

## Heart — Unguwateq

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### QUNUKAMKEN UNGUWATEMNEK. – I LOVE YOU FROM MY HEART.

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Photo: Sven Haakanson butchers a seal.

People who hunt and butcher animals regularly develop an excellent knowledge of anatomy. Butchering allows hunters to learn about internal organs, which improves their ability to capture game. It also helps them obtain special foods and raw materials. Alutiiq people eat many of the internal organs of the animals they harvest. Alutiiq people continue to prepare the heart, lungs, intestines, liver, and kidneys of seals in traditional recipes and to eat the liver, kidneys, intestines, and even the arteries of caribou.

In addition to their economic value, some internal organs have spiritual significance. In the Alutiiq universe, every animal possesses a soul that must be released at the time of its death. The spirit of a salmon resides in its intestines and the spirit of a sea otter is found in its bones. Returning these parts to the natural environment shows respect for the animal, allows its soul to be reincarnated in another animal, and ensures a future supply of game. It also guarantees that powerful animals will not harm the living.

To honor a dead caribou, Alaska Peninsula hunters cut off the tip of the animal's heart and offer it to the four directions. Similarly, Kodiak hunters cut out a bear's heart, remove the tip, and split the organ into four pieces to make sure the animal will not come back to life. Any other part of the bear that is not used must be returned to the kill site to appease the animal's spirit.