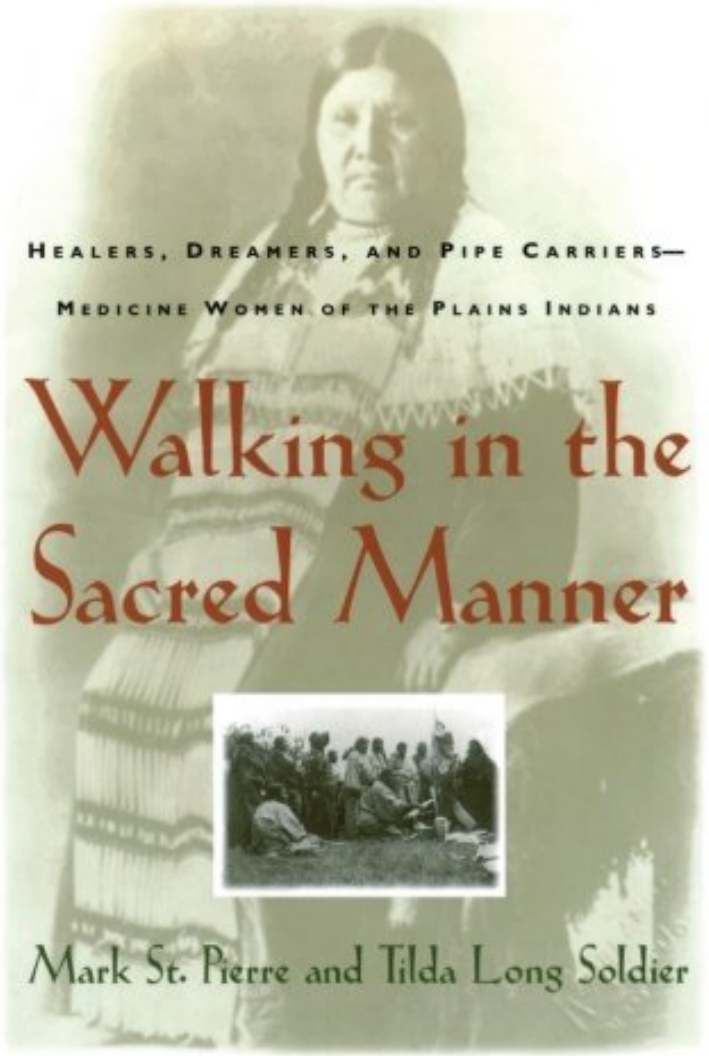
Walking in the Sacred Manner: Healers, Dreamers, and Pipe Carriers--Medicine Women of the Plains

Mark St. Pierre
*ePub | *DOC | audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF*



#183483 in Books Mark St Pierre 1995-05-30 1995-05-30Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.25 x .70 x 6.12l, .66 #File Name: 0684802007240 pagesMark St. PierreEthnic and Tribal;Native American Studies | File size: 70.Mb

Mark St. Pierre : Walking in the Sacred Manner: Healers, Dreamers, and Pipe Carriers--Medicine Women of the Plains before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Walking in the Sacred Manner: Healers, Dreamers, and Pipe Carriers--Medicine Women of the Plains:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This is the most in depth and meaningful account of ...By Rachel J. WebsterThis is the most in depth and meaningful account of Lakota spirituality that I have read, and I've studied many books in the realms of scholarship, history and more new age interpretation of Lakota beliefs. This book very respectfully and sincerely gathers the accounts of traditional medicine women and introduces the reader to living and historical traditions of dreamers, ghost callers, and healers. The information here is warm, accessible, complex and profound. This book is a must read for everyone interested in female spirituality and Lakota tradition. I am very grateful that the information and wisdom here has been shared.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. eye openingBy Bultheel janI thought this was a most interesting book on indian religious lifestyle. Plain testimonials of ordinary women, who are not so ordinary after all. But the simplicity and the spontanity of their voices is overwhelming. I liked this book very much.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Walking in the Sacred Manner: Healers, Dreamers, and Pipe Carriers--Medicine Women of the PlainsBy J. AhnemanI liked it so well, I bought another copy as a gift. This is full of truths about the native culture of medicine women and a few men as well. Much is not recent history, however it does try to illustrate what has happened to native tribal members with some of the 'not so good' influences of modern day. Many references also have further detail to help one get a 'feel' for growing up pre-reservation and living on a reservation in the early 20th century. The best part is how the healers work. Different methods depending on the need.

Walking in the Sacred Manner is an exploration of the myths and culture of the Plains Indians, for whom the everyday and the spiritual are intertwined and women play a strong and important role in the spiritual and religious life of the community. Based on extensive first-person interviews by an established expert on Plains Indian women, Walking in the Sacred Manner is a singular and authentic record of the participation of women in the sacred traditions of Northern Plains tribes, including Lakota, Cheyenne, Crow, and Assiniboine. Through interviews with holy women and the families of women healers, Mark St. Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier paint a rich and varied portrait of a society and its traditions. Stereotypical images of the Native American drop away as the voices, dreams, and experiences of these women (both healers and healed) present insight into a culture about which little is known. It is a journey into the past, an exploration of the present, and a view full of hope for the future.

From the Back CoverWalking in the Sacred Manner is an exploration of the myths and culture of the Plains Indians, for whom the everyday and the spiritual are intertwined and women play a strong and important role in the spiritual and religious life of the community. Based on extensive first-person interviews by an established expert on Plains Indian women, Walking in the Sacred Manner is a singular and authentic record of the participation of women in the sacred traditions of Northern Plains tribes, including Lakota, Cheyenne, Crow, and Assiniboine. Through interviews with holy women and the families of women healers, Mark St. Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier paint a rich and varied portrait of a society and its traditions. Stereotypical images of the Native American drop away as the voices, dreams, and experiences of these women (both healers and healed) present insight into a culture about which little is known. It is a journey into the past, an exploration of the present, and a view full of hope for the future.About the AuthorMark St. Pierre is the author of Madonna Swan: A Lakota Woman's Story. He is an adjunct professor of sociology, anthropology, and creative writing at Regis University in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. St. Pierre has spent twenty years living and learning among the Lakota.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. Chapter 1Healers, Dreamers, Pipe Carriers: Communication with the SacredAt a certain point in the ceremony while I am singing, I start to cry. They are not tears of sadness or joy, but recognition. I cry because I have the feeling, and I know "they" are there.Wounye' Waste' Win: Good Lifeways Woman, LakotaIf we look back far enough, we see that most cultures in the world had something similar to what in English is called a shaman, a specialist in communication with the spirit realm. Common threads in the fabric of shamanism everywhere in the world include the belief that an ordered spirit world exists, that all in creation, including man, have a soul that lives after death, and that communication with these spirits -- plant, animal, and human -- provides important information to the living. All remaining forms of shamanism, which has also been called "the original religion" and "the world's first and oldest religion," share certain ideas. All shamans believe that through drugs, specialized ritual, self-denial, or a combination of these a sacred altar can be created, a mysterious place and time in which direct communication with the spirit realm can be accomplished. In Latin this is called an axis mundi, or a central axis to the universe, where the various layers or dimensions of creation and reality are brought close together.In some parts of the world shamanism remains a major force in the daily practices and beliefs of aboriginal peoples. In the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, the hints of ancient shamanism remain in artifacts, cave paintings, and even regional variations of major religious denominations. Halloween is a good example of this blend of the Christian with the pre-Christian in our own Euro-American culture. The spirits of the dead -- skeletons and ghosts, our ancestors by impersonation -- come back on this special day to beg for their share of the harvest. The day is still celebrated, complete with the admonition of the spirits to abide by the ancient policy "trick or treat."Sensing and Understanding the SacredThe Sun Dance, in some form or other, is virtually universal to tribes on the northern plains. It is a ceremony in which men and women pledge one to four days of abstinence from food and

water. They dance in the hot sun from morning until dark, even throughout the chilly night. Among the Lakota, the dancers may further vow to be staked through the skin of their chest or back to the Sun Dance tree (the stakes and cords representing human ignorance), or they may drag a buffalo skull or offer small pieces of flesh from their upper arm. These flesh offerings from the upper arm are generally a sacrifice made by women, although men may make it as well. The Cheyenne and Crow do not include flesh offerings in their Sun Dance. Suffering is a vital part of a successful Sun Dance. If a few of the dancers are fortunate, they may collapse and experience a vision.A vow is made a year before the dance in return for a spiritual favor or in petition for a favor, which may include such things as the healing of a sick family member or the safe delivery of a new child into the world. Although personal reasons for Sun Dancing vary, the community aspect of this ceremony is to pray for new life, that the (feminine) world might be green and bountiful with the male influence of rain. The outer arbor or shade of the Sun Dance lodge is round, made of pine or cottonwood boughs, or even plastic tarp, but always in the center is a tall cottonwood tree, specially selected by a party of male scouts, often including four virgins who count coup on the tree with sacred axes dipped in red earth paint to bless the tree. It is then cut, lowered to shoulder height, and carried back to the Sun Dance camp. Offerings, consisting of rawhide cutouts of a man and buffalo bull, as well as pieces of cloth into which tobacco has been tied, are tied into its upper boughs. These represent participating families' wishes for themselves and the collective world.It is difficult to know how Plains Indians, whether Lakota, Cheyenne, or Crow, feel when they see the Sun Dance tree or attend a doctoring ceremony. To them the cottonwood tree is the cosmic tree, its limbs in the clouds, its spiritual roots spreading deep into Mother Earth and to the four directions. This tree is the center of the sacred universe during the ceremony.Some anthropologists might say that is a procreative or phallic symbol. Certainly this is true in the sense that it is a central ceremony devoted to praying for the health and future generations of the people. This symbolic "fertility" is further enhanced by the rawhide cutouts of the man and buffalo bull tied into its branches of living green. The successful completion of the Sun Dance as a succession of smaller rituals including the selection and setting up of the tree, sweat lodges of purification, the specific songs, ritual gift giving, flesh offerings, and so on, in turn affects the people and their immediate future.Spiritual beliefs and definitions are also set in a specific language. This language then shapes symbolic concepts that are shared with those who speak that language. It is difficult in a book like this to translate spiritual languages, and the broad concepts they represent, from one language to another. It must be remembered that all conversations and scenes related by the tribal peoples in this book were experienced in that tribal language.The symbols of the pipe, drum, sweet grass, eagle feathers, and parts of or representations of animals like buffalo, wolf, or elk carry deep-seated, shared meaning acquired by Native Americans from birth. It is critical for the traveler into the world of medicine women to understand that Indian culture shares numerous internal symbols, concepts, and ideas that these people have been exposed to from the earliest stages of their life. As a Hopi friend wisely said, "Our children feel and hear the drum before birth." The drumbeat is likened to the heart of the people and, because it is useful in restoring vitality, remains a part of Lakota healing rites. The touch of an eagle feather carries a spiritual residue from the eagle that transmits a healing force. A dream of a bear might call a man or woman to be a healer or, more specifically, to become an herbalist. Of course, these dreams are not in English, or in symbols shared universally with the dominant society.Each time a story is told in oral form only the intention, nuance, and mood of that rendering is captured. Each story retold during a cold winter night, whether from tribal tradition or family history, reflects what the teller wishes to highlight in that one telling. It is difficult if not impossible for those not raised within a culture to participate meaningfully in those ceremonies or understand them entirely. In the Indian community it is the shamans, the special holy men or women who understand and can interpret the deep meaning of these ceremonies because of their specialized training and ritual practice.Power As in all belief systems, faith in a spiritual reality beyond this physical world is essential. Plains Indians often speak of the "power" of their religion. "Power," in the modern, physical world, could be defined simply as the ability to get things done. Power has the same meaning for Plains Indian people in their perception of the spirit world. As Neva Standing Bear Paxton, a Lakota spiritual leader in the Denver native community, says, "When I am asked about my religion, I talk about being Episcopalian, but for my spirituality, I go with my Indian ways."In this context Neva suggests that "religion," which to her is Episcopalian, is a system of thought and rituals that, though they may be concerned with salvation, are relatively powerless to affect changes in the conditions of this world, including the restoration of a person to physical health. When Neva wants to do this she turns to the old traditional Lakota system and its very different understanding of spiritual power.Power may occur on any number of levels, from the power to sense danger to the power to call spirits into a ceremony to doctor a patient.The manifestation of power can come through a shaman's diagnosis, "treatment," or prediction of the outcome of an illness. A modern shaman may address other problems, such as locating a missing person or solving family problems such as alcoholism. No matter what the problem may be, the holy person must accurately predict the future and tell the patient what is needed in order to achieve this cure or avoid future problems. This is risky business, and not only because it places the shaman or "soul" traveler in potential spiritual danger when he or she flies into the spirit realm to recall a lost aspect of the soul but also because the shaman may have to challenge the spirit helpers of a "witch" who has created this trouble for the patient. Eventually the shaman may diminish his or her own spiritual powers through a lifetime of use and dissipation. It is also treacherous in that the journey may take the shaman into a

strange world of trials and danger where he or she may be hurt. It is also dangerous because in a tribal society the shaman's reputation rests on the accuracy of his or her "predictions." Positive results also reassure the faithful and remind them of the mysterious and tremendous powers of creation.Shamanism Many religious scholars believe man's primeval form of "spiritual contact" comes through some form of transformation in which a spirit takes over the body of the trained and initiated holy person or shaman. This transformation may be brought on by fasting or be drug-induced, or the practitioner may be catapulted into the sacred or entered by spirits through the use of ritual. With practice, the shaman may also achieve this state spontaneously. In this state, the shaman may, as in the following story related by Madonna Swan about a Bear spirit helper, acquire the posture, movement, and voice of another being.When I was eight years old, we went to the Fourth of July in Faith. My dad was going to take us to the rodeo. A real rodeo! We were all excited, but that time I had a real bad toothache and was really suffering with it. Dad had a car then, and I was lying in the back seat.I was too sick to go to the rodeo, and I was disappointed; I just cried. There was a woman from Bridger who was a good herb doctor. Her name was Mrs. Blue Hair, and she was a real, old-fashioned Indian woman. Mom saw Mrs. Blue Hair and her family camped not too far from us at the Faith Fair. Mom went to talk to Mrs. Blue Hair about my toothache. "Yes, I can help her, at least until she has it pulled or fixed. Lay her down on the cot in your wall tent then pull the flaps down. I'll be over in a minute."Soon Mom told me to get in the tent and pull the flaps down. "Why? What for?" I asked."She is going to try and doctor that tooth so you can go the rodeo," Mom said. Mrs. Blue Hair came. First she sang and prayed in Indian with her hands outstretched to each direction. When she had finished the medicine song, she bent over me. She sounded like a bear was in her chest. Mrs. Blue Hair took some white powdered medicine from a little buckskin sack and rubbed it all over my tooth. It looked like chalk. When she was finished it hurt less. By the time the rodeo was ready to begin, my tooth was much better. So in a way it was Indian medicine that got me to my first rodeo! Robert Blue Hair, the old woman's son, had that gift until he died a few years ago.This communication or temporary possession by spirit helpers is done through what is called "shamanic transformation," in which shamans become ecstatic, literally "leave themselves," and, in a trance state, are infused with and take on the actual behavior and personality of the helper spirit, or enstatic, and go inside themselves to contact the spirit helper. In a milder form, the shamanic medium communicates with a spiritual visitor to the ritual altar or participates in "spirit flight" into the land of shadows and the spirits or across great distances in the physical world. These last two are the types of shamanistic transformation still primarily used by Plains Indian people. The following passage from Tanya Ward, a full-blood educator from Cheyenne River Reservation, speaks of the Lakota reality of soul travel:I first met Mrs. Kills Enemy when I was five years old. I lived that summer with my grandmother, Nellie Hump, in Red Scaffold. My grandmother had a lot of visitors that summer. These people were called by relationship, not by name.It was late afternoon when my grandmother began pitching another tent outside and moving furniture into the tent. It was a time of excitement. My grandmother used to sit outside and look either south, west, or east because these were the directions that the roads ran. My parents lived to the east, my cousins lived to the south, and my great-uncle, John Hump, and his family lived west.Grandma used to say, "They are coming," and someone would arrive. She seemed to have a sense of people coming to visit. Soon there were many pots cooking, and the log house smelled of bread baking.Grandma kept saying, "They are going to be here soon." I used to wonder in later years if my grandmother knew folks were coming because she received mail, or did she have one of the feelings once again. I used to ask her, "How do you know?"She would say, Slolwaye [I just know].It was near evening when a car drove up to the house. My grandmother ran outside to receive the guests. There were several people in the car, but only one woman emerged. She was of average height. I know this because Grandma Hump was very tall, and she stood over this woman. The visitor was stately in stature, and her skin was light in color. My grandmother was very dark because she was always outside. The woman wore a dark, long dress. On her head she wore a dark flowered scarf that was pulled over her face, making her face barely visible.She came inside and took her shawl off, placing it on the back of a chair, along with her scarf. Her hair was shiny and black. It was braided in two braids, one on either side of her face. She sat down at the table and began looking around. She turned and looked at me and asked, "Who is this sitting on the bed?" My grandmother began explaining who my parents were and why I was there with her. Our Indian names were given first, then our English names.The mysterious woman had a very good command of the English language because she stopped speaking Lakota for a moment and said, "You can call me Mrs. Kills Enemy." When she looked at me it was as though she could see right into my head and read my thoughts. It was a piercing look. I wasn't afraid of her, but she appeared as though people should be afraid of her. She invited me to sit beside her and eat with her. She asked me questions about how old I was, and "Are you in school" " Do you have any brothers and sisters?"I said no.She said, "You will have a sister when you are older."I asked her, "Why did you come?"She said, "Your grandmother is ill. She is really sick, but she won't stay in bed. I came to get her well.""How are you going to do that?" I asked."Well I am going to pray with the pipe and give her some medicine. When we have done that she will be well."Then I said to her, "I didn't know Grandma was ill. How did you know my Grandma is ill?"She replied, "I came to see her because I saw her in a dream, and I saw that she was sick." Much of what that woman and my Grandma Hump spoke of did not make any sense to me until recently. There were speaking about "mind travel" or "soul travel," and they could do it. Mrs. Kills Enemy struck me as someone different than anybody I had met. I think that she

possessed special powers that made her different. To me as a child, it seemed that she exuded an aura of mystery. This was my first impression of Mrs. Kills Enemy. She was a very different person. She created a feeling in me that is very hard even yet to describe.For traditional practitioners, these journeys are undertaken only under the most dire circumstances and are thought to be very dangerous. This power may also be perceived as finite. When it is expended, so, in a sense, is the life force of the holy person who possesses the power. The Lakota believe that prayers or ceremonies used to Hgmuga, to intentionally hurt others (using black magic or witchcraft), may actually result in damage and destruction to the family of the holy person who loosed these powers.Danger for a shaman may include the pollution, weakening, or complete loss of their own life force, of their very soul. The shaman may be judged finished or in decline if he or she has serious health problems. Holy people in this situation are even avoided altogether. It is not uncommon, then, for holy people to feel abandoned at the end of their lives. When he was dying of cancer of the spine, Chauncey Dupris, a Minnecojou Lakota holy man, said, "When they need to be doctored they come and get me, any time day or night. Now that I am sick, no one comes over here to doctor me. There is no rest for me, no retirement until I pass from this earth."The Shaman's Role in a Tribal WorldThat man can successfully communicate with the spirit realm was not foreign to the ancestors of most people of the world, including Euro-Americans. Despite the spread of the Holy Roman Empire and Catholicism across Europe, much remains of older beliefs. Shrines and votive candles are still used in the Catholic church by the faithful seeking the divine intercession of a patron saint. In Ireland, offering cloths are still left at special springs.All practitioners and followers of shamanic traditions share the belief that the soul has multiple aspects and that spirit flight is possible while the living body is left behind. Most share the idea that it is the shaman who helps maintain a spiritual equilibrium in the human world and in man's relationships with the spirit, plant, and animal worlds.The shaman must be familiar with the often treacherous journey to the world of spirits and be skilled at interpreting their messengers. He or she must be able to construct an axis mundi, or altar, and, through ritual, journey to the spirit world at will or be able to "hear" the spirit messengers who journey to this side of the veil. The shaman must then interpret sacred information to the patient, the patient's family, or, on some occasions, the community.Lakota call this altar the Hocoka. In all shamanic religions, the common people believe that the shaman is the receptacle and fountain of sacred knowledge for the community. The shaman is also the source of sacred songs, art, philosophy, and ritual. The shaman is thus shaped by his or her unique tribal tradition but also, in turn, continues to shape the ongoing tradition through the eventual sharing of their own rituals, songs, and sacred experiences with apprentices. All traditions, even ceremonies of shamanism, are vital and, as living things, must help the people in the times and conditions in which they live. There are, for instance no buffalo hunts today; thus some of the rituals used to speak with the buffalo nation have been lost as modern shamans deal with the problems of modern tribal people.Wiyan Wakon: Holy WomenWomen appear in critical roles in the creation stories of Plains Indian people as both "positive" and "negative" characters. Some had the capability to be both. These people accepted and honored the female side of creation in all its manifestations.Among Plains Indians, special people receive messages of "divine selection" through their dreams to a calling as a healer. Because men and women are equally capable of sacred, profound, and complex dreams, the elevation of a lay woman to holy woman is always possible.The Northern Plains Indians were subsistence hunters who gathered plants for medicine and food and intercepted the great migrations of buffalo and elk. Winter snows, drought, changing animal migration patterns, tornadoes, disease, and occasional starvation were facts of life. The successful interaction with the creator and the spiritual forces of the natural world helped the humans to survive.Through their dreams and visions, certain men and women could predict changes in weather or even, with the proper prayers, change threatening weather. Movements of animal like the buffalo were predicted or even guided by proper communication between the humans and the spirits of the animals they relied upon for food. Special people who had dreams of these animals became sacred interpreters and petitioners to these animal grandmother spirits. They became shamans.Beyond the childbearing years -- beyond menopause -- is when many opportunities for spiritual service to their people open up for Lakota women, including the central one here, the calling to help those who are suffering. Whatever the woman's calling -- this is when here powers become manifest, mature. It is the point in life into which all the women healers in this book, living and dead, passed before they became holy women. The dreams have begun earlier, as might apprenticeship in the ritual ways, but fulfillment was virtually always postponed until the woman was beyond childbearing, and her awesome female powers had mellowed.Like men, Plains Indian women may be called to a number of distinct if occasionally overlapping roles in the spiritual service of their people. The term holy woman is as vague as is the term healer. Native terms are much more complex and numerous than clichs like "medicine man." Understanding these names in the context of Indian people and the language they come from is critical to an accurate understanding of the approach and role of the holy woman in her contact with the realm of spirits.Ihan'bla: To DreamPlains Indian children raised close to tradition learn to listen to and interpret the dream world, which is the lasting and sacred world. The ability to acquire the clear memory of dreams, to discriminate between significant and insignificant dreams, to remember them in detail, and to interpret them satisfactorily must be acquired in childhood. The amount of time it takes to interpret or understand a dream might be moments, or it might be a lifetime. Most of the traditional crafts of Plains Indian women are tedious and repetitive, leaving a great amount of time for reflection and contemplation. Both men and women use dreams to

learn about the sacred world. For some it is a lifetime of exploration and learning the truths of the universe.Some women in their special capacity as "dreamers" are called upon, by the clarity and regularity of their dreams, to warn people of impending problems and to predict and possibly alter the outcome of events by understanding what their dreams are about. The dream of a buffalo might cause the dreamer to feed the people as the buffalo does, for example. Dreams of lightning might call upon the dreamer to put on a Heyoka (Clown Dance) in which the flesh of dogs is used to restore the dreamer to his or her old self and extend health to the sick and elderly. A tribal culture's notion that dreams themselves can hold tremendous power to affect the dreamer and perhaps his or her family or community as well gives dreams this central significance in daily life.Other dreamers may be called upon to start a society, or act out in public ritual, their ihan bla' (dreams), such as the performances of Elk Dreamers or Heyoka (Thunder Dreamers), or perhaps to lead a ceremony such as a Sun Dance. Only a few women are selected by their spirit dreams to be medicine women or holy women. Dreaming of certain spirits may call women to a variety of specific vocations or talents.In the nineteenth century, before the reservation system began to alter the traditional social fabric, young women were invited by older women to join craft societies related to the spirits they dreamed about, such as the quillwork societies, or lodge sewing societies. All women, however, were and still are expected to be aware of cultural ideas and values that command respect in the eyes of the community. After the turn of the nineteenth century these craft and dream societies began to die slowly with the passing of members. Although these societies no longer exist, many of the beliefs and attitudes about dreams and spiritually derived talent for traditional crafts remain. This is certainly true of porcupine quillworkers. This art form, perhaps even more so than in the past, is considered sacred.Women who become "doctors" are in essence no different from any other woman in the community except that they have an additional role to fulfill. It is important to realize that they are not considered strange or necessarily exceptional. Though the power of their ceremonies may command deep respect, in most instances their roles in family and community life are the same as those of other women.They [other women] didn't know how [to deliver their own families' babies], so they were very afraid. So when they came after me I would go and do it.Louise Plenty Holes, Oglala, Lakota midwifeWapiye': To Work with SpiritsIn Lakota, wapiye' means to doctor or conjure the sick. Both men and women can wapiye' the sick. Even a Wasicun Wakan (literally, "mysterious white man," or physician) has this ability. It is important to point out that the "doctor" in a sense falls outside the central religious world of the common people. Most Lakota will attend a doctoring ceremony in their life, but very few will conduct them.Among the Lakota there are seven central religious rites that may be used by the Ikce' (common) man or woman as they progress from the beginning of their earthly journey to its end. These are the Inipi, or Sweat Lodge; Tapa Wankayeyapi, or the Tossing of the Sacred Ball; Isnati Ca Lowan, or Women's Coming of Age; Hanble'ceya, or Fasting for a Vision; Hunkapi, or the Making of Relations; Wanagi' Yu hapi, or the Keeping and Releasing of the Soul; and the Wi Wanyang Wacipi, or Sun Dance.Two of these, the Keeping and Releasing of the Soul, and the Tossing of the Sacred Ball, are no longer, or only rarely used. Some of the functions and spirit of the Keeping and Releasing of the Soul have generally been incorporated into modern memorial feasts. To be useful to the faithful, ceremonies must be alive to the needs of the people. Ceremonies have actually come and gone, incorporated into the needs of the times, whereas core beliefs have remained fairly constant, allowing these systems to remain meaningful without the dogmatic structures found in many other religions.The calling to doctor, and the ceremonies associated with healing, form a distinct and exceptional vocation. There are three types of ceremonies that involve doctoring. These are the Lowanpi ceremony, or "Sing"; the Yuwipi, or "they tie them up" ceremony; and a less formal, more idiomatic or generalized Wapiye' ceremony used by many of the holy women who also are herbalists and may choose this as expedient depending on the nature of the illness and the complexity of putting on either a Lowanpi or a Yuwipi. A woman who uses the Lowanpi ceremony would not likely use the Yuwipi ceremony, or vice versa, for certain spirit helpers dictate the type of ceremony to be held. Some women may have a variety of spirit helpers, and the patient's problem or illness may prescribe the details of the ceremony and the specific spirits to be called upon.A fourth method of doctoring involves no ritual at all, and the women who practice it are thought of as Pejuta Win, or herb women doctors, and heal the sick principally by means of traditional pharmaceuticals. The plants used as remedies may need special songs learned in dreams to unleash their healing power; without the songs they are just plants.Some women's dreams call upon them, depending on the needs of the patient, to utilize one or more of these methods. All are wapi'yekiya, using Indian medicine; and in today's parlance they are also Pipe Carriers -- literally, followers of the old religion in that they generally own and use a prayer pipe not only to pray but also as a physical representation or symbol of their participation in the pre-Christian religion.All wapi'yekiya (Indian medical practitioners) make or apply medicine. In the Native American context medicine can be an herb taken orally, the touch of a spirit or a feather, a sacred song, or even a handshake.The differences in curative methods lie in the belief about what causes disease. In the Western world, disease has rational, scientifically provable causes. These pathogens include viruses, bacteria, old age, cancer, inherited defects, and accidents. In the Western medical model we may speak of stress or depression as a source of illness, and even accept that depression can cause sickness and possibly that some ailments may be psychosomatic, or caused by the mind.Many Westerners, in their devotion to science, do not accept that illness may stem from a problem of the soul, or one of its parts. Yet this belief is at the essence of fully half of the Lakota belief

about illness. The health and well-being of the soul, even after death, is a primary concern and the motivation for much of the ongoing ritual life of plains Indian people.Wapiye' Win: Spirit-Calling WomanA Wapiye' Win (ghost- or spirit-calling woman) holy woman is someone with a special vocation. She is someone who knows how to access the sacred -- who, through the use of spirit helpers, or direct flight into the spiritual realm, receives important information about the problem at hand and how it might be remedied.Madonna Swan passed away in October of 1992. Her memory, intelligence, and knowledge of Lakota culture made her a natural person to ask about holy women. On a snowy, late October visit to her home in Eagle Butte, South Dakota, it seemed to me that Madonna's gestures and eyes told us "Ask now, I won't be here much longer." Here, in part, is what she said on that last evening we spent with her:In 1958 we went to Kyle. I had heard of a woman there who was said to be very good at curing the sick. I had been having trouble breathing. At a certain time every year it would become like pneumonia. The woman's name was Louise Kills Enemy.In 1958 I got sick again, so I went down there to Kyle with Marceline Swan, Charles Little Shield, and Mary Swan. I wanted to be doctored, to see if I could keep from catching this cold.She had the ceremony in a house. All the windows and doors were covered. There were four others to be doctored as well. And I think also at that time there was a young man that was going to Hanble'ceya [Fast for a Vision].She told me, "Whoever is going to doctor you is going to come in from the south, so when you go in, face south." Then the ceremony began. All the people came in, and the singers, male singers, came in and sat down. She handed me a pipe and said, "They [the spirits] will try to take it away from you. Don't let them."Mrs. Kills Enemy sat inside her altar. It had four direction colors (red, yellow, black, and white) on tall staffs in each corner. The whole altar was surrounded with tobacco ties [tiny sacks of tobacco linked by light string], and in the middle was a sand painting. They bolted the doors and windows. She sat in the middle of her altar with her head down. It seemed as if she were talking to someone all the time. I guess that's what you call Lowanpi.After they blew all the lights out, the singers sang a spirit song. Then she said, "First the Black-Tail Deer will come in. He's going to walk around the room to the left. If he stops and does not go completely around the room, that's no good; someone in that house [a patient] is going to die. If he circles the room and goes out, that's good, because all the patients are going to live." Pretty soon that deer spirit came in, and you could just hear his hooves and hear him snort. Mrs. Kills Enemy said, "It's good! He went all the way around."She doctored the patients one at a time. When it was my turn she said in Indian, "You need air, so an Eagle is going to come in from the south; don't be frightened. You will feel the Eagle's wind; it's wind above you. When you feel that, breathe deeply."Pretty soon this thing flew in from the south. I could hear it coming. All the air came over me. She said in Indian, "Whenever he flies over you and makes that wind, try to breathe it." He came in over me four times, and each time I tried to breathe in.Then she said, "Next, the white Owl is going to come. He has lots of air, too." And here they were, singing, and those owls came in over me like that. Ooh, it was just scary, too. Like the eagle, the owl came in four times and made a noise each time, and then went out.When the kerosene lights were put on, she told me, "You won't get sick anymore. You will be able to fight off infection." After that I never did get that again. I was cured. I imagine she was about sixty then.What Madonna gave us is absolutely singular in the literature about Lakota women. Louise Kills Enemy's type of ritual is called a Lowanpi, or "sing," and it identically follows the patterns and practices that a male Lowanpi priest would use.Mrs. Kills Enemy's ceremony included a Deer, an Owl, and an Eagle spirit helper and her own retinue of male singers. Her Hocoka, or altar, contained a border of cloth tobacco ties. Four thin wooden staffs stood at the corners, from which hung sacred colored flags, one for each direction, each of the four winds. In the center was a sand painting, consisting of a simple disk of sand, onto which was drawn a sacred design whose meaning was known only to her. Her "claim" as "one who could sit at the altar" was justified; the prognosis was fulfilled. She is the same Mrs. Kills Enemy whom Tanya Ward recalled for us.Today, the help most often sought is from a Wapiye' Win (ghost- or spirit-calling woman) and is for a spiritual remedy.Pejuta Win: Herb WomanThere is some overlap today, and perhaps always has been, between the role of holy woman, Wapiye' Win (Wapi' ya means to conjure the sick in the Indian way), and that of medicine woman, Pejuta Win, wherein the holy woman's rituals involve the contact with the sacred but may also include administering a traditional medicine as well, hence the term Pejuta Win (medicine or herbal woman), or, literally, a "woman who uses herbs." Only certain women used both, but both are considered Wapi' yekiya, using Indian medicine to wapi' yechi, or make someone sound or well, to bring them back into balance or harmony.Mrs. Dora Brown Bull related the following story about her son and a medicine woman from Kyle, named Millie Lays Hard:When Vernal [now in his fifties] was a little boy, about one and a half or two years old, he got real sick. My mom and I weren't sure what was wrong with him. He almost died. He got real skinny. He couldn't gain any weight, so finally Mom brought Mrs. Lays Hard back. She made some tea out of a root. She told us to give him this tea until it was all gone.When we got done covering all the windows, she got a sheet and wrapped herself in it from her head to her feet. Then the lights were put out, and she was placed at her altar. Then she went from one end of room to the other, making owl noises. Mom held Vernal during the ceremony.When she was all done, she told my mom and me that Vernal's grandfather's spirit had been trying to get him and take him to the spirit world. And that's why he was getting sick. Mrs. Lays Hard said she took care of it and told us not to worry about it anymore.Mrs. Lays Hard was paid with Bull Durham [sacks of tobacco]. This took place about 1939. The lady at that time was in her late sixties. She was said to be a Wanagi Wapiye' [using the spirit to heal].rAlthough on our last visit

Madonna seemed very weak, it was obvious that she wanted to talk, perhaps to distract her from her knowledge of impending death. Many years before, tuberculosis had claimed one of her lungs and half of another. Numerous bouts with pneumonia had weakened her remaining lung, and she had spent twenty years living on oxygen. Still, she had long outlived all the medical doctors' most hopeful expectations. That night she joked, "This time the doctors gave me only six months,....but I'm already into my seventh. They've been wrong before." But somehow it seemed to me that she knew her time was close, and she died one week after our visit. Madonna recalled for us her mother, Lucy's, experience with a Pejuta Win, a medicine or herb woman:There was another medicine woman from Kyle; her name was Mrs. Emily Hunter. She was an iyeska [mixed-blood]. She was a very quiet lady, and she doctored in that manner. She would come in, and whoever was going to be doctored, she made them lie down and covered them with a cloth.My mom was sick. At that time [late 1930s] we were living in Bridger, and Mom got so sick she couldn't get out of bed. Dad went after Mrs. Hunter, and they brought her back. Mom's stomach was hurting her. "I'll be well soon," she kept saying, but she didn't get well.So they brought Mrs. Hunter back. "What's wrong with you?" she asked in Indian. Mom told her, and she said, "No, that's not where it hurts you." She said she had to have some kind of root, so Dad and them went out looking for it. They had to use a flashlight because it was at night.Soon they brought back that root. Mrs. Hunter made a tea out of the center part of it. She made a big pot of tea out of that. She said to drink it, and she said, "If that doesn't work, we'll have to try something else." About four in the morning Mom went out and went to the bathroom. Mrs. Hunter said, "You see, she had a kidney infection." So Mom had passed her first water in days, and Mrs. Hunter had cured her.That Mrs. Hunter was a half-breed, and she was light-complected. She spoke only in Indian, and she was from Kyle.There were also women who doctored without ritual, who cured the sick primarily by using physical remedies like Mrs. Hunter used on Madonna's mother, Lucy. These treatments might have been revealed to them in dreams or even passed down from one generation to the next. The following story is from Jesse James, Jr., an Oglala/Creek who told us of his grandmother, a former wife of Crazy Horse.My grandmother, Mrs. Laravie, treated her grandmother for cataracts. She took cottonwood bark and burned it in a very hot fire until it was just a fine white powder. She took that powder and put it in her grandmother's eyes. The old woman's eyes swelled shut. In four or five days, her eyes opened, and that cataract was cracking, breaking up, and she could see again. She didn't have a ceremony; she just knew about these things and did them. As Grandma told me this story, she laughed easily, her eyes were alive with faith.The knowledge of traditional herbs is shrinking. The total number of Pejuta Win, herbalists who have learned how to gather, prepare, and administer herbs is very small, perhaps no more than one or two on any reservation. Thus, the number of herbs, including roots in common use, has also declined, but the use of sinkpe' tawote' (sweet flag root) for colds and sore throats, various berries and teas as diuretics, and braided wacanga (sweet grass) as a spiritual fumigant is very common. Many people have their own "traditional" remedies for adult-onset diabetes, which has become epidemic in the Indian population. Often these include a tea to which certain kinds of Peji hota (sage) might be added.Modern tribal people live in what we might call a cultural continuum. This imaginary curve would, at one end, include the practices and beliefs of the most traditional full-blood, who speaks the language, lives in accordance with the old religious obligations, and maintains an extensive set of relations and family responsibilities. On the other end of the spectrum would be the mixed-blood who may not look Indian and who, as the full-bloods believe, "is Indian only when there is some monetary benefit to it." Most modern Indian people inhabit an area that lies between these two extremes. Day-to-day life is a blend of very old and very new. Jackie Yellow Tail, a Crow woman, said it well:Sometimes I feel like I'm running through this world with a jogging shoe on one foot and a moccasin on the other.Modern Holy WomenPlains Indian men and women are aware of an oral legacy of holy men and women unknown to outsiders. Memories of ancestors and their spiritual accomplishments are combined with personal experience to shape a view of the spiritual present. Holy women who were ancestors continuously came to light during the two years of our journey. No matter what household we visited, stories of medicine women emerged.We have known Roberta (Deer with Horns) Wolf for many years, but until now she did not think to share her memories of her own grandmother. Tilda and I sat up talking with her and Ted, her husband, late one evening, telling them about the long research trip we had been on, when she said,You know, my grandmother was that way, a medicine woman. Her name was Alice Deer with Horns. She was O'ohenunpa [Two Kettle], from near Laplante, South Dakota. I remember that she used to send us little ones outside when she wanted to pray. One time I peeked in at her. I was about eight years old. Even though I was behind her she noticed me and said, "Okay, you can stay, but you must sit perfectly still and be quiet. Don't say a word."She had all her things spread out on the floor. It was a long time ago, but I remember she had many little sacks with herbs in them, her pipe, and a little wooden bowl with wasna [crushed, dried deer meat] in it; there were many things. She smudged all those things with sweetgrass. Then she sang and loaded her pipe. Then she prayed.When she was done praying she smoked her pipe, and then she touched it to my lips. Later I asked her why she did this, and she said it was a more powerful way to pray. She was going to teach her ways to my oldest sister, but my sister died of diabetes when she was sixteen. When my grandmother died, my mother burned her medicine bundle. I don't know why she did that, but she did.For the tribal peoples of this land, this balancing between two worlds can be very precarious, both spiritually and physically. What many of today's medicine men and women do most is help people who are "injured" by living as a colonized tribal people. In effect, they doctor

depression, lack of positive identity, suicidal behavior, drug abuse, alcoholism, family crises, spouse abuse, and stress-related illnesses that are effects of colonization. They also doctor "standard" types of illnesses such as cancer as well, but most "obvious" problems are left to run their course or are treated by a white physician.Popular American culture loves to borrow things from American Indians. Although it is possible that such "ceremonies" as Indian drumming and sweat baths help people to get back in touch with the natural world, they are imperfectly lifted from a continuum of religious ceremonies that carry Plains Indians from birth, through life's struggles, to death and beyond.To understand, at any level, the meaning of these ceremonies and their relationship to the religions from which they are borrowed requires a fairly deep understanding of their true cultural context, which includes knowing those mythic stories of creation, ancient gods, and tricksters that are used to shape and teach the young in the Indian world. We must understand and, as much as we can, share a context acquired by the Indian person over a lifetime, presented here in just a few pages. These include Lakota ideas about creation and the birth of their spirit world, their ideas about life and death, their dreams and everyday life.A seeker of spiritual understanding would not be able to understand Judaism, and the beliefs and ceremonies that go with it, without reading the Old Testament. We must understand the origin of the metaphors acted out in the ritual, to understand the place and use of that ritual within that particular belief system. For Indian people, the beginning is told in their own unique tribal creation stories.