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## ETHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE OGLALA DAKOTA

Helen H. Blish

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ETHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE  
OGLALA DAKOTA  
BY HELEN H. BLISH

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

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## ETHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE OGLALA DAKOTA

BY HELEN H. BLISH

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## ETHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE OGLALA DAKOTA

Considerable work has already been done in the study of Plains Indian secret societies, ritualistic institutions, and dance ceremonies; but this has, for the most part, been carried on and presented from the historical point of view only; and very little aesthetic and ethical interpretation of the elements and nature of these organizations and their purpose has been attempted. I wish to give my attention in this article to some consideration of the first of these neglected phases of interpretation—the ethical.<sup>1</sup>

It goes without saying that the ethics of the Indian will differ in many—perhaps most—respects from those of the so-called more civilized peoples of the world; but that fact in nowise indicates absence of ethical conceptions and codes from his culture. I have limited myself to the most prominent societies, ritualistic institutions, and dance ceremonies of the Oglala Dakota, and shall attempt to interpret them briefly in the light of the moral life and background of the people to whom they belong.

### II

It is to be expected that war and the warlike virtues will appear as prominent elements in all forms of tribal regulations and organizations among the North American Indians, especially perhaps, the Plains Indians. As Larpenteur has said, "The Indian is born, bred, and taught to be a warrior and a hunter; he aspires to nothing else."<sup>2</sup> "If [a man]

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion is based in part upon published material on Plains Indian secret societies, ritualistic institutions, and dance ceremonies; and in part upon materials secured from the Bad Heart Bull manuscript. This latter source is a detailed pictographic history of the Oglala Dakota over a period covering the last half of the nineteenth and the first ten years of the twentieth century. Traditional tribal organization and organizations are "discussed" in detail. The manuscript is now being prepared for publication.

<sup>2</sup> Larpenteur, Vol. II, p. 409.

has earned the right to wear the quills of the eagle [indicating that he has proved himself in battle], he will be consulted in *all matters relative to the common welfare*, and if he may carry the scalp staff or coup stick [symbol of signal bravery and taking of many scalps], the women will sing songs in his praise.”<sup>3</sup> The wandering and the precarious nature of the existence of the tribes quite inevitably resulted in this decided emphasis on the development of fighting ability, an emphasis which made itself felt in practically all the life of the people.

So we find that all of the societies and ritualistic ceremonies (with the possible exception of one) depicted in Bad Heart Bull’s record<sup>4</sup> are closely related to war. Of the secret societies, there are eight, all of which are warrior societies. The other institutions, three in number, are all ritualistic or ceremonial, in no sense being societies; and of these all (with the possible exception which I have mentioned), although there is a definite religious significance, are also very definitely and directly related to war.

### III

It may be well briefly to indicate the sense in which I am using the expression “secret societies”. These organizations are secret in that the membership is more or less rigidly limited; that members are elected, usually for life or until the commission of a crime of one sort or another debars them; that new members are received with due and secret ceremony of initiation; that each society has its individual totem, songs, symbolisms, etc.; and that the uninitiated do not presume to use in any way any of the paraphernalia sacred to a society.

Professor Webster in his discussion, *Primitive Secret Societies*, remarks: “In communities destitute of wider social connections, such societies help to bring about a certain consciousness of fellowship and may often, by their ramifications

<sup>3</sup> Walker, p. 160.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote page 1.

throughout different tribes, become of much political importance." "By the side of the family and the tribe they provide another organization which possesses still greater power and cohesion. In their developed form they constitute the most interesting and characteristic of primitive social institutions." <sup>5</sup>

The eight societies of the Oglala with which I shall deal are: the Tokala or Kit-Fox, the Kangi Yuha or Crow Owners, the Iroka or Badger, the Cante Tinza or Braves, the Sotka Yuha (which name as yet has no satisfactory translation but which seems to refer to unadorned lances), the Wiciska or White Marked, the Miwatani and the Omaha (both of which take their names from the tribes from which they were borrowed, the Mandan and Omaha).

The first six of these make up the so-called *akicita* societies. The term *akicita* has frequently been translated *soldier* by early travelers and writers on the subject of the Indians and their customs and activities. Strictly, however, it designates an office similar to our office of police or marshal. The *akicita* are the men deputized to attend to civil affairs, such as maintaining order in camp, organizing and directing the buffalo hunt, and the removal of camp.

As soon as the *wakicunza*, who make up the true executive body of the band, are installed in office, they select two men to act as head *akicita*. These two in turn select two more to act with them; and the four constitute "a governing board"; they are chiefs of the *akicita*. The board then selects "eight or ten men to act as the force, or designates some one of the *akicita* societies to act instead. In the latter event, the leaders of the society detail the men." <sup>6</sup> Again, according to Wissler, the Indians define the word *akicita* as referring to "those who see that there is general order in camp when traveling from one place to another; those who attend to the duties of overseeing the buffalo hunt so that no one may chase the buffalo singly; those who see that all can charge

<sup>5</sup> p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> Wissler. "Societies." p. 8.

the buffalo at once. . . . They also see that *no one kills another, but in case one does, they either kill him or destroy all his property, kill his horses, destroy his tipi, etc.*"

Edwin James in his account of Long's *Expedition from Pittsburg to the Rocky Mountains* (1819-1820), in speaking of the Omaha, says:

"On all occasions of public rejoicings, festivals, dances, or general hunts, a certain number of resolute warriors are previously appointed to preserve order and keep the peace. In token of their office they paint themselves entirely black; usually wear the crow, and arm themselves with a whip or club, with which *they punish on the spot those who misbehave, and are at once both judges and executioners.* Thus at the bison hunt, they knock down or flog those whose manoeuvres tend to frighten the game, before all are ready, or previously to their having arrived at the proper point, from which to sally forth upon them."<sup>7</sup>

Parkman indicates even more definitely the outstanding power of the *akicita* when he says in describing a particular disturbance in camp when he was living with the Oglalas:

"The 'soldiers', who lent their timely aid in putting . . . down (the sudden tumult), are the most important executive functionaries in an Indian village. The office is one of considerable honor, being confided only to men of *courage* and *repute*. They derive their authority from the old men and chief warriors of the village, who elect them in councils convened for the purpose, and thus *can exercise a degree of authority which no one else in the village would dare to assume.* While very few Ojillallah chiefs could venture without risk of their lives to strike or lay hands upon the meanest of their people, the 'soldiers', in the discharge of their appropriate functions, have full license to make use of these and similar acts of coercion."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> James. Vol. I, p. 297. Costume differs with the tribe or band or society on duty.

<sup>8</sup> Parkman. p. 246.

Out of all this, several significant points present themselves. First, in order of appearance in these quotations, was the duty regarding strict preservation of peace and order, i.e., *concern for social welfare*. Second, there was the punishment of misdemeanors imperiling the *economic welfare of the people*, the severe flogging, etc., of those who interfere with the profitable and successful handling of the buffalo hunt. Third, there was the action in regard to murder, i.e., treatment regarding a *specific social crime*. "They also see that no one kills another, but in case one does, *they either kill him or destroy all his property . . . etc.*" Fourth, the requirements for eligibility to office: "The office is one of considerable honor being confided only to men of courage and repute." These various points will come up for attention again.

I have gone into detail concerning the *akicita* to this extent in order, first, to throw significant light upon general Indian conceptions of civic and social justice, and, second, to throw light even more upon the character of the men who make up the warrior societies and therefore upon the societies themselves. It is to these societies that the head *akicita* and the rulers of the band turn for the *akicita* or police force.

I have said that these six societies were called *akicita* societies. Their *akicita* character is incidental, however; their original nature was warlike; they were primarily societies of warriors; but their *akicita* aspect has come to be no less a significant feature of their general character. Contrary to practices among a few other tribes, particularly the Plains-Ojibway and Plains-Cree with their *okicita* society, the Dakota *akicita* were only temporarily such. Both the *okicita* and the *akicita* performed police duty, true; but in the one case the group made up a definite, permanent *society*, in the other the group was changing and the members were taken from various societies.<sup>9</sup> Among the Dakotas it had simply become customary for the head men to call upon the members

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<sup>9</sup> Wissler. "Societies," pp. 874-5.



of certain warrior societies for this duty *in addition to* their fraternal duties.

After this brief sketching of the *akicita* obligations of these societies, I can proceed to a more direct discussion of their character as warrior societies. The Poogthun secret society of the Omaha corresponds very definitely in several respects to these warrior societies of the Dakota, so I quote from Professor Webster a passage concerning the Poogthun which is just as applicable to the Dakota group:

“The leader was he who could count the greatest number of valiant deeds. A man must keep up his war record to maintain a place in the order.”<sup>10</sup>

There can be no doubt, from that, as to the main interests of the societies. Incidentally, it may be added that

“The songs of the society served as tribal archives, for they preserved the names and deeds of the Omaha heroes.”<sup>11</sup>

In giving in more or less outline form the six *akicita* societies and the outstanding characteristics of the individual organizations, I follow the order used by Wissler in his rather comprehensive paper on Oglala societies and depend for the most part upon his report for the historical data here used. It must be pointed out that at times there is some confusion in the data acquired from different informants as to the appropriate association of name, symbolism, and other traits of the various societies; at times there seems to be some overlapping, but this may be due to any of several causes and can be considered largely negligible in this discussion since it is with the organizations as a whole that I am chiefly concerned. In enumerating distinguishing characteristics of various societies, I shall limit myself to those only about which there seems to be no question or else shall indicate the conjectural nature of the data.

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<sup>10</sup> Webster. p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

## TOKALA — KIT-FOX

The Tokala is one of the oldest of the Dakota societies that continued into modern times. As may be supposed from the name, the kit-fox is the totem of the society and is supposed to serve as an example of activity and cunning. "It is said that the kit-fox has great skill in finding things, as for example, marrow bones buried in the earth; hence the members of the tokala organization regarded themselves as foxes and all their enemies as marrow bones."<sup>12</sup> The young man who had killed an enemy or stolen horses or performed some other such deed would most likely be called to the attention of the leaders, and he would then be invited to join the society.

Among the thirteen or fourteen offices of the organization that of lance bearer was the most impressive, for the lance bearers (four in number) were in duty bound to take the lead in battle and they seldom retreated. At the feast following the spring reorganization and the renewal of paraphernalia, "the chiefs decide[d] on two young men *who [had] killed enemies and distinguished themselves whom they [took] to the center to be presented with the lances.*"<sup>13</sup> As soon as the lance bearers were installed in office it was their duty to go to war in their new capacity. Acceptance of the position of lance bearer meant almost certain death; consequently the candidate did not usually accept without due consideration, though he seldom refused finally since that would mean disgrace in the eyes of his fellow tribesmen. Then at the time of his initiation, came an interesting ceremony: "The relatives of the candidate then [*gave] presents to the poor and needy, but not to the society or its officers.*"<sup>14</sup>

The whip bearers (two) were the marshals of the society; they attended to the bringing in of candidates, to the maintaining of order, etc., and to the inflicting of punishment where punishment was due; they were the *akicita* of the society. In battle these two officers rode horses; and the sub-

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<sup>12</sup> Wissler. "Societies," p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

sequent painting of the horse told both the story of the animal's own mishap if it had been wounded and of the rider's accomplishments. This was but one more manner in which deeds of prowess were recorded.

The Tokala society had a special lodge in the camp circle, and there formal meetings and ceremonies were conducted. At the formal initiation of members, the custodian of the pipe played the part of master of ceremonies. Each candidate, after consenting to assume the duties and obligations of a Tokala, was presented to the custodian of the pipe, who explained the various offices and the duties attached thereto. Singing and dancing followed; and after that the custodian of the pipe invoked the spirits which preside over moving, hunting, and *war*, and the spirit that presides over *bravery, generosity, and endurance*.

Then, while the candidates remained standing, lectures were delivered by the custodian of the pipe or the councilors or some other prominent tokala. These lectures

“inculcate[d] bravery, generosity, chivalry, morality, and fraternity for fellow members. . . . They taught that one should be *brave* before friends and foes alike and undergo hardship and punishment with *fortitude*; that one should *give to the needy, whoever they may be, excepting an enemy*, of everything one possessed; that one should search for the poor, weak, or friendless and give such all the aid one could. They taught that a tokala *should not steal, except from the enemy; should not lie, except to the enemy*; and should set an example by *complying with the recognized rules* of the hunt and camp. If a fellow tokala were in trouble of any kind he should *help him to the best of his ability*, and if a tokala died or was killed and left a widow *he should keep her from want*. They also taught him not to *take the wife of a brother tokala without his consent*; that he should *treat all his women the same*, showing no more favor to one than to another; that if he captured women, *he should treat them the same as his own women*, and his children by such a woman *should be treated as children by women of his own people*; that if he *put a woman away* he should see

that she was *not in want until some other man took her*; and that if a fellow tokala had no wife he should give him one of his women if he had more than two.”<sup>15</sup>

KANGI YUHA — CROW OWNERS

The crow was the totem and symbol of the Kangi Yuha. This society was very similar to the Tokala. The general organization and manner of procedure and purpose were like those of the former; and the regulations regarding membership were the same. Only in the matter of regalia, of naming and grouping of officers, and a few other minor points was there any noticeable difference. The outstanding feature of this society, as distinguishing it from the former, was the no-flight obligation connected with the two short lance bearers. The four regular lance bearers, like those of the Tokala, were supposed to take the front in battle. But the short lance bearers met an even more severe ordeal. They too proceeded at once to war after their installation, but while attacking the enemy instead of merely seeking the thickest of the fray, “they were required to thrust their lances into the ground and not leave the spot”<sup>16</sup> unless some fellow Crow-Owner was able to fight back the enemy enough to pull up the lance and so release the lance bearer.

For the general outline of purposes and ideals of the society, see the Tokala society.

CANTE TINZA — THE BRAVE AND THE DAUNTLESS

Dr. Wissler points out that all information secured in regard to the Braves society indicated that it was “generally regarded as the *akicita* society *par excellence*.”<sup>17</sup> Although its organization with its puzzling number of selected sub-societies was more complex than that of the two preceding, the general purpose and plan of the organization were quite similar to theirs. It possessed, however, several unique ele-

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

ments. Parkman remarks, concerning a certain society which he learned to know while living with the Oglalas and which is without doubt the Cante Tinza (perhaps the No-Flight sub-society) :

“About midnight . . . . Raymond woke me. . . . . The society of the ‘Strong Hearts’ were engaged in one of their dances. The ‘Strong Hearts’ are a war-like association, comprising men of both the Dakcatak and Shienne nations and entirely composed or supposed to be so, of young braves of the highest mettle. *Its fundamental principle* is the admirable one of never retreating from any enterprise once begun.”<sup>18</sup>

The warbonnet wearers were the most conspicuous officers in the Cante Tinza proper, corresponding, to a certain extent, to the short-lance bearers of the Kangi Yuha. No one was allowed to precede them in battle; they were the leaders. These were sometimes called sash-bearers, also, because of a distinguishing part of their regalia. The wide, baldric-like sashes hung by a loop at one end from the shoulder across the body, front and back, and fell in a single panel from about the height of the hip on the other side. The bearers carried also a “small stake, a picket pin, with which they fastened themselves down before the enemy, where they remained until released or until the enemy [was] driven off.”<sup>19</sup> So again courage and fortitude were exalted.

Calamus root was used in the cause of courage, as a “medicine”. Each Brave carried a bit of the root and at critical moments chewed it and spit the juice upon himself or upon a weakening fellow warrior, to induce courage. Every member stood by every other in battle, cheering him on and using every means to keep at high pitch the spirit of bravery.

In this society there appeared also an instance of a definite sex taboo. At the society feasts, the chiefs were served their first taste of food by the food carriers. But “if one of the

<sup>18</sup> Parkman. pp. 289-90. “Strong Hearts” is a translation of the name Cante Tinza which is frequently found.

<sup>19</sup> Wissler. “Societies,,” p. 25.

chiefs [had] had intercourse with his wife the day previous to the feast he must refuse the first taste of food given him . . . . but [might] later join in the feast." In the sub-society known as the Iku Sapa (Black Chins) there was also a sex taboo connected with the sacred warbonnet in its raw-hide case.

The outstanding characteristic of still another sub-society of the Braves, i.e., the No-Flight group, was the "rule forbidding *anyone* to retreat from the enemy."<sup>20</sup>

As the name would indicate, bravery played the main part in the scheme of the whole Cante Tinza complex.

#### IROKA — THE BADGERS

According to Oglala informants, the Iroka was a Crow society originally, similar to the Oglala Tokala. In general the plan of this society was the same as that of the others. There was this point, though, that indicated an element not found in the preceding groups: the singers, four in number, were virgins; "if they [fell] from grace, they [were] dismissed; if they [married] they must get the consent of the society which [would] make them valuable wedding presents. The husbands [were] taken into the society."<sup>21</sup>

#### SOTKA YUHA

This society, also, was said to be a Crow importation and showed much that indicated that it was closely related to the Iroka; and it, therefore, followed the general plan of the other societies enumerated. There was one feature, however, which may appropriately be pointed out here, though it was not wholly restricted to this society. In this society there appeared the definite demand for *vengeance*. "If a lance bearer [were] killed, the whole society [went] into mourning. In formal meeting, the relatives of the dead [appeared] bearing sundry articles formerly his personal property. They [distributed] these relics singly to the members of the sotka,

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

in each instance putting their hands on the head of the recipient and wailing. They [asked] for *vengeance* and those to whom property [was] given must take to the warpath. The idea [was] that each object [called] for a coupe or a scalp.”<sup>22</sup>

#### WICISKA — WHITE MARKED

This society was also a borrowed one. Perhaps it came from the Crows, for it showed very marked similarity, in many of its details as well as general plan, to the Iroka and Sotka. In fact it seems that these three organizations form one cycle, while the former three form a slightly contrasting cycle.

The other two secret societies—The Miwatani and the Omaha—though similar in type to the preceding, are not *akicita* societies. On the average, it seems, the members of the Miwatani society were somewhat older than those of the other groups. One of Wissler’s informants used the term implying *gentlemen of culture, or, gentlemen of high class*<sup>23</sup> in referring to the Miwatani and Omaha societies, classing them with the Chiefs’ Society. The exact origin and history of the society is not the main concern here, however; the significant fact is that with the Oglalas both these groups, except for the fact that they were, through custom, not called upon for *akicita* service, corresponded in all respects to the other warrior societies.

The Miwatani, like the Cante Tinza, had a no-flight regulation for their sash bearers. These officers “staked themselves down before the enemy” and could not be released except by some other person.

J. O. Dorsey says regarding the society of like name among the Omahas, “All [the members were] expected to behave themselves, to be sober, and refrain from quarreling and fighting among themselves.”<sup>24</sup> Wissler bears this out in re-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Dorsey. “Omaha.” p. 354, § 275.

gard to the Dakotas thus: "The pipes [were] used to quiet quarrels among Indians whether they belonged to the society or not. *If a member [were] the direct cause of a quarrel, he [was] expelled from the society. The pipe [was] taken to the scene of the quarrel and smoked as a peace pipe.*"<sup>25</sup>

Another feature, originated by this society, was the custom of "throwing away wives". During the dance, if a member wished to appear particularly praiseworthy, he made formal announcement that he was giving up his wife and anyone who wished might have her. This was a sign of virtue, an especially strong evidence of self-denial and fortitude, for he might be torn by grief at the thought even while he made the announcement. And anyone who reclaimed a "thrown-away" wife was disgraced and had to bear the constant ridicule of his fellows; in fact any Miwatani who reclaimed his wife was expelled from the society.

The Omaha society also was essentially a warrior society which, evidence seems to show, had its origin among the Pawnees where—as is true of all these organizations—it came into being in response to a Shaman's dream. The most prominent ceremony of the society was the Omaha, or Grass dance. The Omaha Dance still exists, but it has now only a social significance and, of course, has lost most of its ritualistic precision.

In this society there was a sex taboo somewhat similar to that which I mentioned for the Cante Tinza.<sup>26</sup> "Any member having recently embraced a woman must refuse" the spoonful of dog soup offered each member by the spoon bearer at the society dance ceremony. With the Omaha society, however, this requirement extended farther than it did with other societies possessing a similar ruling; for, even at the dance preparatory to starting out upon the warpath, members must hold to this requirement, while with other societies it was

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<sup>25</sup> Wissler. "Societies," p. 47. There were two pipe bearers.

<sup>26</sup> The Tokala, Miwatani, and Iroka also had rather similar requirements. *Ibid.*, p. 52.



considered fitting when men were setting out for battle "to leave them some consolation."

The nature of the outstanding obligations devolving upon members and especially upon officers of these various societies, coupled with the plan of organization, paraphernalia, etc., would seem to justify me in classing them, in a general way, as warrior societies; it would seem to point to the fact that "their functions [were] chiefly military."<sup>27</sup> According to Wissler, however, the Oglalas themselves did not appear to hold this view; his informants stressed other points. It is possible, though, that this tendency on the part of the Indians themselves to emphasize the non-military side of the organization is simply an indication of the matter-of-course attitude of the Plains Indian toward war and its *accompaniments*. Fighting was such a commonplace part of everyday existence and occupation that almost unconsciously the Indian fitted the various phases of life into that general pattern. Whatever the chief emphasis, it is certain that these societies presented two aspects—the military and the non-military. And, since the military is perhaps the more obvious, it will be well to point out in summary particularly the other phase.

Social and fraternal relations were the main interests in all these organizations according to Wissler's informants; and in their discussion of the ideals and practices of the societies one makes several discoveries regarding Dakota social conceptions (ideas of wealth and poverty, etc.). Poor men were not asked to join the societies because "*they had not the means to assist the needy and to make feasts*" and because "a man who had no personal ambition to rise in the world" could hardly be expected to uphold the ideals of the group.<sup>28</sup>

As Wissler points out, according to the conception of the Oglalas, "the rich man [was] one *who produced much and [gave] most of it to the poor and dependent in his camp.*"<sup>28</sup> "*Should a man be a great producer but selfishly hoard his*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

property, he would be considered poor and disregarding of the welfare of the people at large, and would not be elected to a society."<sup>28</sup> "It is the ideal that members help both by word and deed the struggling poor man; should he rise, he would be respected but rarely taken into a society, since he did not rise unaided. On the other hand, if one rose by his own efforts, he would be sought by many societies."<sup>28</sup> Certain unselfish ideals of charity and social justice are evident.

It is quite appropriate to point out here the fact that a man's wealth was measured in horses and that one's supply of horses depended upon his ability as a warrior, for the main source of supply in this matter was the enemy. "One of [the Sioux'] most important employments [was] to steal horses," says Maximilian, "and the theft of one of these animals, from another nation, [was] considered an exploit, and as much, nay more, honored than the killing of an enemy."<sup>29</sup> So, again, war appears as a vital factor in the social order.

#### IV

The three ritualistic institutions which I shall take up are the ceremony of the Sacred Bow, the Sun Dance, and the Hunka ceremony; and I shall treat of them in this order.

##### SACRED BOW CEREMONY

It is evident almost at once that there were certain points of similarity between the Sacred Bow Ceremony and the Sun Dance, although in practically all external features they were altogether different and although the latter was much greater in its reach and apparent spiritual and religious significance. The ceremony of the Sacred Bow was concerned in general even more specifically with war than was the Sun Dance. It was a particularly potent appeal to the Great Spirit for protection in time of great need or immediate danger, or at the time of a warlike undertaking. According to one informant, this institution of the Sacred Bow was a regular

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Maximilian. Vol. I, p. 310.

organization started in response to a dream. The last "president" died in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and, it seems, the organization had been in existence for many years before that. Bad Heart Bull calls this ceremony *Kiinyan kapi*, which means *racing*.<sup>30</sup> The significance of the name becomes at once apparent when the ritual is described. The Sacred Bow lodge was set up in the center of the circular encampment. Stakes, bearing symbols, were placed at the four cardinal points near the circumference of the circle of tents; these stakes represented enemies. The most sacred objects of the institution were the Bows, of which there were four. These were double-curved bows, unstrung but bearing at one end a banner consisting of eagle plumes (not tail feathers) woven together with bear-gut. The Bows were entrusted to certain persons only; for many strict regulations governed the bestowal of the honor of carrying the sacred instrument and the person so honored was *appointed* to his office. The purpose of the ceremony was one of propitiation or appeal or both. A man performed it (1) because in time of fierce battle, when danger was great, he had called upon Wakan Tanka and promised to perform the ceremony if protection were given in this extremity, (2) because in time of serious illness a similar prayer and promise were made,<sup>31</sup> or, more especially, (3) because a very serious warlike project was to be undertaken and the Great Spirit must be invoked. The Sacred Bow Ceremony or Race was one way of "making strong medicine"; it was a charm.

Eight carefully chosen men ran in the race, four who carried the bows and the four who carried the hangers of the bows, i.e., staffs upon which the bows were hung so that they would not touch the ground when they were not in use. Sometimes there were more—ten or twelve; but there must be at least eight. The one who had proclaimed the performance of the ceremony, the one who had offered the prayer and the

<sup>30</sup> According to John Colhoff, interpreter.

<sup>31</sup> In these two points it was quite similar to the Sun Dance.

promise to the Great Spirit, might be one of the bow-carriers; in case he were not he would carry one of the hangers.

The "race" started, after due ceremonial preparation, from the lodge at the center of the camp. The eight men first ran west, circled the stake and struck the image of the man upon it, then returned to the center, circled the lodge, ran next to the north, etc. Each time the lodge and stake were circled; and each time the stake was struck, for it was an enemy. The whole performance was truly a race, each runner trying to outdo the others and come in first at the end. It was in reality something of an endurance test, for the tribal camps were large. After the last return to the lodge, each runner entered the sweat-house, which stood near the lodge on sacred ground and which had not been entered by anyone during the ceremony. There he received final purification. This was the last step in the whole ritual.

I have said that the eight "dancers" were carefully chosen. Further, they held these honored places to which they were chosen as long as they were able, an honor which might be cut short either by death or by other misfortune, for they were required *to lead in battle, to show great bravery, and to strike at least one or two enemies with the bow or hanger*. Sometimes, however, after proving themselves in battle they resigned. Obviously the warrior virtues were the ones stressed; success in war was the chief concern.

#### SUN DANCE

The Sun Dance was as widespread and generally significant as any of the rituals of the Plains Indians; in fact, "it [was] the only one of their many ritualistic complexes that [rose] to the level of a tribal ceremony."<sup>32</sup>

So much has been said and written about it and it has been described in such minute detail by various authorities, that I shall simply outline as briefly as I can some of its main religious and spiritual significances, which, of course, throw light upon the ethical.

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<sup>32</sup> Wissler. "Sun Dance," p. v.

In spite of external appearances, the ceremony was not performed in a spirit of bravado, the torture was not endured for the mere desire of showing the extent of one's physical endurance. It was performed as a religious rite, a rite of propitiation. The ritual and significance of the Sun Dance of the Oglalas, as Dr. Walker has pointed out, "include[d] most of the Mythology and much of the customs"<sup>33</sup> of the people. One who danced the Sun Dance in its completeness conclusively proved himself possessed of the four great virtues of the Dakota—bravery, generosity, fortitude, and integrity or fidelity—and bore thereafter honorable marks in the form of scars upon breast and back which assured him the respect and honor of his tribe.

There were incorporated into the ritual four forms, graded according to the extent and implication of the ceremony. The rules governing the conduct of the candidate for the dance were strict. After the preliminary consecration of the candidate by his personal mentor, he received from the mentor instructions regarding these rules. Anyone dancing the second, third, or fourth form must (1) subordinate himself to his mentor, (2) meditate continually upon his undertaking, (3) speak little with others than his mentor, (4) use only his consecrated implements and utensils, (5) not become angry, (6) not hear ribald speech, (7) not go into water, (8) not have sexual intercourse.<sup>34</sup> Any infringement of these rules called for due penance, prescribed by the mentor, before the candidate could proceed.

Like the Ceremony of the Sacred Bow, the Sun Dance was often performed as the fulfilment of a vow to the Great Spirit made in time of great stress; or again it was a means of securing supernatural aid for one's self or another in the future. More than this, however, it was a means of securing supernatural or shamanistic powers for one's self.<sup>35</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> Walker. p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Indian was laying himself as a personal sacrifice upon the altar of his God; he was giving thanks to his God for past aid and was beseeching His protection and aid in the future.

Though the dancers and the officers of the ceremony were the most prominent figures, the ritual was a tribal ritual and could prove efficacious only if the people as a whole offered themselves in mind and spirit in response to the sacred occasion. Every step of the ceremony—the selection and preparing of the dance ground, the securing and preparation of the sacred tree and other objects, the sanctification and preparation of the dancers and their attendants, as well as every portion of the dance itself—was performed with greatest sincerity and reverence. The whole ritual was pervaded by a distinct spirit of solemnity and obedience to supernatural law.

At the same time, however, one cannot fail to notice the relationship and influence of war to much of the ceremony and symbolism in the ritual. The very virtues themselves which were named as paramount—bravery, fortitude, integrity—were, for the Indian, for the most part irrevocably connected in some way with war; and those who were looked upon as possible candidates were in practically all cases those who had proved themselves in battle. Further, there is no escaping the warlike character of many of the various ceremonies or elements of the ceremonies. First of all, there was the appointment of an escort for the high officials of the ceremonies; this group was made up of “reputable brave men . . . ; preferably, they should be members of the various societies, [i.e., warrior societies]. Their functions [were] to escort the superior and mentors when they [went] in procession to perform rites pertaining to the ceremony and to lead in battles against the malevolent Gods and beings to be fought on the site of the ceremonial camp.”<sup>36</sup>

Next came the first of these fights against the malevolent spirits, on the day of the establishment of the ceremonial camp. This was in every way an imitation of a real battle. The only difference was that the enemy was invisible. On

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

the same day there came the ceremony of scouting for the tree. This was a true reproduction of the activities of scouts on the warpath, performed, of course, with a certain ritualistic orderliness that would hardly be possible amidst the exigencies of real warfare.

Again on the second holy day the escort did battle against any and all malevolent beings that might be skulking about the camp or in its vicinity. It was important to the ritual that all evil or disturbing influences be expelled from the camp. On this day, also, the sacred tree, as a result of the scout of the day before, was sought, attacked, and captured by the escort and others who wished to join in the fray. Here also the whole procedure was an imitation of a real, warlike sally and capture; the tree was struck and bound; and the men returned "to the camp singing the victory song and shouting like victorious returning warriors."<sup>37</sup> Later, after the ceremonial felling of the tree, it was carried to the camp, the carriers howling like wolves at each ritualistic halt, "for this [was] the cry of returning warriors who [came] bringing a captive."<sup>38</sup>

Then on the third holy day, after a period of license that seems strangely out of key with the reverential atmosphere prevailing throughout most of the whole Sun Dance season, the escort again did battle against spirits of evil, this time against the obscene gods, Iya and Gnaski, who had been holding brief sway over the camp. This battle was even preceded by a preparatory war-dance.

On the fourth holy day, the most important day of all, just before the final dance, the vows of the young braves were made. This, too, was done with ceremony. All the young men taking part obligated "themselves in the presence of the Sun, each to do his duty *as a warrior* against an enemy of the people."<sup>39</sup> In line, at a signal, they charged four times, once from each cardinal point, around the Dance Lodge.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Last, on this same day, in the Sun-Gaze dance, came a definitely warlike symbolism. The Sun-Gaze dance was that part of the ritual which was most gruesome, that part in which the extreme torture took place. This ceremony was divided into four acts, all of which were characterized by terms of war: (1) *the capture* (of the dancers by their individual attendants who personated warriors taking enemies); (2) *the torture* (of the dancers or "enemies", i.e., the cutting of the flesh and inserting of sticks through the flesh and the binding to the pole by the "captors"); (3) *the captivity* (of the dancers, i.e., gazing at the sun and dancing in an effort to tear themselves loose from their bandage); and (4) *the escape* (of the dancers by tearing the sticks and thongs from their flesh, or by being "rescued", i.e., the flesh cut loose, if their efforts in the dance had not torn them from their thongs by morning of the fifth day). So war practices characterized this the great step in the Sioux' greatest ritual.

It may well be pointed out, however, that for the most part these martial characteristics were external, that they had to do essentially with the mode of expression rather than with the content, the inner significance. Back of the whole ritual, both those parts which are martial in nature and those which are not, there lies a real philosophy and religion. But the fact of the presence of the warlike elements in itself is significant, for it indicates the intimate part that war played in the life of the people; it reflects the natural, matter-of-course attitude toward this dominant occupation of the Indian; it is proof of the thoroughness with which war was incorporated into the fabric of the Indian's existence.

But it is the philosophy and religion underlying the ritual of the Sun Dance that demands special attention in a consideration of the ethical conceptions of the people who practiced it. I have already said that a definitely reverential atmosphere enshrouded the camp and the activities of the people at this season, and that the spirit of acquiescent and sincere solemnity on the part of the people as a whole was a necessary element in the successful performance of the ritual.



All this indicates a consciousness, on the part of the Indian, of a need of *rapport* with the powerful supernatural beings whose beneficence is to be petitioned; it indicates a consciousness of the intimate relationship between the existence of these beings and that of men; it indicates the inherently symbolic character of the Indian's conception of life. Every movement, every bit of ceremony, is truly *ceremonial*; it has a definite meaning and significance.

Clearly indicative of the necessity for group participation, for group-solidarity of desire and spiritual response, in this ritual, came the first move necessary to the person who contemplated performing the dance:

“He should endeavor to know whether *the people* deem his virtues sufficient to enable him to dance the Sun Dance to its completion or not; for, if they think he lacks in one or all of the great virtues, they probably will not become constituents, *and he cannot have the ceremony performed.*”<sup>40</sup>

One of the first requisite duties of a candidate for this ritual was to choose a man to be his mentor, a man—perhaps a shaman—skilled in knowledge of the tribal lore and customs and ceremonies; and the performance of this duty was bound to be one way of the candidate's ascertaining some indication of his standing with his people. The candidate ceremonially requested the chosen one to become his mentor. If the man refused, the candidate might choose another, “but it would be better for him to proceed no farther in the matter because such a refusal would indicate that all his people [were] not willing to become constituents in a ceremony performed for him.”<sup>41</sup> If, however, the invitation pipe were accepted, then the candidate proceeded in his plans and preparations.

This choice of a mentor and the relationship between the two are noteworthy. The attitude that the candidate constantly assumed toward the older man was one of deference and reverence. He subordinated himself to him, mind, spirit,

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

and act. In fact the very word *Tunkasila* used to refer to or address the mentor was applied as a term of reverence and in itself indicated the subordination which the user gave willingly, which he even desired. So in this case as in the case of the people as a whole, harmony of spirit was sought.

The specific symbolic act of harmonization was the smoking of the pipe in common and the burning of sage or of sweetgrass to dispel the spirits of evil, contention, licentiousness, etc. Even during that period of denial which began when the candidate entered the sacred lodge to meditate upon his undertaking and prepare for his coming ordeal, he took with him a pipe and a plentiful supply of tobacco and sweetgrass. It was his privilege, as often as he wished, to appeal to Wohpe, the Beautiful, the Gracious One, through the smoke and incense of tobacco and sweetgrass in which her potency resided; for she was the mediator between gods and men. So the symbolic act of smoking the pipe and burning sage and sweetgrass appeared again and again in connection with all the ceremonies throughout the ritual; thus did the Indian appeal to the mediator between mortals and their deity.

From the time of the announcement of their candidacy and the coming together of the bands till the establishment of the Sun Dance camp, the candidates did not enter into the gayeties or general activities but kept aloof from the people. And after the beginning of the second four-day period of the sacred season and the establishment of the sacred lodge, the candidates remained in the lodge and saw no one but their mentors, their individual attendants, and the superior, until the time of the final torture and dance. They were consecrating themselves to and for a sacred ordeal, and so for the time they were not as other men were; there was something of the uncanny about them, some touch of the supernatural, as it were.

The organization of the ceremonial camp was strict and its establishment accomplished and maintained with the closest adherence to religious law. As I have intimated before, every step in the procedure had its specific symbolism and religious

significance; every move was made according to the dictates of supernatural beings, given long before and now incorporated into shamanistic practice and long-established ritualistic order or received particularly for the immediate occasion in vision or other supernatural communication. Every day had its rites of propitiation, petition, etc. On the second day of the first four-day period, for instance, the council of the ceremonial camp, before any deliberations were entered into or before any further arrangements for special ceremonies were made, smoked to the bear spirit for wisdom in conducting the councils and ordering the activities of the day. On the third day was held a ceremony in which the buffalo spirit was honored and propitiated, for he was "the patron of generosity and hospitality."<sup>42</sup> Then during the fourth day came the announcement of the names of those women who were to fell the sacred tree—women who were chosen carefully, who were mothers, and were "noted for their industry and hospitality."<sup>43</sup> The same day brought the announcement of the names of maidens who might act as female attendants to the dancers during the final ordeal; each, as her name was called, had to rise and publicly declare that "*she [had] never had carnal intercourse with a man;*"<sup>43</sup> then, only if her word remained unchallenged, was she accepted.

The second four-day period of the maintenance of the ceremonial camp, however, was the truly holy season—

"the holy days of midsummer when it is meet to perform ceremonies that pertain to the Gods. Then the

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. '98.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

*Skan*, Sky God, the Great Spirit. Source of all power and motion. Domain, all above the world beginning at the ground. Patron of directions, trails, and of encampment. Symbolic color, blue. (*Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.)

*Tate*, Father of the Four Winds. Governs the year and the coming and going of the seasons. Guards entrance of spirit trail, admitting or excluding spirits from entrance according to judgment of *Skan*. (*Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.)

*Okaga*, the South Wind, last-born son of *Tate*. Pleasing god, bringing joy when he prevails. All water-fowls, his messengers. (*Ibid.*, p. 85.)

*Wi*, the Sun. (*Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.)

Earth has caused the ground to bring forth the grass to fatten the buffalo and the fruits for the benefit of mankind and all things that grow from the ground. The Winged God has caused these things to grow and ripen. *Skan, Tate, and Okaga*, pervade all above the world, and *Wi* (the Sun) smiles upon all.”<sup>44</sup>

On the morning of the first holy day the red herald proclaimed that any one “knowing himself to be *unworthy to appear before the face of the Sun* should not enter the ceremonial camp circle, because if such a one appear[ed] in the ceremonial camp the Sun [would] hide His face with a veil of clouds until the offending one [withdrew], or until the Winged God [swept] or wash[ed] away the offense.”<sup>45</sup> “Unworthy to appear before the face of the Sun:” that very evidently carried fairly definite implications since the proclamation was made in that form. Something more or less specific made one “unworthy to appear before the Sun’s face.” A brief summary of the attributes of the Sun God—*Wi*—throws some light on these implications.

“He ranks first among the Superior Gods. . . . His domain is the spirit world and the regions under the world. . . . Daily He makes His journey above the domain of the Sky and at night He rests with His people in the regions under the world and there communes with His comrade, the Buffalo. *He is the patron of the four great virtues.* . . . His favor may be secured by appropriate offerings and ceremonies and He may grant a communication to one who dances the Sun Dance.”<sup>46</sup>

Later in this same day a second Buffalo Feast was given. “This [was] to propitiate the Buffalo God and the Whirlwind God, for it [was] meet to please these Gods on the first holy day, because They [were] the patrons of *domestic affairs* and of love-making. Therefore, *families march[ed] together in*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81. Thus we see a partial reason for association of buffalo and buffalo symbolism in Sun Dance.

[the] procession." <sup>47</sup> Before the food was served, a shaman danced the buffalo and dedicated the food to the Buffalo, spirit of generosity; and to the feast proper were invited as guests *the old, the poor, and the needy.*

The chief activity of the second holy day was the capturing, bringing in, and painting of the sacred tree. Besides this, the most significant thing was the preparation of two new elements for the next day's ceremonies. Two images, one of a buffalo bull and one of a man, were cut from buffalo skin and painted black. Then the superior, the mentors, and the shamans "by incantation imparted to the image of a man the potency of *Iya, the patron God of libertinism*, and to the image of the buffalo the potency of *Gnaski, the . . . patron God of licentiousness*. When thus prepared, these images [were] carefully wrapped and bound so as to restrain them until they [were] elevated." <sup>48</sup> This prepares one in a measure for the emphasis that was placed upon sex during much of the next day's ceremony.

The third day started, after the usual preliminary rites of greeting to the Sun, etc., with the "procession of sex"; the women in the first half of the column, the men behind. After it came the preparation of the Fetish of the Sun Dance to which was imparted the potency of the buffalo spirit, and then the decoration and raising of the Sun Pole, the Sacred Tree. At the fork of the tree were placed the fetish and the Sun Dance banner. But *above* them were hung the images of the buffalo and the man; the gods represented by these images were to hold sway in the camp till they should be subdued by force. So, the tree in place and firmly planted, there began a period when the camp was given over to extreme boisterousness and licentiousness, a period when such sexuality and familiarity prevailed as would not be endured at any other time; and this lasted until the superior saw fit to end it all and called forth the escort to dance a war dance and do battle with the obscene spirits. The images were shot and

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

beaten from the pole, scorched in the coals of buffalo chips, and trampled under foot by the warriors in their dance of victory. Then the sun and buffalo beings were propitiated and the potency of the fetish maintained "decency in the camp."

The fourth and last holy day was the most significant of all with its solemnity and final ceremony of torture. Rather as a preliminary to the ordeal of the Sun-Gaze Dance, the candidates for the Sun Dance, after their ritualistic installation, danced the Buffalo Dance, in which they imitated the motions of an enraged buffalo, assuming attitudes expressing "defiant bravery".

The climax of the day and of the whole season, however, was, of course, the Sun-Gaze Dance. I have already given some detail regarding this ceremony. I wish here to summarize a few points of significance regarding the torture as they were explained to the dancers by their mentors. Anyone wishing to present himself as a sacrifice to the Sun in the Sun Dance must have inflicted upon himself a wound which would *cause the blood to flow, "for when the blood flows as a token, it is the surest guarantee of sincerity."* Such torture "should cause pain, *for to endure pain willingly for the accomplishment of a purpose proves fortitude.*" "The first great virtue, bravery, is made most manifest by enduring the greatest flow of blood and the most suffering that the rites of the Sun Dance demand." The other torture, gazing steadfastly at the sun during the whole dance, should be endured "so that no one can say that [the dancer] did not dare to look into the face of the sun when making a request of him."<sup>49</sup> Anyone who endured all the demands of the ordeal might expect a communication from the Sun Himself.

HUNKA CEREMONY OR WAVING HORSE-TAILS OVER  
EACH OTHER

In the Hunka Ceremony one finds less evidence of warlike relationships than in any of the other institutions named.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

This ceremony was very ancient in origin. The Oglala Dakotas celebrated it for many, many years; but whether or not it was of Dakota origin is not determined. Suffice it to say that it demands attention because of its inherent social, spiritual, and ethical connotations and implications.

The term *Hunka*—and consequently the relationship which it designates—is somewhat difficult to explain precisely. It described a certain relationship between two individuals. As Walker has it, the relationship, which was bestowed ceremonially by a shaman, bound each individual “to his *Hunka* by ties of fidelity stronger than friendship, brotherhood, or family.”<sup>50</sup> *Hunka* expresses that relationship between two people. *Hunkaya* designates the relationship existing between all people for whom the ceremony has been performed. *Hunkayapi* is the collective term used for all persons for whom the ceremony has been performed; they are *Hunka people*. This group, however, had no organization as a society and the members “recognized no distinctions among themselves as *Hunkaya*.”<sup>50</sup> They felt a certain bond one with another, however, since they all were “of the anointed,” as it were.

It is significant that to some authorities it seems probable that the term *hunka* is of foreign origin, and that it bears a close relationship to the Pawnee *hako*.<sup>51</sup> If this be true, the ceremony was doubtless introduced among the Dakota by the Pawnee. Wissler, as editor of Dr. Walker’s article, points out the fact that “this ceremony is essentially the same as the *Hako* of the Pawnee” and further that “it also appears to be a form of the ceremony known to the early explorers as the ‘Waving the Calumet,’”<sup>52</sup> both of which are vitally significant in their expression of ethical and spiritual conceptions.

I have said that of all the native institutions discussed in this article the one least closely related to war was this, the *Hunka Ceremony*. In truth its central conceptions and im-

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122, footnote.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123, footnote.

plications had much more to do with peace and an increasingly moral and spiritual social order and personal life than with war. There were, however, quite naturally, some evidences of the influence of war to be discerned even in this ceremony, although they were almost entirely relatively unimportant externalities. I wish, however, to point them out before I enter into a discussion of the more significant phases of the ritual. The first episode in the ceremony proper in which the person seeking the *Hunka* relationship appeared was designated as a "symbolic capture". The young man was spoken of symbolically as an enemy. He was "captured" in his tipi by the conductor with the help of the older man who, in the ceremony, was to be made *Hunka* to him. The young man was then led to the ceremonial lodge by the two older men while they sang "the song of a returning warrior." As the entrance of the ceremonial lodge was reached, however, the conductor said, "If any one will take him (the enemy) for *Hunka* we will not kill him." To this the other man responded, "I will take him for my *Hunka*. Take him into the lodge." And the ceremony proceeded.<sup>53</sup>

Again the suggestion of war was made in the speeches of the seven *Mihunka* later in the ceremony: here, however, war and fighting were mentioned only as part of the ordinary occupations of everyday existence; loyalty to *Hunka* obligations was the keynote of these speeches. Such loyalty would please the gods and insure success in war and the chase, the possession of good and industrious women, many offspring, and physical and spiritual comfort.<sup>53</sup>

But the outstanding points of emphasis in the ritual were not these. As is true of all Indian ritual, there was a wealth of imagery, of symbolism and figurative expression in this ceremony. The first ceremonial expression after the lodge had been entered was a cry for *fidelity*. The conductor stood at the door as the people seated themselves and sang four times:

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29.



“The meadow lark my cousin.  
A voice is in the air.”

This is figurative, of course. As Walker explains,

“To the Dakota, the meadow lark is the symbol of *fidelity*, just as among English-speaking people the dove is the symbol of peace. By claiming relationship to the lark the Shaman claimed *power to influence for fidelity*. By saying, ‘A voice is in the air’, he implied that the influence for fidelity pervaded the camp.”<sup>54</sup>

So the virtue of fidelity received the Indian stamp of something greatly to be desired.

Again in the next step of the ceremony there was the appeal to the Great Spirit for peace, concord, and temperance.

“Great Spirit,” [prayed the Conductor,] “be with us this day; West Wind, keep the Winged God in your tipi this day; Sun, we ask that you keep Iktomi and Anog Ite from this camp this day.”<sup>55</sup>

The mythological conception underlying this was “that the God, the West Wind [was] the comrade of and [had] controlling influence over the Winged God, whose voice [was] thunder, and the glance of whose eye [was] lightning, [and whose effect was often anti-natural]; that *Iktomi* [was] the imp of mischief who [delighted] in making ceremonies of no effect; *Anog Ite* [was] a double, or two-faced woman who [fomented] discord and licentiousness.”<sup>56</sup> The implications are obvious.

After the conductor had waved the *Hunka* wands over the young man, he addressed him thus:

“I sought a vision and the Bear God spoke to me. . . . ‘The young man should have the horse-tails waved over him; he will provide for his women and children; he *will be brave and truthful and people will listen to him*; he will have plenty and *give freely*.’”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

This was the prophecy regarding the young man. Then followed a warning to him, for he would need ever to be upon his guard since evil and temptation are at large in the world.

“If you are *lazy* or a *coward* you will sleep with the coyotes. You should not cut your woman’s nose. No woman will give her flesh for you. The buffalo will laugh at you. If you tell *lies*, Iktomi will trick you. Anog Ite will show you both her faces.”<sup>57</sup>

This needs some explanation. That one should sleep with the coyotes simply meant that one was so extremely impoverished that he had no shelter whatever. Custom allowed a Dakota man to cut off the nose of a wife who was *unfaithful to him*. According to custom also, a woman in mourning gashed her legs till the blood flowed, in proof of the sincerity of her grief. But, said the conductor, one who was lazy or cowardly was in such a shameful state that he had no right to shame his wife or to expect her to grieve at his death. “The buffalo will laugh at you” simply meant that a lazy, cowardly one would “have no success in hunting or the chase and [would] want for food.”<sup>58</sup> If Iktomi tricked one or Anog Ite showed both her faces, as happened to a liar, then *misfortune, shame, and despair* pursued him. So were generosity, integrity, and self-respect honored by the counselors.

Later there came a phase of the ritual which reminds one of certain precepts of the Christ. The conductor feigned hunger, and the young candidate gave him the very food from his mouth; soreness of foot, and he gave him his moccasins; nakedness and cold, and he gave him his shirt and his leggings.

Then,

“My friends,” said the Conductor, “this man has done as a Hunka should do. *He has given all that he had. . . .* I will put the red stripe on his face for he is *Hunka*. I put this stripe on his face so that the people may see it and know that he has given all his

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

possessions away. . . . I will put the stripe on his face and on the face of his *Hunka* so that they will remember this day, and when they see one in want they will give to that one." <sup>59</sup>

Finally came the secret ceremony and the last instructions of the conductor. The young man who sought the *Hunka* relationship and his *Hunka* were bound together by thongs, in symbol of the deeper bond. Then the conductor again addressed the younger man:

"You are bound to your *Hunka*, and he is as yourself. . . . What you have is his. What he has he will give you if you wish it. *You must help him in time of need.* If one harms him *you should take revenge*, for it is as if you had been harmed. . . . His children will be as your children and your children shall be as his. If he is killed in war you should not be satisfied until you have provided a companion for his spirit [*i.e.*, avenged his death with another]. If he . . . seeks a vision, you should aid him." <sup>60</sup>

## V

### CONCLUSION

It remains to seek in all this material a possible few outstanding features, a few elements found to be factors in the regulation of and attitude toward Indian life by native society; and to summarize those elements.

I have already pointed out in the body of this discussion that the four great virtues of the Oglalas were courage or bravery, fortitude, generosity, and integrity or fidelity. I am inclined to think that, in some way or another, all of the other ethical elements appearing in the material just surveyed will fall under these four heads. In some cases the relationship will not be obvious; and in no case will I insist upon trying to force this classification. But in general I shall proceed with this hypothesis in view.

One of the first facts that calls for remark in connection

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

with Plains Indian culture is the influence of the supernatural, a fact which has been intimated throughout the foregoing pages.

“Among the Plains Indians,” says Lowie, “almost everything is explained as the result of supernatural revelation; if a warrior has escaped injury in battle it is because he wore a feather bestowed on him in a vision; if he acquires a large herd of horses it is in fulfilment of a spiritistic communication during the fast of adolescence. In a community where explanations of this type hold sway, we are not surprised to find that the origin of rites, too, is almost uniformly traced to a vision and that even the most trivial alteration in ceremonial garb is not claimed as an original invention but ascribed to supernatural promptings.”<sup>61</sup>

It is, in large part, this very fact of the great influence of the supernatural that accounts for the strictness of civil and ritualistic regulation. Since it is through religious revelation that the Indians receive so much of the law of their living and since it is religious sanction that gives great power to certain individuals and groups of officers, one is less surprised than he otherwise would be at the general submission to law, the general orderliness and control of the tribal life, and the submission to disciplinary measures when such measures become necessary. The powerful elements of religious sanction and public opinion here act together for restraint, just as they do in all primitive social groups.

From this same source, the supernatural, endorsed by public opinion till they become traditional, came the exaltation of the four great virtues.

“Custom,” says Hans in his book *The Great Sioux Nation*, “has made endurance and patience . . . . the exponent of every manly virtue. . . . He who subjects himself to the most excruciating torture without the slightest expression of pain is held in the high esteem by his comrades and the tribal ruler, regardless of his other qualities.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Lowie. pp. 94-5.

<sup>62</sup> Hans. p. 76.

Endurance and patience enter as elements into all the great virtues; and it is to be noticed in connection with Hans' remark as with other references that I have made that torture—*physical* torture usually but sometimes *mental* torture, also, as it is contingent upon the physical—is the test of the virtues. That additional expression of Hans', "regardless of his other qualities," is likewise noteworthy. First and foremost was recognition given the four virtues as they expressed themselves in physical prowess, less attention being paid, ordinarily, to their finer but less spectacular expressions in chastity, continence, and the more spiritual but less obviously virtuous personal reactions to circumstance and social need. The Oglalas, and primitive peoples in general, were by no means the only people who thus tended to exalt the physical and obvious to the frequent neglect of finer expressions; but the relative crudeness of their society in general makes it inevitable that the emphasis on physical prowess should be more apparent and perhaps more real as well.

The Oglalas said that the first great virtue was bravery and courage. This was an active, dynamic quality; it meant the meeting of danger fearlessly, the seeking of danger, in fact, especially in battle. For example, one of the bravest acts a warrior could perform was to touch a living enemy in battle with one of his weapons, i.e., to "count coup" on him while he still lived. Such an act would require courage, of course, for one dared death in approaching an enemy closely enough to touch him. Frequently the trait of cunning seems to enter into the Indian conception of bravery. Take, for instance, the symbolism in the Tokala or Kit Fox society. The fox was said to be very cunning, very sly, in finding marrow-bones and prey; and the members were enjoined to personate foxes, treating their enemies as marrow-bones and prey. Always, as well, their bravery included a seeming recklessness, almost a foolhardiness, in the face of sudden danger—a recklessness which can in part be explained by the traditional belief in the powers and guardianship of supernatural beings.

All through all the societies and the ritualistic institutions that I have mentioned this demand for bravery has been outstanding. It was a requisite for every member of every one of the secret societies, and the performing of *outstanding* feats of bravery were required of those who should be officers. "The leader was he who could count the greatest number of valiant deeds. A man must keep up his war record to maintain a place in the order."<sup>63</sup> And these were "orders" which, in a sense, formed the backbone of the tribal society. Relative to the Tokala, at the feast following the spring reorganization, "the chiefs decided on two young men who [had] *killed enemies and distinguished themselves*, whom they [took] to the center to be presented with the lances."<sup>64</sup> And again, at the initiation of the Tokala, the master of ceremonies—the custodian of the pipe—invoked the spirits which presided over *bravery, generosity, and endurance*.

Likewise, in the ceremony of the Sacred Bow, only men who had consistently showed prowess in battle were allowed to perform this ceremony; and, if they did run the "race" of the Sacred Bow, they were required thereafter *to lead in battle, to show great bravery, and to strike at least one or two enemies with the bow or hanger*.<sup>65</sup> As I have made plain, I think, the bravery prerequisite for men desiring to perform the Sun-Gaze dance—in any of its forms—also was a matter of tradition among the Oglalas. Men who would dance this ceremony must have the approbation and co-operation of the tribe as a whole; and that came only with a record for warrior prowess. But in the Sun-Gaze dance itself there came the demand for courage with a little different connotation; here the element of *self-torture* for a purpose entered. The tortures to be endured could be faced and met only by a brave man, one who could contemplate and experience suffering of body, and mind, and spirit perhaps, without flinching. Here

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<sup>63</sup> Webster. p. 132.

<sup>64</sup> Wissler. "Societies," p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Information from He Dog and Short Bull (Buffalo), Oglala Dakotas, at Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota.

we come to an expression of a somewhat more refined conception of bravery—bravery considered as that quality which makes it possible for a man to meet an invisible, immaterial enemy, to suffer for a spiritual cause.

So also in the *Hunka* ceremony, the bravery praised took on a spiritual quality. The courage that was sung was more a fine courage in the personal, peaceful life and its relationships, a courage developed and shown in meeting the more intimate social and spiritual conflicts and questions and trials of existence. This was the bravery exemplified in the unselfish assuming of responsibility for a fellow-being whom one is willing to bind to himself by bonds stronger than those of blood, and whose joys and sorrows, trials and triumphs thereby become as his own. To be sure, occasions might and probably would arise when the obligations of such a relationship would demand the courage of battle; but the emphasis was not upon such occasions. The "courage of the commonplace"—so one might express it—received the crown here.

The second great virtue of the Dakota was fortitude. Under this main head, as related to it directly or indirectly, I am classing a number of points and am indicating at the same time the *social* or *personal* emphasis of each. It goes without saying that all of these have both social and personal aspects; and yet it is likewise true that in some cases one aspect is more prominent than the other. So, as elements in the Indian's life, in which the social aspect was emphasized, I include (1) loyalty to Dakota customs and traditions, which was enjoined at all times in connection with membership in the societies and participation in tribal rituals; and (2) submission to tribal regulations and official decisions, in the case of civil organization and administration as well as ceremonial and strictly martial affairs. These elements besides being predominantly social in significance were likewise as closely related to peace-time as to war-time practices. Largely social in significance also, but at the same time definitely related to war, were (3) the endurance of any hardship and pain of battle, demanded of every warrior, and (4) the strong ob-

jection to retreat found in the Tokala society and the absolute no-flight regulation of the Cante Tinza, Kangi Yuha, and Miwatani warrior societies. Of social significance, too, since they were particularly related to ceremonies, ceremonial objects, and activities concerned with the group as a unit of society—ritual and war especially—were (5) the sex taboos and similar regulations such as those of the Iroka in regard to their virgin singers. In all these there is, of course, a decidedly personal element; but it is subordinated to the other. Even with chastity and continence the social—group—aspect was emphasized.

The “throwing away” of wives, started by the Miwatani society, I am considering as an example of fortitude in which the personal aspect is emphasized, for—though the act of “throwing away” occurred during a dance ceremony—its effect and force was almost entirely a personal matter. The self-torture<sup>66</sup> of particularly the Sun-Gaze dance was another expression of fortitude for the sake of the personal significance; it was administered as part of a personal appeal and in the hope of a personal reward. In all, the demand for self-control was the dominant note; and it was a demand that was felt in the various phases of tribal life, albeit not to the same degrees as with us and often not with the emphasis placed just as we “cultured”, “civilized” peoples would place it.

The third Dakota virtue, generosity—says Walker—is for the Dakota second only to bravery.<sup>67</sup> This virtue again, is chiefly social, specifically economic, in its exercise and significance; but it is directly and critically related to war, since, as I have previously pointed out, Indian wealth was made up largely of horses and these were secured from the enemy. Our concern here, though, is with the virtue of generosity as such, not with the chief means by which its expression was made possible. As Westermarck says of primitives in general, so of the Dakotas:

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<sup>66</sup> The “throwing away of wives” was supposedly one sort of self-torture also.

<sup>67</sup> Walker. p. 161.



“ . . . . the duty of helping the needy and protecting those in danger goes beyond the limits of the family and *gens*. Uncivilized peoples are, as a rule, described as kind toward members of their own community or tribe. Between themselves charity is enjoined as a duty, and generosity is praised as a virtue. Indeed, their customs regarding mutual aid are often much more stringent than our own.”<sup>68</sup>

True to primitive feeling generally, the Dakotas—as has been shown in my quotation from the lectures to the Tokala—discriminated against people other than their own in the exercising of such virtues as generosity and truthfulness. So the precept was for generosity to *all* people *except the enemy*. Nevertheless, the virtue of generosity was tremendously important and was rigorously exercised according to Dakota custom.

In the discussion of societies I called special attention to the fact that as soon as Tokala lance-bearers had been installed “the relatives of the candidate [gave] presents to the poor and needy.”<sup>69</sup> According to the Tokala lectures to initiates

“ . . . . one should give to the needy, whoever they [might] be, excepting an enemy, of everything one possessed; . . . . search for the poor, weak, or friendless and give such all the aid one could.”

and, specifically,

“ . . . . if [one] put a woman away he should see that she was not in want until some other man took her.”<sup>70</sup>

The result was that the social and economic difficulties which have to be cared for by special charity organizations or which go unmet in most modern social orders were rather well attended to by the “savage” social and economic system of the Dakotas.

<sup>68</sup> Westermarck. Vol. I, p. 540.

<sup>69</sup> Wissler. “Societies,” p. 15.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

As a result of this precept in regard to generosity, it happened that a man, besides the necessary record for bravery, must possess the means to give to the needy. Wealth was prized as a means to the meeting of the principle of mutual aid which held such a prominent place among the social precepts of the Dakota. So the Oglala conception of wealth, of *the rich man*—to which I have already made reference—becomes doubly interesting:

“ . . . the rich man [was] one who produce[d] much and [gave] most of it to the poor and dependent in his camp.”

and further,

“Should a man be a great producer but selfishly hoard his property, he would be considered poor and disregarding of the welfare of the people at large.”<sup>71</sup>

In the cases of the Sun Dance and the *Hunka* ceremony, we find a rather dramatic representation of the expression of the virtue of generosity. The Sun-Gaze dancer was offering himself as a sacrifice to his God; as one old Indian has pointed out a man's body is his most precious worldly possession, and when he sacrifices that to the gods in excruciating tortures he is sacrificing himself to the extreme. Although it is true that such sacrifice was often made “by way of substitution, for the purpose of preventing the death of some particular individual,” it is just as true that usually “the offering of human sacrifice [was] mostly a matter of public concern, a method of insuring the lives [and happiness and prosperity] of many by the [sacrifice] of one or a few.”<sup>72</sup>

In either event, however, the sacrifice of the Sun-Gaze dance was usually an expression of generosity. So, too, in

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> Westermarck. p. 454. I have his statement here, although the specific connotation is rather different, because the general fact and spirit are so pertinent to my point. By the term “human sacrifice”, he means the taking of a life as a sacrifice; whereas I am speaking of the sacrifice expressed in extreme torture but not death. Therefore I have changed his word “death” in the last line to “sacrifice”.

the *Hunka* ceremony, the candidate exemplified his spirit of generosity dramatically by ceremonially giving all that he possessed to the one who called upon him in need. The precept of generosity was upheld in all the societies and rituals of the tribe.

Last there was the virtue called integrity or fidelity. In this category falls faithfulness to the traditions and customs, all the highest ideals of the Dakota. A certain conception of social justice is found here, and the demand for fraternal loyalty and for revenge. The tribe as a whole and each band as a unit was organized according to ancient rules; therefore, in order that tribal integrity as well as the integrity of each member might be safeguarded and maintained, adherence to the rules was necessary. "The members of a band [were] entitled to the force of the entire band in the protection of their rights and they must obey the laws and customs of the Oglala and the edicts of their council."<sup>73</sup>

So the *akicita*, licensed by custom and appointed by the chief councilors of the band, maintained strict order in camp and during tribal moves. Privileged to judge in matters of crime, disorders, disputes, and various other questionable situations in the civil and social order, and to administer punishment on the spot—even to the extent of death—the *akicita* constituted a real power for peace and justice in the community. They themselves, however, must first of all be men of integrity, men of truth and honor; according to tribal regulation, these officers were accountable only to the *akicita* group for neglect of duty or for misconduct; but, if an *akicita* were found guilty of a crime—theft, lying, murder, the stealing of a brother society member's wife, unjust administration of his office, etc., etc.—it was required that he be made to pay a greater penalty than that which would be placed upon anyone else for such crimes.

If it were found that a shaman, the priest and wiseman—the "medicine man"—of the band, were exercising "his authority only to gratify his own desires, the *akicita*, or marshals of the camp, [might] adjudge and punish him accord-

<sup>73</sup> Walker. p. 73.

ing to his offense, even to the taking of his life. If, in the exercise of his attributes as a shaman he wrongfully injured another, the one injured [might] exact from him a satisfaction for the injury, which might be to take his life.”<sup>74</sup>

All this does not mean that accused persons had no benefit of counsel, no possibility of appeal. *Akicita* officers were supposed to listen to pleas and heed such pleas. There was no possibility of appeal *beyond* the *akicita*, however, except to the council, either for accused *akicita* officers or for the ordinary citizen; and usually the decision rested with the *akicita*.

The Miwatani society, too, was a recognized force for peace. Members of that society particularly were looked upon as peace-makers; as I have pointed out elsewhere, the society pipe was emphatically a *peace* pipe and was brought to the scene of disturbance and strife in camp in an effort to re-establish harmony. If it were discovered that a member of Miwatani had been a party to the creation of a disturbance, he was promptly expelled from the society. So, did this society cast its vote for social and civil harmony.

It may be well, in connection with the point regarding social harmony, to recall the Buffalo Feast on the first holy day of the Sun Dance season. It seemed fitting to the Oglala that this ceremony of propitiation should be performed at that holy time since the Buffalo God and the Whirlwind God with him were “patrons of *domestic affairs* and of love-making.”<sup>75</sup> Thus was another plea for peace and harmony made.

Pertinent here, also, are the qualifications required of the women who cut down the Sacred Tree for the Sun Dance. “These women should be *mothers* noted for their *industry* and *hospitality*.”<sup>76</sup> In this way, in part, was their integrity and strength exemplified.

Likewise significant here was the treatment of the spirits of license and debauch after the period of hilarity and

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

licentiousness on the third holy day of the Sun Dance. One wonders at that period of debauchery in the midst of a sacred season. Yet it might appear that it came for the sake, as it were, of contrast, in order that the need of the overthrowing and subduing of these ethically vicious spirits might be dramatically and impressively represented; in this way could be portrayed the necessity for virtue to triumph over unrestraint. A comparative study of the "clown" elements in various ceremonies of the various tribes of North America as well as primitive practices of Europe may well throw light on the true significance of this period in the Sun Dance.

Then there was that factor so often found among primitive peoples, the demand for vengeance. It is represented specifically among the societies in the regulations of the Sotka, as I have already shown. "A life for a life" or "Several lives for a life" was the spirit of the demand for vengeance, for blood-revenge. Once more, it was represented in the *Hunka* ceremony when the conductor, addressing the candidate in the final period, says:

"If one harms [your *Hunka*] you should take revenge, for it is as if you had been harmed."<sup>77</sup>

(the matter-of-factness of the final clause implying the deep-seatedness of the tradition of vengeance); and again:

"If he should be killed in war you should not be satisfied until you have provided a companion for his spirit."<sup>78</sup>

Father De Smet explains, in a measure, this thirst for vengeance thus, and so makes clear the relation of desire for revenge to the virtue of integrity:

"He (the Indian) seeks revenge, because he firmly believes that it is the only means by which he can retrieve his honor when he has been insulted or defeated; because he thinks that only low and vulgar minds can forget an injury, and he fosters rancor because he deems it a virtue."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> De Smet. p. 302.

Westermarck points out the fact that "from one point of view, blood-revenge is . . . a form of human sacrifice."<sup>80</sup> The blood of the dead called for vengeance, for the spirit wandered restlessly demanding satisfaction at the hands of kinsmen until the crime was avenged. It would seem that this point of view is in large part the one assumed in the *Hunka* injunction:

"If he should be killed in war you should not be satisfied until you have provided a companion for his spirit."<sup>81</sup>

The implication might be explained even farther, however, by the fact that according to Plains Indian belief the spirits of enemies slain by a warrior were doomed to serve him when he should enter the Happy Hunting Grounds; therefore, since his *Hunka* was as himself and whatever was his belonged to his *Hunka*, he might send on the spirit of one of his victims as companion for the killed *Hunka*.

At all events, revenge was an attempt to redeem honor, to vindicate integrity—the integrity of the slain or injured one, the integrity of the family, and the integrity of the band and its traditions.

No further resumé is necessary, I believe. My discussion is by no means exhaustive; it was purposely limited in scope and of necessity limited more or less in treatment, many of the implications of the rules of societies and mandates of rituals not being followed through to the final possible meaning. The material which I have brought together can leave no doubt, however, that there was a fairly-well established and comprehensive system of ethics in the culture of the Plains Indians as they are represented by the Oglala—a system which naturally bears a close relationship to the type of life which they traditionally lived, a system which, while it does not coincide with the "civilized" codes, bears at some points rather strong resemblances to ours and at other points seems rather superior.

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<sup>80</sup> Westermarck. p. 482.

<sup>81</sup> Walker. p. 139.

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