Joe’s Guide to Ceremonial Drums at Mille Lacs

*Gaa-tibaajimod(told by) Joe Nayquonabe Sr. Gaa-tibaajimotawaajin(transcribed by) James* Clark

# **Introduction/Reasoning**

“People have come far and wide to telling me that they do not feel comfortable going to the dances especially when they get there. “it’s like going to school” Joe said “if you want to learn about the dance you need to be there”

# Process

Here’s how Joe enters the dance hall:

* Find an open place to sit (some places are designated for members/female members/drum keepers/warriors (Ogichidaag)), dress appropriately for the ceremony ahead, use your discretion as this is sacred to us Anshinaabeg
* Around the drum there is a Asemaa dish, Joe notices upon various people’s entering the dance hall they put Asemaa down and then after ceremonial proceedings (not required of all visitors)
* After a few opening songs, the speaker will be announcing the beginning of the ceremonial proceedings and then he will tell the singers to begin the ceremonial songs that belong to that drum
* Each member of the drum has a designated song that they will dance to, members give gifts after their song which shows they are thankful and appreciative for their song. These gifts are given to whomever the members feel should receive it
* In addition, visiting drum members may choose to also dance along to those songs they were designated at their home dance
* After the ceremonial songs are completed, that is when they finish a bundle of gifts that will be set out for the members of the visiting drums. The tobacco dish will be set out for people to put their asemaa down
* Once those bundles are completed the pipe will be lit and prayers will be offered by a speaker for the bundles, the people in attendance, and those in need
* When setting Asemaa down (praying), people may put asemaa down for those they wish the drums to protect/look over, Joe offers his asemaa for the warriors, people dealing with addiction and finally his Namesakes
* Once everyone that belongs to that drum puts Asemaa in you can continue to offer (again, not required of all visitors)
* Once those bundles are counted by number of visiting drum members present, they’ll be divided up
* After that the pipe man will begin to smoke the pipe and start to share with the people around the drum and then visiting drum members, and if there’s any left then the non-members
* Then the home drum keepers will distribute the bundles to the visiting members. If the keepers and members of the same drum are there, then they could open the bundles and distribute. Otherwise you open the bundle at home and give to those that take care of the drum at a later time
* Once done the speaker will talk about having dinner and getting ready for the social
* The second part begins with the lady’s song. How do you know if someone wants to dance with you? They’ll give you a gift to dance. Once that dance is complete you go back and give that person something to dance one more time (EX. Material, money, blanket, beadwork)
* Once the night is danced away then you begin to close with one last song
* Sometimes thanks and safe travels to visitors are given

# **Conclusion**

“If you see me at the dance hall with an open seat then come and sit next to me and I will let you know what is going on to the best of my knowledge during whichever part of the dance we are at.

People are having fears about not being able to speak/understand the language and also what is going on and the cultural protocol. The creator and drum are happy to see everyone there and it belongs to the Anishinaabe people. No shame for not yet knowing our language and culture, it belongs to all of us not just a group, creator understands.”

Joe would invite you to come to the drum that him and his nephew take care of, you won’t be able to sit next to him as those are drum keepers’ positions but he will help you out and find someone that will be willing to tell you what is happening. It is okay not to know, it is understood why and let’s all work to change it. Miigwech.

# Offerings (Prayers)/Social Exchange

Tobacco (asemaa), money (zhooniyaa), blankets (waabooyaanan), material (gidagiigin), not limited to only these items