed to run the race every year for four years. In the second year Moon's side won. In the third year, Sun's side won. In the fourth year, Moon's side won again. Sun and Moon took turns winning the race because

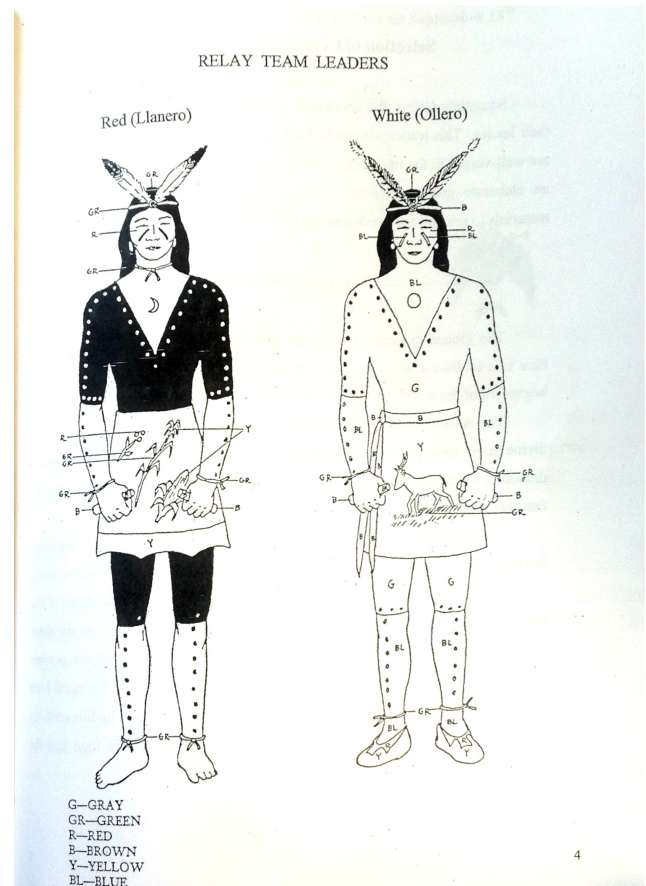
people can not eat meat all the time and they can not eat fruits and vegetables all the time. It was to ensure both kinds of food for mankind. After the fourth race, the ceremony was handed down to the Apache.

**“If you stop holding the ceremony, you will starve”**

*-JICARILLA DEITIES*

The Apache were watching the race for those four years. So Sun, Moon, White God, Ancestral Man, Monster Slayer, and Water's Child decided to give it to them. They told the Apache, “if you stop holding this ceremony, you will starve.” That is why the ceremony is held every year.

But in the course of time, the people became lax and the ceremony had to be re-introduced. Two girls were offered in marriage as prizes. The girls were placed there so that the Jicarilla people would multiply and be numerous.



Sun and Moon enlisted the aid of the cultural heroes, the deities, the animals, and such fast-flying birds as the Sandhill Crane, the Cliff Swallow, the Falcon, and the Humming Bird. As the race is now carried on by the Jicarillas, the Ollero (White Clan) represents the side of the Sun and the animals, while the Llanero (Red Clan) takes the part of the Moon and the plants.

### **Selection of Ceremony Representatives**

Sometime before the ceremony, the prominent men of each Clan choose their leader. This leader, always himself a Ceremonialist, appoints assistants who are well-versed in the intricacies of the rite, for there is a secret enclosure to erect, an elaborate ground drawing to trace, feathers, paints, and other necessary materials to prepare for the decoration of the runners.

### **Ground Drawing**

The ground drawing is of particular importance at this time. The ceremony here is a traditional or “long life” ceremony that was handed down from the beginning of the world by one generation of practitioners to the next.

The mastery aspect of the ground drawing is not the result of inspiration or divine favor, for the ceremony has no roots in shamanism. The songs and ground drawings were learned before the people came up from down below, before the emergence.

In the ground drawing, the medicine men make the Sun and the Moon the same as the first ones made by Holy Boy in the beginning. The Sun is made round with our sets of rays, all of the pollen. The Moon is made in the shape of the full moon. The songs they sing, when they make the Sun and the Moon, are about how the Sun and the Moon were made in the creation. These songs and prayers were made and given in the world below. These men sing of how Ancestral Man and Ancestral

Woman were made and of how the people traveled up this earth on the ladder. They also sing songs for long life and about the food and the animals.



### **Significance of the Location of the Ceremonial Grounds**

The corrals or kivas stand for “the place of emergence” and the race track is thought of as “the spot from which the first race around the world for plants and animals began”. Nearby is a body of water, symbolic of the traditional lake of the place of emergence.

There is an association of the race track with the Milky Way because according to the myths, the Milky Way marks the first path of the Sun and the Moon when they participated as the two contestants of

the first ceremonial relay race. The kivas are erected in the form of a corral and are made of aspen trees and branches.

### **The Morning of the Race and Events for that Day**

Early in the morning the men gather at their holy places. For each kiva there is a door-keeper appointed who keeps out people who have no business there.

All the old men smoke and pray and they get ready to start the necessary work in the kivas. One man gets the paints ready to paint the runners. Some men bring in dead birds for feathers to decorate the participants.

The leader now gets ready to do the ground drawing. Three men are called upon to assist him and the four men do the ground drawing. The figures are not the same every year because they are interchanged from year to year.

The painting of the runners begins with the painting of the boy who won in the preliminary race. At this time the blessing and the dancing take place in each kiva. The prayers and blessing is for strength and purity greater than that of the other clan so that victory would come.

On the day of the race, the people all dress in fine clothes and traditional outfits. They begin to gather on both sides of the race track. The events begin early in the morning as soon as the sun comes up as befits a ceremony of gratefulness to the sun and the spirit which creates life.

Each clan begins the ceremony by dancing from their end of the track to the opposite clan's end with prayers and songs. Two tribal elders dressed in the feather will then run from the west to the east. Then two other elders will run from the east to the west. They represent the birds that first ran and thus initiated this ancient worship of the renewal of life. As soon as the second two elder runners reach the west side, that signals the beginning of the actual race.

During the race the crowd is held back and nobody is allowed on the race track or to cross the track. The runners will race in relays until each clan's runner crosses the other in the exact middle of the race track. The clan runner who was ahead on length or half of the track is then declared the winner. The losing clan is then responsible for providing the other clan with gifts of food from the earth.

The two clans then retreat to their respective ends of the race track. Slowly, they begin marching by dancing and singing toward the other clan. At the middle, when they meet, they dance back and forward three times and they finally pass the fourth time. Then the losing clan throws gifts of food and material goods required of its members.

The race at this point ends in a good-natured ritual conquest. After parading to their respective kivas and dancing once again back and forth, they re-enter the kiva for more prayers and blessings and to terminate the religious aspect of the ceremony.

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## VOCABULARY

*Ancestral Man* - the first Jicarilla man created.

*Ancestral Woman* - the first Jicarilla woman created.

*Ceremonialist* - a person who participated in a ceremony many times in the past.

*Deities* - Jicarilla culture heroes and supernatural.

*Dressed in the feather* - a person with a ceremonial painted face and hair covered with down feathers and usually holding a feather in each hand.

*Emergence* - the place from which the Jicarilla People came up to this world. The preparation and process to come up from below is all considered part of the emergence in the Jicarilla religion.

*Holy Boy* - one of the Jicarilla Culture Heroes. He first attempted to make the sun.

*Kiva* - ceremonial dwelling.

*Llanero* - The Plains People, represented by the red flag during the Go-jii-ya ceremony. Spanish word which, when translated, means "Plains People."

*Ollero* - The Sand People, represented by the white flag during the Go-jii-ya ceremony. Spanish word which, when translated, means "Sand People."

*Shamanism* - having to do with magic, usually practiced by North American Indian medicine men.

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# *Do achí tii*

(Rules of Conduct for Participants)

Go-jii-ya is the tribal harvest festival where the emphasis is placed on the participation of young men. It is derived from the story of the Jicarilla where there was a race of all the animals and birds around the world. Today, there is a relay race that takes place at Stone Lake between the Llanero (Red Clan) and the Ollero (White Clan).

- Only the men enter the Kivas. It is said that women may affect the strength of the runners. The Ollero women believe that they give strength to the men by dancing and entering the kiva. The Ollero women dance on the race track before the race. Llanero women dance only when the race is over.
- People who are not participating in the race are not to cross the race track after it has been blessed on the 14th.
- Only the losing clan is supposed to give fruit and vegetables after the race is completed.
- One does not throw the fruit and vegetables but gives it in an appropriate manner.
- The spectators should give their support by yelling only.
- Jicarilla women take care of their camps and feed anyone who comes to their camps. Giving and sharing are traditional values that are highly regarded. It is a sign of generosity.
- The Jicarilla people are a matrilineal tribe. This means that one follows his/her mother's side when it comes to traditional ways including clan.
- Elders day women and young children are not allowed to attend the tryouts.
- Photos and recording devices are NOT PERMITTED. Only tribal members can take photos for their own use.

- information provided by the Jicarilla Culture Committee, 1997