



## **White Buffalo Calf Woman (Ptecincala Ska Wakan): The Gift of the Sacred Pipe**

Before the appearance of the Buffalo Calf Woman, the Indian honored the Great Spirit. But for the Sioux, the coming of Buffalo Calf Woman brought a most important instrument, the pipe, which is now used in all ceremonies.

The sacred pipe came into being many, many years ago. Two men of the Sioux tribe were hunting when they saw something approaching in the distance. As the figure grew close, they observed a maiden, attired in white buckskin, carrying a bundle wrapped in buffalo hide.

As she walked slowly toward them she sang out and repeated: "Behold me. For in a sacred manner I am walking."

One of the men had evil thoughts about this maiden and moved towards her. The other Sioux tried forcibly to restrain him, but the evil warrior pushed the good warrior away. A cloud descended and engulfed the evil one, and when it lifted, his body was a skeleton being devoured by worms, symbolising that one who lives in ignorance and has evil in their hearts may be destroyed by their own actions.

The good warrior knelt in fear, trembling as the buckskin-clad maiden approached. She spoke to him, telling him to fear not and to return to his people and prepare them for her coming. The warrior did so, and the maiden appeared, walking among them in a sunwise (clockwise) direction.

She held forth her bundle and said: "In this bundle is a sacred pipe, which must always be treated in a holy way. No impure man or woman should

ever see it. With this sacred pipe you will send your voices to Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, Creator of all, your Father and Grandfather. With this sacred pipe you will walk upon the Earth, which is your Grandmother and Mother. All your steps should be holy. "

"The bowl of the pipe is red stone, which represents the earth. A buffalo calf is carved in the stone facing the center and symbolizes the four-legged creatures who live as brothers among you. The stem is wood and represents all growing things. Twelve feathers hang from where the stem fits the bowl, from the Spotted Eagle; these represent all the winged brothers who live among you."

"All these things are joined to you who will smoke the pipe and send voices to Wakan Tanka. When you use this pipe to pray, you will pray for and with everything. The sacred pipe binds you to all your relatives, your grandfather and father, your grandmother and mother."

"The red stone represents the Mother Earth on which you will live. The Earth is red, and the two-leggeds who live upon it are also red. Wakan Tanka has given you a red road, a good and straight road to travel. And you must remember that all people who stand on this earth are sacred."

"From this day, the sacred pipe will stand on the red earth, and you will send your voices to Wakan Tanka."

"There are seven circles on the stone, which represent the seven rites in which you will use the pipe."

The Buffalo Calf Woman then instructed the people to send messengers to the different bands of the Sioux nation, to bring in the leaders, the medicine people, and the holy ones. When the people gathered, she instructed them in the sacred ceremonies. She told them of the first rite, the Keeping of the Soul. She told them that the remaining six rites would be revealed to them through visions. As she prepared to leave she said: "Remember how sacred the pipe is, and treat it in a sacred manner, for it will be with you always. Remember also that in me are four ages. I shall leave you now, but shall look upon you in every age, and will return in the end."

The Sioux begged the woman to stay among them. They promised to build a fine lodge and let her select a warrior to provide for her, but she declined their offer.

"No, the Creator above, the Great Spirit, is happy with you, you the grandchildren. You have listened well to my teachings. Now I must return to the spirit world."

She walked some distance away from them and sat down. When she

arose, she had become a white buffalo calf. She walked farther, bowed to the four quarters of the universe, and then disappeared into the distance. Her sacred bundle was left with the people. To this day, a Sioux family, the "Keepers of the Sacred Bundle," still guards the bundle and its contents on one of the Sioux reservations.

Today, other ceremonies have supplanted some of the original seven ceremonies taught by the Buffalo Calf Woman. The Sun Dance, Sweat Lodge and Vision Quest are still major ceremonies that are widely practiced. The Pipe Ceremony itself is now used to open gatherings, meetings, and sweat lodges. The Pipe Ceremony is used in naming ceremonies, in which one is given an Earth or Indian name. It is also used in Indian marriage ceremonies.

In times of religious persecution, the visible ceremonies had to go underground. Sweat lodges, which were common around most lodges and tipis in the early reservation days, started to disappear when Christian missionaries began to entrench their power with governmental authorities. The pipe was much easier to hide. Sioux spirituality thus came to depend for its secret expression upon the pipe. Now that Native Americans have won back their religious freedom, the Pipe Ceremony remains established.

The Buffalo Calf Woman told the Sioux where to find the sacred red stone to make the peace pipe. In the pipestone quarries in southwestern Minnesota, near the town of Pipestone, the Sioux and all other Indian nations dug for their red stone in peace. They also traveled to and from the quarries in peace. No warfare was allowed. Peace councils were often held in this place.

Mother Earth is now in grave danger. Why not turn to ceremony, at least to get the feeling, the message that Mother Earth must live? She is speaking to us quite strongly already. Let Her speak also in ceremony. We can gain a special resolve by communicating within the ceremonies. By listening to nature through nature-based ceremonies, we can be like the Sioux. Deforestation, the thinning ozone layer, global warming, overpopulation and the pollution of our streams, rivers and oceans present great odds. But we can adapt. We can live, and our planet can survive.

The Seven Sacred Rites: The seven traditional rituals use the sacred pipe in accordance

with the Buffalo Calf Woman's teachings:

1. The Keeping of the Soul
2. Inipi: The Sweat Lodge Ceremony or Rite of Purification
3. Hanblecheyapi: Vision Quest
4. Wiwanyag Wachipi: The Sun Dance Ceremony
5. Hunkapi: Making Relatives
6. Ishnata Awicalowan: Preparing a Girl for Womanhood
7. Tapa Wanka Yap: Throwing the Ball