

❖ CUSTOM OF FLEECE BEATING



The sayings of those who beat fleece with swipples, or special sticks, are similar to those that accompany the shearing of sheep. Before the chosen day to beat the fleece, its lanolin and moisture are dried by stretching it out. The host family prepares swipples for everybody who is going to participate, as well as the mattress and buff for making rings to beat fleece. The host family treats those who come to assist in beating fleece with tea and other foods. Mostly women each take two swipples and sit in a circle around the fleece and look at each other's face. Men place an amount of fleece on the ring depending on the size of ring and stretch it. The head of family or eldest man in the group clad in hat holds a cup of milk or bowl of fermented mare's milk, looks to the south, and chants a benediction:

*Putting a ring
As big as a world
Piling up fleece
As big as a mountain;
The fleece of the lambs
Is as thick as a finger
The fleece of the tegs (young sheep that have not yet been shorn)
Is as thick as a span;
Be rainless
And windless;
May the fleece be beaten with our swipples
Separating the good and the bad
And preparing it as we wish*

The man finishes his benediction and sprinkles milk from his cup over the wool as a blessing. He then sets the cup of milk or bowl of fermented mare's milk aside and begins to beat the fleece and others follow his example. If others come while the fleece is being beaten, they say:

*Be windless
Be fast without a whirl of dust
May the fleece be like silk thread
And as strong as sinew*

Or

*May your woolens
Be like mountains
May your ring
Be like a world*

In response to these words, which symbolize a successful production of felt, we say:

*This place is graced with your virtue
And your gracious benediction
Commensurate with your desire
May you be as prosperous as you wish*

The beating of the fleece can continue depending upon the amount of fleece and the endurance of the people gathered. When the beating is completed, the host family treats those who assisted with fermented mare's milk and dairy products. Then another household can beat its fleece with the assistance of neighbour households. Traditionally they alternate in these ways. The origin of this custom is very old.