

NOTICE: THIS MATERIAL MAY
BE PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT LAW
(TITLE 17, U.S. CODE)

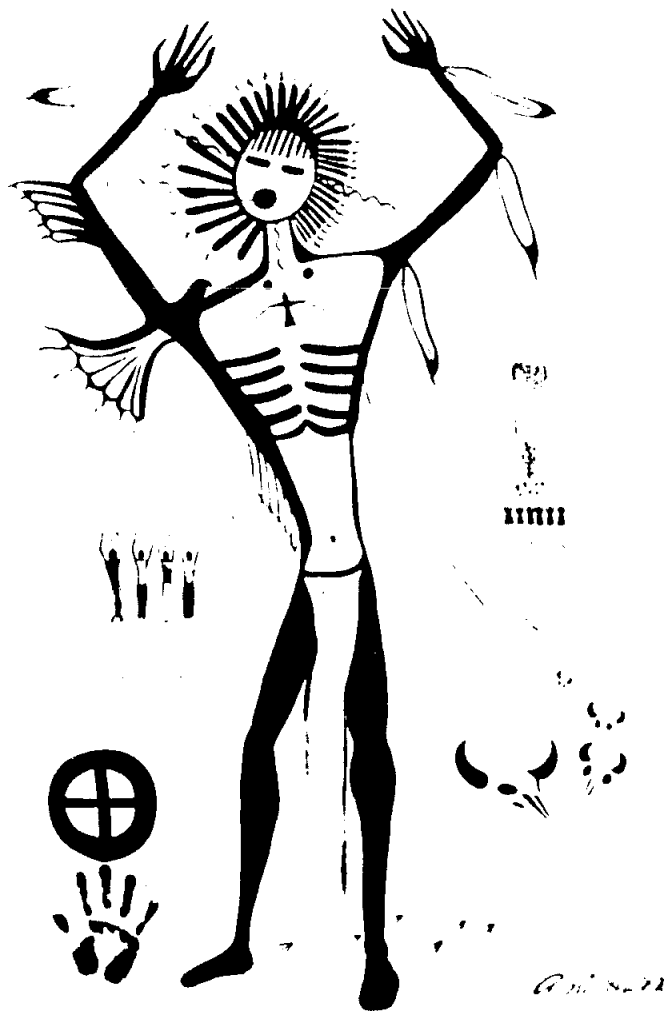
1

Lakota Belief and Ritual in the Nineteenth Century

BY RAYMOND J. DeMALLIE

TRADITIONAL Lakota belief and ritual, as they existed in the last century, have been extensively recorded. We are fortunate that substantial bodies of material, written in the Lakota language by native Lakota people themselves, have been preserved. The writings of George Bushotter (1887-88), George Sword (ca. 1909), Thomas Tyon (ca. 1911), and Ivan Stars (ca. 1915-20)—to name only the most prolific—form a native corpus for understanding traditional culture that is unparalleled for any other Plains tribe. Bushotter and Sword wrote from their own experiences, while Tyon and Stars interviewed other, nonliterate Lakotas to record their stories. The great value of these writings is that they have not been tampered with by outsiders; they present the Lakotas' own viewpoints, expressed in their own words.

In addition to those writings we have been bequeathed an even larger body of material dictated by Lakotas and written down by non-Indians. In this category the outstanding pioneer investigators were James R. Walker (1896-1914), Edward S. Curtis (1905-1908), Frances Densmore (1911-1914), and Aaron McGaffey Beede (ca. 1912-20). From later times we find an ever-increasing quantity of recorded material concerning Lakota culture, of which the most significant part has been the teachings of Nicholas Black Elk, the Oglala holy man, dictated to John G. Neihardt (1931 and 1944) and to



Joseph Epes Brown (1947–49). Also invaluable are the large number of translations of earlier Lakota writings, as well as interviews in Lakota and writings in English, by Ella C. Deloria (ca. 1929–60), herself a Yankton Sioux.

A brief summary of the foundations of nineteenth-century Lakota religion, based on these source materials, will serve as an introduction to the traditional concepts to which religious developments during the past century may be compared. This personal interpretation, developed from my studies as a cultural anthropologist, represents only one of the various perspectives from which nineteenth-century Lakota religion can be understood. Many of the basic concepts of this traditional religious system are still alive among the Lakota people today, who continue to develop them in the context of modern life.

Central to my understanding of Lakota religion is an anthropological concept of culture that focuses on symbols and meanings shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by the individuals who compose a society (see Geertz 1973:3–30). My goal here is to make the implicit meanings that structured nineteenth-century Lakota religion intelligible in terms of the present. To this extent it is an attempt to translate Lakota concepts and to express them in English.

It is essential at the outset to emphasize that traditional Lakota lifeways were not compartmentalized into the distinct institutions that characterize modern America. Religion was not separated out from the rest of social life but was an organic part of the whole. Therefore, a description of nineteenth-century Lakota religion may be phrased in terms of beliefs and rituals that permeated everyday life. And we must understand these beliefs and rituals in the context of the whole of Lakota culture.

Belief

From the perspective of Lakota culture, the world was characterized by its oneness, its unity. Humankind were believed to have been created within the womb of mother earth, just as

were the buffalo, which provided the people with most of their food. Both human beings and buffalo had emerged upon the surface of the earth to populate the world as the Lakotas traditionally knew it. Therefore humans were called *wicaša akantula*, "men on top." In a very real sense, humankind and nature were one, just as the natural and supernatural were one. The distinction between natural and supernatural, so basic to European thought, was meaningless in Lakota culture. For the Lakotas the important distinction was between humankind and that which was not human, between the common or ordinary and the extraordinary or incomprehensible. From the Lakotas' perspective, the quality of incomprehensibility characterized the universe: it was neither to be fully known nor controlled. Humankind existed not outside nature but as part of it. Human beings stood in awe and fear of the universe, venerated it, and dared to manipulate it to the best of their limited capability. The incomprehensibility of the universe, in which humankind, through ritual, could share, was called *wakan* (see DeMallie and Lavenda 1977).

Wakan, as Good Seat, an Oglala, told Walker, designated "anything that was hard to understand" (Walker 1980:70). It was the animating force of the universe, the common denominator of its oneness. The totality of these life-giving forces was called *Wakan Tanka*, "great incomprehensibility." *Wakan Tanka* was the sum of all that was considered mysterious, powerful, or sacred—equivalent to the basic meaning of the English word "holy." *Wakan Tanka* never had birth and so could never die. The *Wakan Tanka* created the universe, but at the same time they comprised the universe. As Little Wound told Walker: "The *Wakan Tanka* are those which made everything. They are *Wakanpi*. *Wakanpi* are all things that are above mankind. . . . *Wakan Tanka* are many. But they are all the same as one" (Walker 1980:69–70). Rather than a single being, *Wakan Tanka* embodied the totality of existence; not until Christian influences began to affect Lakota belief did *Wakan Tanka* become personified. Like the *Taku Wakan*, which the Lakotas told Densmore referred to the visible

manifestations of *wakan*, *Wakan Tanka* was an amorphous category most precisely defined by incomprehensibility (Densmore 1918:85, fn. 2).

Among the Lakotas were many *wicaša wakan* ("holy men") who shared to greater or lesser extents in this universal power. Through their personal experiences they sought to impose order and some degree of understanding on *Wakan Tanka*. Sword told Walker that the *Wakan Tanka* were conceptualized as *Tobtoḥ kin*, "the Four times four," a group of sixteen benevolent *wakan*—powers, or as we would say, gods or spirits—many of which were personified as nonhuman beings yet shared human characteristics (Walker 1980:94, 98–99). They included natural phenomena such as Sun, Moon, Wind, Thunder, Earth, and Rock as well as a variety of invisible spirit forms. Outside this classification of *wakan* were yet other *wakan* beings that used their power for evil rather than for good. In Lakota understanding, the *wakan* "power" existed in and was created by these *wakan* beings, each of which was predisposed for either good or evil. Thus *wakan* was not a neutral power, nor did it exist free in the universe; it was bounded and directed.

From the Lakotas' perspective, *wakan* was totally other, entirely outside or beyond the human realm. Little Wound warned Walker that the *wakan* beings ("*Wakanpi*") "have power over everything on earth. They watch mankind all the time. They control everything that mankind does. Mankind should please them in all things. If mankind does not please them, they will do harm to them" (Walker 1980:69). The necessity of pleasing the *wakan* underscored the need to recognize them, but since they were by nature incomprehensible, such understanding as was possible could only be achieved by human beings who shared to some degree in this incomprehensible power. These holy men and women were religious specialists who gained their knowledge through direct contact with the *wakan* beings in dreams or visions, and they became themselves conduits through which this *wakan* power flowed.

For the Lakotas the course of a human life was a clear

reflection of the workings of *Wakan Tanka* in the universe. Finger, an Oglala holy man, explained this to Walker (1917: 154–56). The body of a child was created out of the physical relation between its father and mother, but when the baby was born, its body was animated by *Takuškanškan*, the spirit of movement, who gave it a guardian (*sicun*). This spiritual essence functioned to guard the person against evil spirits; as Walker wrote, “It is an influence that forewarns of danger, admonishes for right against wrong, and controls others of mankind” (1980:73). We might say it was the individual’s consciousness or will. For the Lakotas the *sicun* represented the potency of *Wakan Tanka* embodied in a human being. *Takuškanškan* also gave to each baby at birth a ghost (*niya*), which came from the stars, but Finger did not describe its function in life. Each person also possessed a spirit (*naği*), evidently an immaterial, but immortal, reflection of the body. After death the guardian was believed to escort the spirit to the spirit world beyond the Milky Way (*Wanaği Tacanku*, “Spirit’s Trail”); the guardian and the ghost then returned to the places from which they had originally come before the child’s birth. The person’s body, Finger said, “rots and becomes nothing.”

Wakan Tanka, understood as the “power of the universe,” was not isolated from the secular world. Lakota culture does not seem to have recognized a sharp distinction between sacred and secular. Since every object was believed to have a spirit, every object was believed to be *wakan*. This spirit was called *tunwan*, a spiritual essence or force that gave power to do *wakan* things. These *tunwan* were not alike or equal; differences in this spiritual essence were reflected in the physical differences among life forms. The *tunwan* might well be considered the material manifestations of phenomena. Such outward forms were not considered to be real but were only physical manifestations of inner power. Thus, according to Sword, “We do not see the real earth and the rock but only their *tonwanpi* [*tunwans*]” (Walker 1917:153).

The unity of *wakan* beings—at least those disposed to do good toward humanity—was expressed in terms of family

relationship. Little Wound commented that people should think of the *wakan* beings “as they think of their fathers and their mothers” (Walker 1980:69). This relationship extended throughout the universe, uniting human beings to the rest of creation by bonds of kinship. Black Elk told Brown, “We know that we are related and are one with all things of the heavens and the earth, and we know that all the things that move are a people as we” (1953:97). The Lakotas believed that this relationship had not always existed. In long ago times, for example, the buffalo were said to have been ferocious, continually warring on mankind. Then the White Buffalo Woman, one of the *Wakan Tanka*, brought the Calf Pipe to the people and taught them its rituals. She was sent by the Buffalo People to establish a relationship between them and humankind, so that ever afterward human beings would have food and would increase. The pipe was to be the Lakotas’ direct link to *Wakan Tanka*; Finger told Walker that the *Wakan Woman* was herself present in the smoke from the pipe, carrying the people’s prayers directly to *Wakan Tanka* (1980:111–12). Significantly, the Lakota word to pray, *wacekiye*, also means to call on for aid, to claim relationship with someone. For the Lakotas the act of prayer was an invocation of relationship, calling on the *wakan* beings to live up to the kindness and generosity expected of good relatives (Deloria 1944:28–29).

Once established, the relationship between humankind, the buffalo, and all the rest of the universe was fixed. Its symbol was the circle, unending and whole. In Lakota culture time was not conceived of as a causal force; history was not directed, nor did it embody that notion of progress and change which is so fundamental to European culture. Instead, the universe was perceived as existing in harmonious balance. As Ella Deloria once put it, “You see, we Indians lived in eternity” (Malan and McCone 1960:13).

When the Lakotas encountered Europeans, the clash of ideas was inevitable. In 1865, U.S. Treaty Commissioners met the Lakotas on the Missouri River and warned them that inasmuch as the buffalo herds were rapidly diminishing and be-

fore long the buffalo would become extinct, the Indians would have to learn to support themselves by farming. The Lakotas agreed that the buffalo were decreasing in numbers, but they did not see this as a process leading to extinction. Instead, the chiefs told the commissioners that they wanted the whites to take away the railroads and the steamboats and "return us all the buffalo as it used to be" (Board of Commissioners 1865: 104). The commissioners were baffled at this reply, treating it as childish illogic, and they reported to the secretary of the interior that the Indians "are only too much inclined to regard us as possessed of supernatural powers" (Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1866: 169).

This complete failure to communicate resulted from the conflict between two divergent systems of belief. For the whites the irreversibility of the process of buffalo extinction was self-evident. For the Lakotas it was equally self-evident that *Wakan Tanka* had given the buffalo to the Indians as their means of life. Moreover, the buffalo and the land were considered as one—buffalo were believed to regenerate themselves by emerging from the womb of mother earth. In fact, land was insignificant without the buffalo that lived on it. Asked whether the Lakotas would settle on the Missouri River, One Horn, the Minneconjou chief, replied: "When the buffalo come close to the river, we come close to it. When the buffaloes go off, we go off after them" (Board of Commissioners 1865: 34). The Lakota people, the buffalo, and the land were one; while the people lived and the land existed, talk of extinction of the buffalo was meaningless to the Lakotas.

In the nineteenth-century Lakota system of belief, the unity of *Wakan Tanka* embraced all time and space, together with the entirety of being, in a universe where the place of human beings was minor but well-defined. Because this universe was most fundamentally characterized by incomprehensibility, it was beyond humanity's power ever to know it fully, and perhaps it was this futility that made the quest for understanding of the *wakan* the driving force of Lakota culture.

Ritual

Lakota culture possessed a great wealth of rituals, both public and private, that permeated all aspects of life. Some of these were believed to have been taught by the White Buffalo Woman, while others had their origins in visions. All of them were believed to have been patterned originally according to the instructions of *wakan* beings; none were simply created by human beings on their own initiative. Basic to all rituals was the purification lodge (*ini kaḡapi*), or sweat lodge, which both cleansed a person's body and spirit and prepared him to participate in other rituals. These rituals included great tribal festivals like the Sun Dance; celebrations of changes in life status like the Buffalo sing (*takanka lowanpi*), the girls' puberty ceremony; and rites of togetherness like the *hunka* sing, in which one person ritually adopted another, bringing two families (or bands, or tribes) together as one. Many rituals were expressive of individuals' dream experiences, including the *heyoka* ceremony for Thunder-being (*Wakinyan*) dreamers and ceremonies for dreamers of the Elk and Buffalo. Some rituals were for healing, notably those of the Bear dreamers, who used their *wakan* knowledge to doctor wounds. Still other rituals, like the *yuwipi* ceremonies of Stone dreamers, could predict the future or locate lost objects. Finally, some rituals were completely personal and secret, like those of the Bone Keepers, who made powerful love medicines.

Belief and ritual are interdependent concepts. Belief forms the intellectual and emotional underpinnings of religion, for a system of knowledge representing humankind and the universe. Belief functions to make people's lives and the world in which they live intelligible and acceptable; belief provides the rationale for right and wrong, good and bad. Ritual provides the means for putting belief into action, for expressing belief. The Lakotas spoke of the purpose of ritual in terms of "pleasing" the *wakan* beings who they believed comprised the entire universe. But ritual was not merely a reflection of belief;

it was also a means to further belief, for through ritual a person came to expand his knowledge.

In Lakota society the quest for knowledge of the *wakan*, what Black Elk called "the other world," was largely a personal enterprise and was primarily a male concern. Each individual man formulated a system of belief by and for himself. There was no standardized theology, no dogmatic body of belief. Basic and fundamental concepts were universally shared, but specific knowledge of the spirits was not shared beyond a small number of holy men. Through individual experience, every man had the opportunity to contribute to and resynthesize the general body of knowledge that constituted Lakota belief. Rituals were more standardized than belief; as public performances they gained general and accepted structure through continual repetition. To come to terms with their vision experiences, novice visionaries sought the aid of older, experienced specialists to help them to integrate their individual experiences into the body of tribal ritual.

From the Lakota perspective the power of rituals made them potentially dangerous. Every ritual was composed of three essential components: the *wakan* actions, the *wakan* speech, and the *wakan* songs (see Walker 1980:136). If any of these were performed incorrectly, the ritual would fail to produce the desired end and might actually result in doing harm. Therefore, instruction in conducting rituals in a proper manner was essential for any novice visionary, and this led to greater uniformity of ritual than of belief.

Essential for every Lakota man to achieve success in any endeavor was the vision quest. According to Black Elk, a woman might also seek visions in this ritual way, although almost nothing has been recorded about women's sacred experiences (Brown 1953:44). Clearly, the sacred power of men was considered to be qualitatively different from that of women, just as in all realms of Lakota life male and female roles were precisely defined and rigidly separated. Young men usually went on the vision quest at puberty, the ritual serving for them as a celebration marking their change in status. Before

undertaking the quest, known as *hanbleceyapi*, "crying for a vision," a young man was taken into the sweat lodge by a holy man. Cold water poured on hot rocks released the spirit or breath of the rock in clouds of steam. The ensuing heat caused the man to sweat profusely, purifying his body, as George Sword said, "of all that makes him tired, or all that causes disease, or all that causes him to think wrong" (Walker 1980:83-84).

After this purification the young man went away from the village to a hill where he prayed for his vision in solitude. His body was naked, clothed only in a breechcloth, and he wore a furred buffalo robe around his shoulders; his hair was unbraided; and he cried for the vision, tears streaming down his face. All these outward signs—nakedness, unbraided hair, tears—were symbols of humility. The vision seeker made himself pitiable so that the *wakan* beings would be moved to hear his prayers, that is, to acknowledge their relationship to him. Frequently the vision seeker stood on a bed of sage, a plant sacred to the *wakan* beings, whose fragrance repelled the evil *wakan*. At the four directions poles might be erected with offering cloths representing the quarters of the world. Within this circle of sacred space the vision seeker held fast to his pipe and cried aloud for a revelation.

An account of the ritual by Thomas Tyon depicts graphically the vision seeker's mental state. Although he was defenseless, alone, and isolated from the camp, he was instructed to fear nothing, but to be alert to whatever might befall him. Tyon wrote:

Now the vision quester wraps his robe around himself with the fur side out, and until the sun rises, he stands looking east, pointing with the pipe that he holds, praying as hard as he can. All night long he stands in this way, it is said. At last the dawn seems to be visible, and so he stands, rejoicing greatly, it is said. And then possibly, he becomes very drowsy, so very slowly he lies down flat, they say. And with his arms very properly uplifted in prayer, now as he lies there, he hears something stamp the ground behind him, coming towards him, creeping up stealthily, little by little. He is very excited (*lila*

cantiyapa). So perhaps, all of a sudden, he thinks to raise up his head as it goes by, they say. And he looks at the thing that comes stamping the earth. And then it is very little even though he heard the sound of its breath (*taninyan honaran*), it is said. It was only a grasshopper walking although it came stamping the ground, they say. [Walker 1980: 151–52]

All the vision quester's senses were alert, waiting for the *wakan* beings to communicate with him. Black Elk told Neihardt that for his vision quest he was instructed to walk from the center of his sacred circle to each of the four directions in turn, west, north, east, and south, and to cry aloud at each of the quarters. "While crying I had to say this: 'O Great Spirit, accept my offerings. O make me understand!'" (DeMallie, ed., 1984:228). Black Elk had experienced a great vision when he was a small boy, and as he approached manhood it was necessary for him to undertake the vision quest in order to understand his vision. As he prayed to the four directions, four different birds came to signal to him, and this recognition from the *wakan* caused him to cry all the harder. As the night wore on he had a vision of butterflies, dragonflies, and a dog—the symbols of a Thunder dreamer—and he understood his obligation to become a *heyoka*. Then a great storm broke, and as Black Elk told Neihardt:

I was crying for fear now. I asked the great grandfathers to pity me and spare me—that I had the clearness of understanding now that I was willing to do it on earth. Now you could feel the wind of the hail storm and I could hear and see the falling of the big hail all around me. Then I did not care whether I got killed or not, that probably I would be better off in the other world anyway. I began to lie down and then offered this pipe. I covered myself with the robe and I could hear the growling of the thunder and the flashes of the lightning and I could hear voices saying this all over the heavens: "Hey-a-hey!" I looked for the hail to hit me, but not one of them touched me and I did not even get wet. [DeMallie, ed., 1984:230]

The vision quester understood that he had been selected by one of the *wakan* beings to perform a special duty on earth. In the case of a dream of the Thunder-beings, like Black Elk's, it

became a duty the neglect of which was punished by death; the Thunder-beings struck down by lightning anyone they favored who failed to acknowledge his duty before the people. Dreams of the Thunder-beings, causing the vision seeker to become a *heyoka*, were powerful yet awesome. They placed an obligation on the dreamer to perform the *heyoka* ceremony for the benefit of the people, a ceremony of public abasement in which the dreamer dressed in rags and acted and talked "backwards," in a senseless manner, causing the people to laugh at him. For example, Black Elk told of a *heyoka* trying to cross a shallow mud puddle who pretended to determine its depth by laying his long crooked bow down on the surface of the water. Then standing the bow on end, he measured it and found that the puddle was deep, the water high above his head. Diving in, he mired himself in the mud to the general amusement of the onlookers. Black Elk explained the significance of these antics thus:

The *heyoka* presents the truth of his vision through comic actions, the idea being that the people should be put in a happy, jolly frame of mind before the great truth is presented. When the vision comes from the west, it comes in terror like a thunderstorm, but when the storm of [the] vision has passed the whole world is green and happy as a result. In the ceremony of the *heyoka* this order is reversed, the creation of the happy frame of mind in the people preceding the presentation of the truth. [DeMallie, ed., 1984:232]

Not all *heyoka* visions were as complex and detailed as Black Elk's. Sword told the story of one as follows:

And so now one of the men related a *heyoka* Thunder-being dream in this manner: "I began to dream. A snowbird came for me from the west. I went forth like lightning and as I arrived at the camp of the Thunder-beings I came to my senses. Men had painted themselves white and on each of their limbs they had painted a zigzag line in red, a finger's width. 'Boy, human being, let your mind be completely clear. These rituals you will take back to your people and you shall reveal them,' they said." So it was. On account of this he will make haste and sponsor a *heyoka* ceremony. [Sword, in preparation]

It is important to note that in visions like this one, the vision seeker was not instructed in any rituals by the vision itself; rather, the vision gave him the directive to perform a ritual that was well known to the people. Thus individuals who dreamed of the same *wakan* being organized together in loose associations (*ošpaye*) or societies (*okolakiciye*) and performed the rituals together, inducting new members whenever someone experienced the appropriate vision.

The vision invested the vision seeker with a supernatural aura, a *wakan* quality that set him apart from others. The gift of the vision was knowledge; the vision seeker was exhorted to be attentive, to focus his mind (*wacinkapa*). This attentiveness must be maintained not only during the vision experience but afterward as well. The power originated with the vision but was developed in a practical sense by subsequent contemplation of its meaning. As Densmore was told, mastery of the vision required "effort and study" (1918:85, fn. 2). Black Elk referred to it as "clarity of understanding" (*waableza*). This special knowledge granted by the vision placed on the visionary a corresponding obligation, a sacred duty to use the powers he had received in order to benefit the people. For some Lakotas, like Black Elk, fulfillment of this duty became the dominating theme of their lives.

Many visions granted the vision seeker power to cure the sick. In his great vision Black Elk was given herbs with which to help his people. One day, after he had performed the *heyoka* ceremony for the first time, a man came to him and asked him to doctor his child who was dying. Black Elk instructed the man to present him with a pipe and an eagle feather by way of formal petition, and then he would honor the request. This was to be his first cure. Black Elk commented to Neihardt: "When the power of the west comes to the four-leggeds it is a rumbling and when it passes it leaves the world green and fresh. . . . And so now I used the drum to make the rumbling sound which represented the power of the west. Of course I had never received any instructions

from anyone, but I just fixed a way for my curing" (DeMallie, ed. 1984:236).

Black Elk was only nineteen years old at this time, and was unsure of his power. He prayed to each of the six directions individually and sang a sacred song from his vision. He said to Neihardt:

When I sang this I could feel something queer in my body and I wanted to cry. At first I was in doubt but I was in earnest now. After singing this song I walked toward the west where the cup of water was and I saw the little sick boy looking up and smiling at me. Then I knew that I had the power and that I would cure him. The next thing I made an offering and took a whiff at the pipe. Then I drank part of the water and started toward where the sick boy was and I could feel something moving in my chest and I was sure that it was that little blue man [a spirit that he received in his great vision] and it made a different sound from anything else. Then I stamped the earth four times standing in front of the boy. Then I put my mouth at the pit of the boy's stomach and drew the north wind through him. At the same time the little blue man was also in my mouth, for I could feel him there. I put a piece of white cloth on my mouth and I saw there was blood on it, showing that I had drawn something out of his body. Then I washed my mouth with some of the water of the cup. And I was now sure that I had power. [DeMallie, ed. 1984:238-39]

Black Elk gave us a vivid picture of his first experience learning to trust in and make use of his vision power. Although in this case he was not assisted in the ritual by any other holy men, he nonetheless followed the common procedures which he had seen used by other medicine men and which had been used on him during his illness at the time of his great vision. But each ritual action took on new meaning, charged with the symbols of his own vision.

In the prayers and songs of a ritual it was customary for the holy man to speak in the *wakan* language, the language of the spirits. This was called *hanbloglaka*, "relating visions." To speak in this manner invoked the power of one's vision, and because it was phrased metaphorically and aphoristically, the language was relatively obscure to anyone lacking a knowl-

edge of the vision. An example of this ritual speech was recorded by George Sword in telling about the vision experiences of a Bear dreamer:

In the west there is a lodge as high as the clouds. The lodge is painted red, with white painted stripes; at the bottom of the lodge there are likenesses of bears sitting upright. The door is toward the east. At the honor place [the back of the lodge, the west] is the likeness of the sun and a likeness of the moon is at the doorway. Men painted red sat at the right side of the lodge. At the back of the lodge, men who had whitened themselves by smearing their bodies with clay had been invited to sit. I went in the lodge and went toward the honor place by way of the right. All those men who were painted red said "Wohoho!" And they said, "Human man, you will be wise."

Those who sat at the right were good and just men; since he went there, he will have good success; therefore they rejoiced and said "Wohoho!" Then they showed him what they will give him—all kinds of medicines. A man who has these medicines can cure a wounded man and make him live. And then medicine for war, and hawk wing and owl feathers to wear in battle, all this they tell him about. The name of these is *wotawe*. Those they put on and in battle they will not be wounded, so for that reason they make rules for them. The man who went also had a dream of the sacred whirlwind. He returned to his people with these gifts. [Sword, in preparation]

When the man returned home, he made a lodge like the one he saw in the vision, and he was supposed to restrict his activities in it to the right side only. In order to obtain control over the medicines that he had been given, he must perform the Bear ritual to declare his vision publicly. So he painted his body red all over, painted his face yellow, and drew black lines from the eyebrows down his face. He smeared yellow paint on a bear robe and wore it over his shoulders. The robe was decorated with an eagle feather attached at the head. The dreamer carried a red-painted knife. In this costume he greeted the men who came to help in his ceremony and who wished to share in his sacred power. He spoke as follows: "Bear spirit, attentively take heed! In this manner you gave me your authority and so you spoke. Now today your authority I will see

revealed. It will be finished and there will be no tragedy befall the people. On a good day, with a cloudless blue sky, I will reveal it. And the people and your children will live without tragedy and without sickness." (Sword, in preparation)

After singing songs from the vision, the dreamer stepped out of the lodge to enact the Bear ritual. He became possessed by the spirit of the Bear. As he breathed, he blew clouds of red clay from his mouth; bear's canines protruded from his lips. Acting like an angry bear, he chased the people about. From time to time he squatted, pulling up prairie turnips out of the soil. When at last he returned to his lodge his helpers met him with a filled pipe and soothed him. Then they smoked together and the ceremony was at an end. Those men who had assisted him would have success on their next war expedition. Those who wished purchased from him some of his medicines for curing or some of the protective *wotawe* for war. In this way they formed a Bear society and would meet again in the future for ceremonies and for curing.

Before curing, the Bear medicine man (*pejuta wicaša*) related his vision in the *wakan* language as before. He said:

In the west there is a lodge as high up as the clouds. Inside the lodge I was deeply attentive. Men who were painted red sat in the lodge and they showed me a man with a gaping wound whose mouth was red with blood. Speaking, they put medicines in my hands: "Boy, human man, be keenly attentive! With these sacred medicines you will make those who lie suffering among your people to stand." Those persons who spoke gave these to me.

And so he [the Bear medicine man] said this: "They are called bears—those, they are the ones. So humbly I tell their words. Alas! Without these I am nothing." [Sword, in preparation]

The Bear dreamer treated the wounded man first by cleaning out his wound using the tip of a bear claw. Then he applied medicines and dressed the wound. The doctor remained with the wounded one until his recovery was assured. Later, when the patient was well again, he was inducted into the Bear society and allowed to share in their medicines.

The Bear vision serves as an instructive example of Lakota

visions. On the one hand, it reflected a common pattern—the *tipi* in the clouds and other symbols of the vision were all frequent motifs. The Bear enactment ceremony and the healing ritual were both carried out in accordance with well-known Lakota traditions. The specific content of the vision, however, the words of the vision and the songs, were unique, reflecting the individual visionary's experience. Because individuals who dreamt of the same power united together in societies, the outward uniformity of the rituals was assured; and by selling the medicines to heal wounds and provide protection in war, the sacred gifts of a vision could be widely shared. Thus the vision was at once individualistic and collectivistic.

Conclusion

Study of nineteenth-century Lakota religion provides insights into the foundations of traditional culture. More and more previously unpublished manuscripts are now being made available in print, allowing everyone access to these original sources for understanding the past. The work of analyzing them has only just begun. In this brief survey, however, I have tried to suggest a few fundamental features:

1. Basic concepts formed the core of Lakota belief. These included the idea of *wakan* as the creative universal force; time as nondirected or nonprogressive; the unity of humankind and nature; the existence of a spiritual force in all forms of creation; the essential incomprehensibility of the universe; and the importance of ritual to imbue human beings with spiritual power. These commonly accepted, shared understandings were the cultural building blocks of Lakota religion.

2. Classification of the *wakan* beings, and detailed understandings of each of them, were largely individual concerns, dependent upon each person's visions and religious experiences.

3. Prayer was the act of humbling oneself before the *wakan* beings, making oneself pitiable in order to beseech the spirits to activate the kin relationships that bound them to humanity.

4. Spiritual gifts were the possessions of individuals, but they obliged their owners to use these gifts for the welfare of society. In some instances this required sharing or selling of certain powers.

5. Rituals were culturally conservative, following a small number of set patterns; beliefs were less conservative and involved wide variation among holy men.

6. The content of both religious beliefs and rituals was not conceived of as static, but rather as continually changing, infused with new revelations from visions that might modify older forms.

The large body of information on nineteenth-century Lakota religion is a priceless legacy. Most of it was recorded at a time when the Lakota people felt that their traditional religion must pass away. The men who left these records of the old beliefs and rituals were by and large practicing Christians. George Sword, for example, was a deacon in the Episcopal Church, and Black Elk was a Roman Catholic catechist. Yet they believed that there was truth and goodness in their traditional religion, and they wanted to preserve it for the benefit of future generations. They recorded these sacred things, as Sword said, that "the Gods of the Oglalas would be more pleased if the holy men told of them so that they might be kept in remembrance and that all the world might know of them" (Walker 1980:47). However, history did not decree that Lakota religion should pass away. Surely, the old holy men would be pleased by our efforts to understand their sacred traditions; just as surely, they are with us in spirit.



3

The Sacred Pipe in Modern Life

BY ARVAL LOOKING HORSE

I AM a Cheyenne River Sioux, a *Mnikowoju* (Minneconjou) through my father. My name is Arval Looking Horse, but I have an Indian name, too, *Šunka wakan wicaša*, Horse Man. A long time ago names were earned when a person did something great, but my grandmother gave me that name when I was a little boy. Her name was Lucy Looking Horse, and her father's name was Bad Warrior. She was the keeper of the Sacred Pipe of the Sioux people. Just before a keeper of the Sacred Pipe dies, he has a vision of who to give the Pipe to. It is always given to a blood relative, either a man or a woman. Just before my grandmother died, she had a vision and gave the Pipe to me. That was in 1966; I was just twelve years old. My grandmother taught me how to be the keeper of the Pipe, but I was young at that time, so I forgot most of the things she told me. Later, my father taught me the rest. This Sacred Pipe has been handed down through the generations, through blood relations. With it, our religion has been brought down through oral tradition—not written tradition. So I was taught the old way of carrying on the Pipe for the Sioux nation.

The Sacred Pipe was brought down to earth and given to the first keeper, Buffalo Standing Upright, a long time ago. I am the nineteenth generation to serve as Pipe keeper.

A story is told about the Pipe before it was brought to the Sioux people. A man was out scouting and came upon what we

now call Devil's Tower, in Wyoming. This is a sacred place, a sacred hill. There used to be a hole through it, straight across from the east to the west. It looked like a big tipi, open both on the east and the west. The man entered, and on the north side of the tipi he saw the Sacred Pipe, and on the south side he saw a sacred bow and arrows. He was going to pick up the Pipe, but instead he chose the bow and arrows and walked out the west side of the tipi. Since then the Cheyennes have had the Sacred Arrows.

Later, the Sacred Pipe was brought to the Sioux. This happened on what is now the Cheyenne River Reservation, near the community of Iron Lightning.

Two warriors were out hunting buffalo. There were hardly any to be found, so they went farther and farther away from camp. As they stood on top of a hill, looking into the distance, they saw something white coming. They went closer to look at it and found a woman walking toward them, carrying a bundle. One of the young men had good thoughts toward the woman. He realized that buffalo were scarce and the people needed some kind of help. But the other young man had bad thoughts. "This woman is pretty," he said, "so I want to have her." The first young man said, "No, *Wakan Tanka* must have sent this woman." But the young man who was thinking evil reached out to touch the woman. Suddenly a cloud came over them. The good young man heard rattlesnakes inside the cloud. When the cloud lifted, the young man saw that his companion was nothing but bones, just a skeleton lying there. Then the woman said to him: "Tomorrow make preparations for me to come to bring the bundle for the Sioux people. With this you will survive on the earth."

The man went back to the village and told the people what he had seen and what had happened. So the people prepared for the woman to come. The next day she arrived and presented them with the Sacred Calf Pipe. The woman taught them how to use the Pipe, how to pray with it, and how to do different things to take care of it. She gave the pipe to Buffalo Standing Upright, a medicine man, one of the leaders. She ex-

plained everything about it, and then she left. She left the camp circle in a clockwise direction, then headed west. As she went she changed into four animals. The last was a white buffalo calf, which disappeared over the horizon.

Ever since then the Sioux have had this Sacred Buffalo Calf Pipe. From then on it has been our religion. Every distinct people has its own religion, and this is the Sioux religion. Now the Pipe is in Green Grass community, on the Cheyenne River Reservation. When people talk about it in English they call it the Sacred Pipe, which they get from books, but when they talk about it in Indian it is always called *Ptehincala hu cannunpa*, the Buffalo Calf Pipe. It is used for prayer in our religion; *cannunpa iha wacekiya*, "to pray with the pipe."

Sometime ago we tried to get a permanent building to house the Sacred Pipe. We founded the Mystic Calf Pipe Association to raise money for this purpose, but finally we gave up the idea. We realized that if we built such a place it would only become a tourist attraction, and the Pipe would be dishonored. So we disbanded the association.

The Pipe is for all people, all races, as long as a person believes in it. Anyone can have a pipe and keep it within their family. But only the Sioux can have ceremonies with the Sacred Calf Pipe. The Pipe bundle has always been opened now and then by the person who is taking care of it at the time. Different people are chosen to help in this ceremony. The Sacred Pipe is very powerful; it is at the center, and all other pipes are like its roots or branches. The Sacred Pipe transfers its power to the other pipes. All pipes have to be blessed, made sacred (*yuwakan*). Any medicine man has the power to do this, for a medicine man's pipe is very powerful. But many people want their pipes blessed by the Sacred Pipe. Every year they come to Green Grass to pray with the Pipe and have their own pipes blessed.

In 1974 they had a Sun Dance in Green Grass, and we decided at that time to have a Sacred Calf Pipe ceremony, the first one since I became the keeper. It is a hardship to have so many people coming one at a time to pray with the Pipe, so we

thought we would have a big ceremony and let everybody come at one time. On the hill by my father's house we made a big altar (*owanka*) with four poles set in the four directions. Colored cloths symbolizing the four winds are tied to these poles. The altar is in the shape of a square, the four directions. It is supposed to be outlined with small bundles of tied tobacco (*canli wapahta*), but because we use this altar over and over, we have outlined it with rocks. The Sacred Pipe is kept nearby in a little house painted red. It is well protected. The Pipe is wrapped in a plain tanned buffalo robe. Other things that go along with the Pipe are also kept in the house, including a drum and various offerings that have been presented to the Pipe.

In the ceremony the Pipe bundle is taken out of its house and placed within the altar. It is not allowed to rest on the ground, but is instead placed on a tripod. All the people can come and pray with it. First they must cleanse themselves in the sweat lodge. Many medicine men help us in these ceremonies. Everybody knows what to do; no one tries to be the leader. During the ceremony the drum is brought out and the singers sing the special sacred songs of the Pipe ceremony. The singers come from all over; they are not medicine men, but are the men who know all of the ceremonial songs. Every year people bring their own pipes to this ceremony to have them blessed or reblessed. A person may have his pipe reblessed whenever he feels that he needs it.

Our people have had all kinds of trouble in recent years, and many have failed to respect the Pipe and our religion. Sometimes even medicine men have acted badly. Many times people have not prepared themselves properly for ceremonies. They have not cleansed themselves in the sweat lodge. In ceremonies the spirits told us that we should put the Sacred Pipe away for seven years, to give the people time to think about their lives and straighten out. The last Pipe ceremony was held in 1980, during the summer. We still have a long time to wait for the seven years to pass. Then we will have the Pipe

ceremony again. Some people say that when times are bad, the Pipe grows shorter, but this is not so. It is the same length now as it has always been.

The power of the Pipe is real. Once the Indian agent sent the Indian police to bring the Sacred Pipe to Cheyenne Agency, the reservation headquarters. As soon as they did, the Indian police began to die, one by one. So the agent asked the keeper to come after his Pipe. He went and got it and instead of riding, he walked all the way home to Green Grass. But all the policemen involved in it died off.

Our people used to be probably in the Minnesota area, or eastern South Dakota. Then we came west of the Missouri River and pushed out different tribes that were here. The Sioux were strong; they had many societies, and they were well organized. They taught their children a positive attitude. From the time they were nine or ten years old, children were taught how to use the power of their minds. Then they prepared them to go up on the hill—to go on a vision quest. Before people went on the hill they had to prepare themselves for a long time, keep themselves clean and prepare for a year. They had to learn everything they needed to know before they went on the hill, for it was in this way that individuals got their power.

The sweat lodge was basic to this. It is called *ini kaḡapi*, "purification lodge." The sweat lodge is a world half on top of the earth, half under it. Probably it means day and night, I don't know. The center is the fireplace where the sacred rocks (*inyan wakan*) are placed. They build a fire some distance away to heat the rocks for the sweat lodge. When the fire is lit they use the smoke from burning sage to purify the path from the fire to the sweat lodge. This is the *inyan canku*, "road for the rocks." Once they start the fire, people should not cross this path. The first four heated rocks are placed in the sweat lodge fireplace in the pattern of the four directions. The next three represent up, down, and center. So the first seven rocks represent all seven directions. The other rocks represent

different spirits and are placed in any order on top of the first seven. It does not matter how many rocks there are altogether. It depends on the person who is making the sweat lodge.

The sweat lodge is very sacred. It is the mother's womb. They always say when they come out of the sweat lodge, it's like being born again or coming out of the mother's womb. Each person carries some sage with him into the sweat lodge. When the lodge is closed, and the steam is very dense, chewing on the sage helps you breathe.

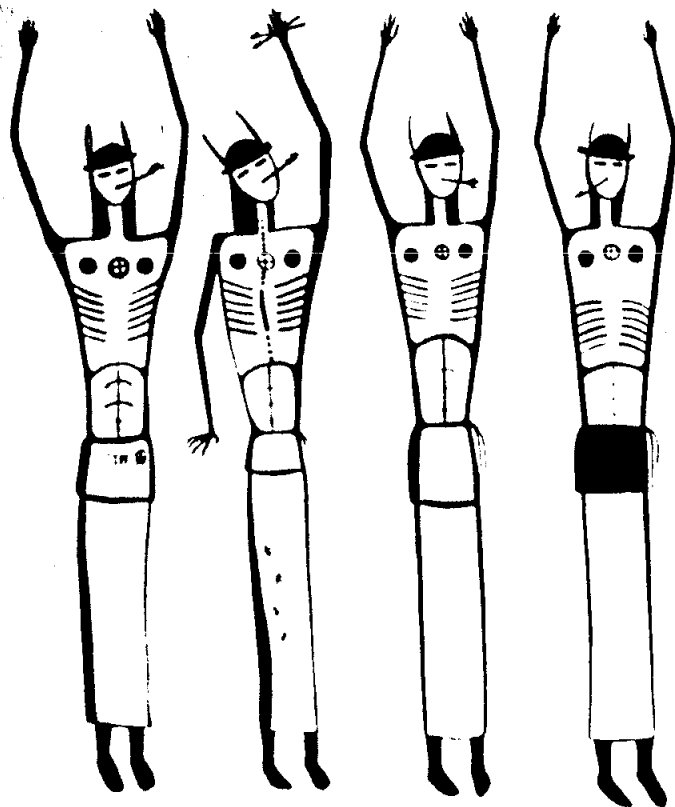
After being purified in the sweat lodge, a person may go on the hill for a vision quest. There the spirits come to a person and become the person's helpers. These helpers work between the earth and *Tunkašila*, "Grandfather." *Tunkašila Wakan Tanka* is our Great Grandfather, and the spirits work between here and there. A medicine man has to put a person on the hill because the medicine man knows what to do. He must communicate what the person is doing on the hill. Both the person on the hill and the medicine man have to use their minds. By sitting down and thinking about it, a medicine man can feel how the person is doing on the hill. If a medicine man is going to put a person on the hill, he has to know how to go about it. Each person has to have his own vision; he cannot buy a spirit helper. Some people sell medicine rocks—usually for money—but they are really not supposed to do that.

The *yuwipi* and *lowanpi* are different ceremonies that medicine men perform. They are very similar and both use the pipe. These different ceremonies come from the different visions that people have on the hill.

Myself, I am just a normal person like anybody else, living day by day. I always visit with the old people and learn their stories. I put a lot of things together from what they tell me. It is really oral tradition, from my family and from medicine men. Sometimes I have ceremonies. The medicine men call me on the telephone and give me advice, tell me what is going on. That way I keep on top of things. The medicine men do not communicate too much among themselves, but they all try to help me out because I am supposed to use the Sacred

Pipe to help my people. Someday, I will pass the Pipe on as my grandmother did.

Everybody—almost every family—has a pipe. I, too, have my own pipe with which I pray. The pipe is very sacred, for the stem represents a man, and the bowl, which is red, represents a woman. The Sacred Pipe is the center, and all the other pipes are the roots. When the people pray with the pipe, then the spirits come. Sometimes it takes time, but they do come. It is our way. The Sioux people believe in the Sacred Pipe.



4

The Lakota Sun Dance Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

BY ARTHUR AMIOTTE

DURING recent years I have affiliated myself with several elderly men who are the active and functionary intercessors of the contemporary Lakota Sun Dance ceremony. I have performed much as their helper, as an apprentice, and so my understanding comes from that relationship. In addition, I have studied the published and unpublished manuscript materials. This is a phenomenon that we will see occurring more and more in the future, as young Native Americans search for a deeper and more profound understanding of their contemporary culture by studying written records. Moreover, these people will bring to those records knowledge gained from actual experience observing and participating in traditional ceremonies.

Contrary to what many people say, or what we may read in the literature, even though the Sun Dance was officially prohibited during the 1880s, it never became extinct. From oral tradition we have evidence of people on numerous Sioux reservations having sneaked off to the badlands or to hidden places in the hills where these formal ceremonies took place in as close to their original form as they could be. Beginning as early as 1924, and developing especially during the 1960s and seventies, we had the revival of the ceremony proper, gradually moving out of its transitional phase where it was part powwow and part Sun Dance and part annual fair. We

have seen a renaissance take place recently in which the Sun Dance was returned somewhat to its formal, intensely sacred character, with many of the same restrictions and dimensions that it had in its historical setting.

There are, of course, many things about the technological age in which we live that simply cannot be avoided, so my presentation is going to deal with the contemporary Sun Dance. But I think you will be able to perceive something of the historical element that still persists in today's Sun Dance.

Deep in the heart of winter on any reservation, now at this moment, on this day, there may be people gathered together in a meeting hall. Perhaps there are women cooking pots of soup, getting prepared for an evening meeting, perhaps even this evening. At the appropriate time, when it seems right, the people will arrive at someone's house. There they will select from among their own, or from others afar, he who will be the *wicaša wakan*, the *itančan wakan*, the "sacred man," the "head man" of the sacred camp, he who will be the intercessor, the shaman who will intercede on behalf of the people. It is he who will perform the tasks of sacrifice in order that the world may be recreated and that man be reactivated with the *wakan* force of the universe. Numerous other officials, the assistants to the intercessor, will be selected as well.

The head singer—that person who knows the numerous songs that go with each intricate part of the rite—must be selected. There will be the selection of the sacred woman, she who will become *Pte san win*, White Buffalo Woman, she who will dance with the pipe and endure and sacrifice much the same way as the men do. One lady will be chosen to attend to the ladies in their sweat lodge. Men will be chosen in the capacity of grandfathers to the young men who will be dancing. Young virgins will be selected to perform the tree-chopping ceremony. Those who are to preside over the tree ceremony and those who will carry the tree back to camp will also be selected. There will be chosen from among the people those who will sponsor and sacrifice and feed the people at any

other ceremonies that might take place at the same time, such as the *hunka* ceremony or the White Buffalo ceremony for the young ladies in the camp. Perhaps there will be a name-giving ceremony. People will step forth and make pledges, donating thousands of dollars worth of beef and goods to be given away as gifts to visitors and to the dancers from afar. The lodgemaker will be chosen—that man and his family who will construct the sacred lodge as a sacred task. He may have helpers. Attendant with that will be the selection of those priests who will assist in the creation of the sacred place.

Such preliminary meetings did not occur in historical times. Today they are necessary because the people no longer live all in a single place, and coordination of the many activities required for the ceremony has become more complicated.

All of these things must be accomplished before the sacred time comes. The Northern Lakota tradition, that of the Hunkpapa and Sihasapa (Blackfoot Sioux) bands, is to have the Sun Dance take place around the summer solstice, when the junberries are ripe. When the time has been designated, realizing that there are many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people coming from hundreds of miles away—in automobiles, not on horses as they did long ago—preparations must be made to select the site. Originally a place was chosen that had not been used by other people, a place where water and cottonwood trees were close and there was an abundance of *peji hota*, the sacred sage, and an abundance of dry wood for the campfires. In modern times such places are comparatively rare, an indication of how life has changed.

As it is, weeks, perhaps even months before the dance, the four priests will have made four journeys on four separate days to look for and examine a particular site that they think will be suitable to take care of the people. Done as committee work, there is perhaps a bit more stress and strain, but once the headman has been chosen he becomes the officer, the person in charge, and the rest of the people yield to his judgment. With his shirt of office, the people hope that he will make wise decisions so that everything will go properly.

Historically, we know that once the Sun Dance camp was formally established, the temporal leadership—the *itancan* or *naca omniciya* (the chiefs or the council)—no longer had power. The power to rule this camp was handed over to the sacred leaders, and the *akicita* societies (men's societies) became the regulators of the sacred camp. Today, people are appointed to some degree to represent the old *akicita* societies, and the period of sacred leadership begins.

Meanwhile, at great distances away—Chicago, Bismarck, Rapid City, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C.—families have already taken pledges, and some are already preparing themselves, abstaining from the mundane affairs of life, perhaps fasting one or two days a week, attempting to hold the sharpness of their tongues, and storing away money to be used for expenses in journeying to the sacred center. Perhaps in their minds they are returning to that mythical time at the beginning of the world, to the sacred lodge of the *Pte oyate* (Buffalo People, the ancestors of the Lakotas) that existed originally underneath the world, to a re-creation of that sacred spot through which the Buffalo People came into this world, and the other beings with them (see Walker 1917:181–82; 1983:245–89).

The young ladies who have been selected for their offices are not allowed to attend local school dances. They are not allowed to date boys. They, too, are leading a restricted life in preparation for the sacred journey. The old-man-who-counts watches the sunset, cutting notches in his stick, even though with calendars this is no longer necessary. The old man watches until the sun sets on a well-known landmark. When finally it reaches the appropriate place, the time has come to make the sacred lodge.

Following the purification rite, the four priests with their sacred media proceed to the sacred area. There, with their sacred paints and sacred tobacco, they step to the spot where the sacred tree will be planted. They stop four times along the way, joking with one another, replicating the state of chaos that the world is in at this time. The final step becomes one of

ultimate seriousness, however, for they have arrived at the potential place that will become the center of the world.

First sanctifying the knife over burning sage to dispel evil, then resanctifying it in the smoke of sweetgrass to bring in the good influence, the earth is cut in a sacred mandala. This is the first of the “mellowed earth altars” that release the potential of the earth. For this is where the axis mundi will be placed, the tree of life, that central connection between the masculine powers of the zenith and the feminine powers of the nadir; that means, that principle, that pipe, that body, that avenue through which the sacredness of the world will be connected, and to which man in awesome sacrifice will be connected so that he, too, may participate in the bringing down and the bringing up and the sharing of that sacred power of the *wakan*. In a cross formation, the lines are cut in the four cardinal directions to reestablish this place as indeed the center of the world. Sacred tobacco and sacred paint are placed in these cuts.

Then the sacred cottonwood stake with a rawhide thong attached is drawn into this center of the world and touched with the sacred pipe, for these are one and the same happening now, which will become one and the same in the future when the tree is brought in. Next the lodgemaker unrolls the cord of life out to the west and marks off the western entrance, then proceeds around the outside edge of the sacred ground and establishes the north, then the east, then the south. Attached to the center by the once-living cord of the bison, that living cord which connects us all to the sacred, he reiterates in his mind the travels of the sons of *Tate* (the Four Winds that are sons of the Wind) as they set out to create the directions when there was no direction. Entrances—not walls—are marked off at each of the four directions. Two tipi stakes are placed on each side of what will be an entrance to the sacred area. Then the entire area is purified with burning sage and resanctified with burning sweetgrass. Finally, the people recede, walking backward to the edge of the space. They return to the sweat lodge, before resuming their mundane tasks until the time of

the Sun Dance proper. All is in readiness; the lodge is partially built.

On the appointed day, coming from great distances, their headlights appearing at four or five o'clock in the morning, the people arrive, and all of a sudden the circular camp of the Lakotas appears miraculously—tipis, whitewall tents, brightly colored modern nylon tents. Their vehicles are parked behind or beside—no longer is the favorite horse attached to the tipi, but rather the favorite car. Those who had pledged to provide for the smaller ceremonies immediately begin making preparations, perhaps by the morning of the first day. They may take two or three days to set up the camp. Already at that time small *hocoka* (camp circles) set with flag offerings to the four directions are established before the individual camps. Great quantities of meat and other food are being prepared behind the individual camps.

At the appropriate time the *eyapaha* (crier) travels around the camp in his vehicle, perhaps with a loudspeaker attached, singing a song to the people, inviting them to so-and-so's camp because they are providing a feast for their daughter. Their daughter is one of those who is going to be chopping the tree, so they invite the people to their camp to honor her, for on this day she will be made a Buffalo Maiden. All the people move toward this one camp, bringing their dishes of tin, paper, or plastic. When they arrive, they sit down. Already the sacred altar has been made. Then the whole family comes out of the tent, parading their goods, parading their people into the center for *Lakol wicoh'an waštelaka* (for the "love of Lakota tradition"). For the love of tradition, they say, we are going to do this. We are going to sacrifice. We are going to sanctify. We are going to enter a miniature center of the world in preparation for the big one.

The ceremony takes place, the child is sanctified, the people are fed, great quantities of gifts are given away, and about that time it may be ready for the Sun Dance proper to begin. The dancers congregate at the purification lodges, taking with them all the things that they will need for the next day. Some

of them begin their fasting and begin purifying themselves in the sweat lodges.

Early the next day the scouts are sent out to survey the countryside to select the sacred tree, that one which is standing at the center of the tree nation, that one we will rely upon, that one which will come back and be the tree of the world. They leave, and in due time they return, proceeding in a zigzag fashion toward the east entrance of the sacred lodge. Meanwhile, standing in the entrance of the sacred lodge, is the *wicaša itancan wakan*, the holy headman, with his helpers and the singers. The singers are singing *akicita olowan*, songs that honor returning warriors. As they come back they march in a zigzag fashion, stopping four times and howling like wolves to indicate their success. As they approach the east entrance, the intercessor asks in sign language, "Have you located the enemy?" And they sign, "Yes, we have."

Everyone in the encampment, dressed in their finest regalia, wearing their Lakota best, rides on their four-wheeled horses in a long procession to where the sacred tree is standing. They may have to walk part of the way, because one sometimes cannot get close to tree people in vehicles. Once they are assembled beneath the sacred tree the rite begins, prayers are said, the pipe is filled. Perhaps by now the intercessor has hushed away the protector spirit of the tree, which sometimes exists in the form of a snake lying coiled about the bottom of the trunk. The snake must be escorted out of the sacred area without injuring it, telling it, "Your job is done now." (Once, when a huge bull snake was being shooed away, I could have sworn that, as it slithered off, it looked back as if to say, "Well, okay, I'll go then!") The intercessor, with his pipe and his stick, shoos away the snake so that the rite can proceed.

The four maidens are brought before the tree with their aunts or their mothers standing behind them. There they are reminded of their significance and their relationship to the earth. They are told: "You are the pure, you are the good, you are the fecund, you are the new life of the people. Through

you, the women, even the bravest of warriors must come into this world. You are the earth, and by helping us to recreate this earth, you will be giving new life to the tribe. On this day you are going to undertake a difficult task. The maidens have their hatchets with them. Their faces are painted red, and each wears something red. Again they are told: "Remember this tradition that you may teach your own children, that it will never be forgotten. Without you this ceremony cannot be completed."

One by one, the maidens are led to the tree, where each strikes it with her hatchet, thereby symbolically killing the enemy. The drum beats, the women make the *li-li-li-li* sound (the tremolo), and the men give the warrior shout, *akiš'a*. Prior to this the uncles of each of these girls have gotten up and told their brave deeds in active service, vicariously transferring their warrior status to their nieces. After the girls are finished, their warrior uncles—the veterans—actually cut down the tree. Meanwhile, the ladies and the men have gathered robes, for the tree cannot land on the ground. All the ladies and the girls who participate lay out their shawls, their robes, their blankets, so that the sacred tree will not touch the ground. As it falls to the south, the direction to which all souls go when they leave this world, it is received by the people. The men carry the tree upon their shoulders, while the ladies walk behind and underneath, holding their robes so that none of the leaves touch the ground. They proceed now to a flatbed truck and place the tree on the rack, all wrapped in the robes so that no part of it touches the ground. No one can go in front of the tree from this time on.

As they proceed back to the sacred circle where the tree is to be planted, the songs for a fallen warrior are sung once again, for this tree being which is to stand at the center has been ritually killed and transformed into something else. Sacrificial transformation (in Latin, *sacer facere*, "to make sacred," to transform one sacred substance into something other than what we perceive it to be) is a key to just about every aspect of Lakota ceremonial life.

When the tree has arrived at the Sun Dance camp, it is brought through the east entrance of the sacred circle. Four times the men carrying it stop to howl like wolves or coyotes. As the sacred tree is received at the center, a shaman begins to dig a hole to receive it. The dirt itself is removed from the earth, and offerings—*wasna* (pemmican), sacred red paint, buffalo fat—are fed to the earth as gifts. Meanwhile, a man paints the tree in a sacred fashion, using the sacred red paint. He is a very old man, and he weeps as he goes about his work because he realizes the significance of what is to take place.

Offerings are attached to the top of the tree—formerly, a quilled buffalo robe, but in modern times a piece of red cloth. Then the rawhide cutout images of a man and a buffalo are tied at the top to the fork of the tree. The man represents our enemy, the buffalo represents that which we need to support our lives. In modern times life is different, but we still seek to conquer that which stands in the way of true enlightenment, and man is still his own worst enemy. The bison represents the plentitude of the earth, something that we all need today as much as ever. At this time the sacred bundle is also attached to the crutch of the tree. It contains the sacred implements for making life—the *wahintke* (hide-tanning tool), the knife, a piece of *papa* (dried meat) with an arrow stuck through it, a womans sewing awl, a tent stake for staking out a horse—all those things that mankind needs to construct and preserve life. The very tools that he uses are placed in a rawhide bundle and attached to this tree, as much as to say: "Oh, Ancient Gods, we wish to live! This is how we live. Give us strength to use these tools properly that the people may live."

At the appropriate time the ropes of sacrifice are attached to the tree, and by lifting and pulling the tree in four successive stages, it is raised up and centered into the hole. Whereupon the cry of the people goes up—the women give the tremolo, the men the warrior shout, the drummers beat their drum, the people cheer. At last, after all this time, we have arrived home. Our center is here. This is where we were, this is where we are, this is where temporal time is ne-

gated. We have now returned to mythical time. The world is repleat, the world is complete. By doing what we have to do, we can assist in the ongoing creation of this world, for this is the way our grandfathers taught us to do this. This is the way the White Buffalo Woman taught us to do this.

These are the ancient ideas that perhaps existed even before the Pipe was brought to us, but which became formalized as a result of the Pipe, for the Sun Dance is probably the most formal of all learning and teaching experiences. Inherent in the Sun Dance itself is the total epistemology of a people. It tells us of their values, their ideals, their hardships, their sacrifice, their strong and unerring belief in something ancient. In joyous recognition of having arrived home, having conquered the enemy, having conquered time and space, a victory dance is held at which all the people are welcomed to dance here about the center of the world, smashing down the grass, clearing the dance circle of pebbles and twigs that might be in the way of the dancers' feet.

At the conclusion of the dance it is not uncommon to see standing at the east entrance a young mother and father, perhaps an old mother and father, perhaps a grandmother and grandfather, with a tiny child. They come into the center, to the tree, bringing their gifts. Sometimes they have horses, sometimes they do not. The little child is brought in before the sacred tree. The appointed officials bring their little sharp tools and with proper purification, the child's ears are pierced—his spiritual ears, the ears of his *nagi*, his ghost. The child's physical ears are pierced indeed, but more importantly, the ears of his intellect, his mind, are also pierced so hopefully from then on he can hear the voices of the spirits and of the grandfathers. That done, the parents distribute their gifts to the crowd, take up their child and walk away.

Following the victory dance, the purification lodges begin and continue until the next day. At sunrise each day, from the inception of the dance up to the time that it actually takes place, there are morning songs for securing good weather. Perhaps some families have even made offerings to the West.

For this puppies are painted with sacred blue paint, choked, butchered, boiled, and eaten in sacrificial ceremonial feast. These sacrifices are made so that the Powers of the West will be benevolent with their weather, that the sky will be a clear blue color with not too many clouds, and that the nights will be pleasant.

On the morning that begins the first day of the Sun Dance, the dancers arise and prepare themselves with their accoutrements. At this time the sacred paints may be applied to them. In a long procession they walk around the outside of the sacred lodge to stand at the entrance. Then they proceed into the center of the lodge and stand facing the east, waiting for the sun to rise and travel down the eastern road into the Sun Dance lodge. But before this can happen we hear a single man's voice, accompanied by a hand drum, singing the song that White Buffalo Woman is supposed to have sung when she came from the east: "I Walk in the Sacred Manner." We see the sacred woman appearing on the horizon in her white buckskin dress, her face painted red, walking very, very slowly. All the people are gathered facing her. As she comes, she walks around the lodge clockwise, proceeds to the center, presents the pipe to the intercessor, then goes to her sacred place, where the mellowed earth altar will be built.

At this time the pipe is ritually filled with sacred tobacco. Symbolically identified with all things in the universe, the grains of tobacco are carefully placed in the bowl, the bowl itself being the center of the world. This is touched to the sacred tree, and the pipe is then taken and handed to the White Buffalo Woman. She offers it to the Powers and at last the dance begins. The dancers face the sun, looking into it, protected by the wreaths of sage around their ankles, their wrists, their heads. They stare into the sun with upraised arms, beseeching, praying. Some hold their hands open, palms to the sun, honoring the Powers. Others bunch their fingers together in a ritual gesture, calling down mercy and strength from the Powers.

As the dancers begin their sacred dance, the mellowed

earth altar is constructed. It, too, is a center—another center. The maker of the sacred place lies down and weeps to the earth and the sky, asking them to forgive him for what he is about to do, but saying that it is necessary if life is to come into this world again. With the properly incensed and purified instruments he proceeds to cut into the earth for the altar, mellowing it, picking it free of any small twigs or grass, making it nice and clear. Then he places upon it the mandala of the center of the world, filling the design with the sacred tobacco and the sacred paints. He places the meat rack at the back of the altar, near the buffalo skull which has been brought in previously.

A Northern Lakota tradition calls for a visitation to an ancient site where there are petroglyphs, sacred markings on rock. The intercessors leave during one of the breaks in the ceremony and go to the sacred place. There offerings are made to the sacred markings. The designs are memorized, brought back, and replicated on the mellowed earth altar. Oddly enough, it is not unusual to find that a certain kind of transformation does take place even today. Year after year the visitation to the sacred site reveals to us that the marks do change, and in each year they are in turn brought back and replicated on the sacred altar. Following the Sun Dance proper, the shamans gather together in the purification lodge—the sweat lodge—and interpret those markings in terms of the potential message that they might have for the people during the forthcoming year.

Before we can understand the Sun Dance, we need to examine the nature of the Lakota person and how he perceives himself in relation to the world. For the Lakota believes he has not one soul but four. Without understanding this we cannot very well appreciate the significance of the ritual.

The first soul is called the *niya*, a word which comes from *woniya*, "life breath." It is that aspect of an individual that ties his body to his innermost. In the purification lodge (*inipi*) a person not only sweats and releases toxic matter through his

pores but also does something to his innermost, just as the process of eating purified food, food cooked in a ritual fashion, takes care of one's physical being. Anyone who has seen a corpse knows that something is missing from that body. It is devoid of movement. The Lakota people would say its *niya* is gone. Now the other three souls just might still be there—which gives rise to the meaning of ritual burial.

The second soul is the *naġi*, which is comparable to the stereotypical ghost—it looks like us, it retains our personality. In the Lakota person it is very capricious. When you consider the range of individual personalities, a *naġi* separated from its body could be malicious or benevolent depending upon the nature of the person it originally belonged to. So in a sense the *naġi* retains something of the personality of the individual.

The third soul, the *naġila*, the "little ghost," is another approach to the concept of *Takuškaŋŋkan*, "That Which Moves," or "That Which Causes All Things to Move." Inherent in this concept is a vision of the entire universe as infused with a force of movement. We can think of *Takuškaŋŋkan* as that which causes the sun to shine, the stars to twinkle, the earth to move (since science tells us it does move), the sunlight to reach the earth, the water to penetrate the earth, the seed to start regenerating within itself for life to come. *Takuškaŋŋkan* is that which from the moment of conception causes those two things that a man and a woman bring to new life to start multiplying, that which causes all things to be in motion and to be alive. The *naġila*, to some degree, is that part of *Takuškaŋŋkan* which is in all of us. If there is a prayer in Lakota that adequately expresses this, I think it is *Mitakuye oyaŋ'in*, which means "I am related to all things," "all my relatives," or "I am related to all that is." When you consider that we share the common energy force of *Takuškaŋŋkan*, of course, we are related to everything. The Lakota person does not forget this.

The fourth soul, the *sicun*, has to do with that sacred power that can be received by people through the intervention of and intercourse with the supernatural. The man who has a vision of the eagle is himself in a state of *naġi* at the time that it

happens. Perhaps it is the *nagi* of that eagle that appears to the man in a sacred-vision questing place and tells him: "Kola, you have done this. I wish to give you something of myself, something of my power." It may be an animal part, a song, a prayer, a stone. When that man is purified after the ritual and returns home to his mundane life, he has within his own bundle or medicine object that thing given to him by his spirit helper, imbued with, bursting with, imploding with *sicun*. When he proceeds to utilize it to do fantastic things in curing or as a protective device before he goes into battle, or as a means of honing his intellect in preparation for doing difficult things, with proper ritual he opens his *wotawe* (war medicine) or his *wopiye* (medicine bundle). He puts his ritual paraphernalia about himself and goes back in his mind to the time he received it through the vision experience, in some degree activating it so that its power joins with his own power, thereby transforming him. He is no longer himself. He is his spirit helper; his spirit helper is him. This can be attested to by the change in his voice, the change in the pattern of his movement. He is something else. Those who have the capacity have been able to see shamans in broad daylight as being other than what they are as human beings.

Realizing that each of these four souls needs to be attended to, the role of Lakota ritual is to nurture them all. The *niya* needs to be strengthened, the *nagi* needs to be strengthened, the *nagila* needs to be strengthened, and one can gain *sicun* through proper sacrifice. So in the Sun Dance, when the dancer's flesh is cut and the thongs are attached, the man perceives this not as torture but rather as the embodiment of the profound truth that the entire four parts of him are literally being joined to the sacred power inherent in the sun, the tree, the zenith, and the nadir, all of the forces of the earth that are centered there. Through sacrifice, through being made sacred, through being transformed, his very spirit selves are attached to That Which Is Sacred.

We all know it is dangerous to try to stay in the sacred world for very long, so the teaching is that one must try to release

one's self as quickly as possible. Otherwise one might find it so wonderful there that one would want to stay. So those attached to the sacred tree must use every effort to free themselves quickly. Some people mistakenly perceive this as self-torture, and it is exactly because of this misunderstanding that the dance was originally forbidden as a heathen rite. But for the one who understands it, there is a profound realization in the dance, a sacred ecstasy, a transformation whereby he realizes the wholeness and unity of all things. The spiritual, the temporal, the gross, the profane, the common all come together at one time. Through this the individual transcends all that we know of this life and finally arrives at the real world, the real place.

Today we may hear criticisms of the use of tin buckets, kettles, loudspeakers at the Sun Dance. I think we should realize, however, that Lakota culture has never been static; it never has been monolithic. It always has been undergoing a process of change. In fact, the process of life itself is one of transformation. As cultural beings what is important to us is, that despite our having taken on many aspects of modern technology, the sacred intent continues to remain the same. That is the very core of the meaning of sacred Lakota traditions.