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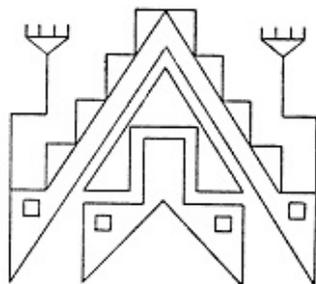
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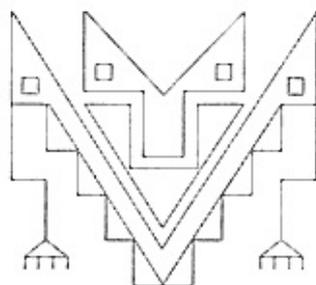
THE CIVILIZATION OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN SERIES



Black Elk (*Photograph by J. E. Brown*)



The Sacred Pipe



Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux

Recorded & Edited by Joseph Epes Brown

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*To my people the Sioux
Black Elk*

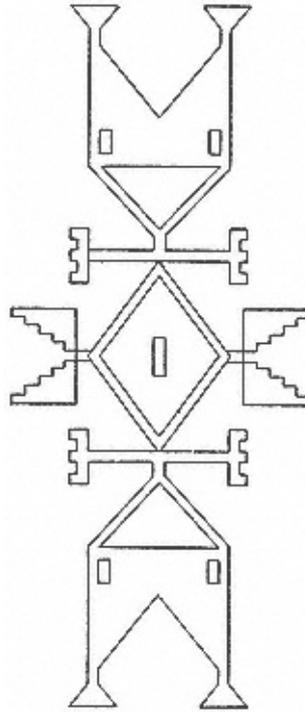
Table of Contents

Preface to Seventh Printing	xi
Editor's Preface	xiii
Foreword, <i>by Black Elk</i>	xix
I The Gift of the Sacred Pipe	3
II The Keeping of the Soul	10
III <i>Inipi: The Rite of Purification</i>	31
IV <i>Hanblecheyapi: Crying for a Vision</i>	44
V <i>Wiwanyag Wachipi: The Sun Dance</i>	67
VI <i>Hunkapi: The Making of Relatives</i>	101
VII <i>Ishna Ta Awi Cha Lowan: Preparing a Girl for Womanhood</i>	116
VIII <i>Tapa Wanka Yap: The Throwing of the Ball</i>	127
Index	139

Illustrations

Black Elk	<i>frontispiece</i>
Black Elk (<i>Hehaka Sapa</i>)	12
Black Elk in France	13
Black Elk with his wife	60
Black Elk and Yellow Hand	61
Sitting Bull (<i>Tatanka Yotanka</i>)	92
Little Warrior (<i>Ozuye Chikala</i>)	93
Seven Sioux Warriors	124
Black Elk and J. E. Brown	125

Preface to the Seventh Printing



I first learned of the Lakota Sioux sage, Black Elk (Hehaka Sapa), through John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*, a poetic work of great value that first appeared in 1932, published by William Morrow and Company of New York. Because of the war effort at that time, the original copper plates had to be destroyed, and the first edition was out of print soon after publication. During several trips to Europe immediately after the war, I was able to make arrangements through close friends for French, German, and Italian translations, all of which became very popular and have since appeared in many continuing editions.

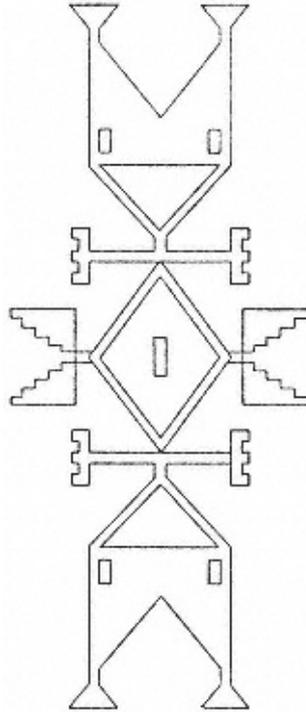
As a lifelong student of Native American history, traditions, and lifeways, I understood the importance of the Black Elk lore and wished to meet the old man, even though Neihardt had advised me that Black Elk would not speak to me. After much traveling, however, I found Hehaka Sapa in an old canvas wall

tent in Nebraska, where his extended family was engaged in digging potatoes. I entered into the tent with great anxiety because of Neihardt's discouraging advice. On my journey west an old Assiniboin had given me a traditional Plains ceremonial pipe, which the old Sage and I smoked in silence. When the ritual smoking was completed, the old man turned to me and asked why I had taken so long in getting there, for he had been expecting my coming. He then invited me to spend the winter with him and his extended family at their home on Wounded Knee Creek, Pine Ridge Reservation. He wished to relate the history and meanings of the seven sacred rites of his people, a project that was completed over several years with much of the translating being done by his son Benjamin Black Elk.

I wish to express great gratitude to all members of the Black Elk extended family and am honored by continuing contacts over the years that affirm that here adoptions into a family are permanent and continuing, never casual, and they involve continuing mutual responsibilities.

JOSEPH EPES BROWN
STEVENSVILLE, MONTANA
JANUARY, 1988

Editor's Preface



Black Elk first became known to a wide range of readers in 1932 through John G. Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks: The Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Neihardt's poetic and sympathetic treatment of the old man's life and mission raised the question as to who, in fact, Black Elk really was. For if the account was faithful to only the essential qualities of the man, it was clear that even from a people noted for their large share of great personalities, here was an unusual man of vision; a holy man in the full sense of this term, and a man upon whom destiny, in a time of cultural crisis, had placed a heavy burden of responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his people. Here, also, could be an important message for the larger world.

I went to find Black Elk in the fall of 1947. After I had followed his traces across many of the Western states, we finally met in an old canvas wall tent on a Nebraska farm where his family and other

members of their band were employed in harvesting potatoes. During that first encounter we simply sat side by side on a sheepskin, and silently smoked the red stone pipe which I had brought with me as an offering in the traditional manner. Partly crippled, almost completely blind, he seemed a pitiful old man as he sat there hunched over, dressed in poor, cast-off clothing. But the beauty of his face and the reverent quality of his movements as he smoked the pipe revealed that Neihardt had given to us the essence of the man, and the subsequent years spent with Black Elk have confirmed this initial impression. Knowing that Black Elk usually had refused to talk with many other people, it was with relief and wonder that I heard his first words: he had anticipated my coming, and wished me to spend that winter with him, for he had much to tell of the sacred things before they all should pass away.

I lived that very cold winter with Black Elk and his generous family in their little hewn-log house under the pine-covered bluffs near Manderson, South Dakota. Everything the old man told me I recorded in the time available when we were not hunting for wild game, or hauling water from the nearest hand-pump eight miles away, or cutting hardwood in the valley bottom for the iron stove, and I profited from this rigorous life which his family and my many new relatives shared with me.

I am fortunate in having met at least some of those men of the old days who possessed great human and spiritual qualities. But Black Elk had a special quality of power and kindness and a sense of mission that was unique, and I am sure it was recognized by all who had the opportunity of knowing him.

According to his account, Black Elk was born in 1862. Therefore he had known the times when his people still had the freedom of the plains and hunted the bison; he had fought against the white men at the Little Big Horn and on Wounded Knee Creek. He was a cousin to the famous chief and holy man, Crazy Horse, and had known Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, and American Horse. Although Black Elk spoke no English, he had observed much of the white man's world, having traveled with Buffalo Bill to Italy, France, and England, where he danced for Queen Victoria

"Grandmother England." But whether hunting, traveling, or fighting, Black Elk was not as other men are. During his youth he had been instructed in the sacred lore of his people by the great men, among whom were Whirlwind Chaser, Black Road, and the sage Elk Head, Keeper of the Sacred Pipe, from whom he learned the history and meanings of his people's spiritual heritage. With this understanding Black Elk prayed and fasted at length, until he himself became one of the wise men, receiving many visions through which he gained special powers to be used for the good of his nation.

This responsibility to "bring to life the flowering tree of his people" haunted Black Elk all his life and caused him much suffering. Although he had been given the power to lead his people in the ways of his grandfathers, he did not understand by what means the vision could be fulfilled. It was certainly due to this pervasive sense of mission that Black Elk wished to make this book, explaining the major rites of the Oglala Sioux, in the hope that in this manner his own people, as well as the white men, would gain a better understanding of the truths of their Indian traditions.

It has now been more than twenty years since Black Elk last spoke, and there have occurred many changes which demand that his message and, indeed, similar messages of other traditionally oriented peoples be placed in new perspective and in a new light. At the time when Black Elk was lamenting the broken hoop of his people's nation, it was generally believed, even by the specialists, that it would be only a matter of time every little time in fact until the Indians, with their seemingly archaic and anachronistic cultures, would be completely assimilated into a larger American society which was convinced of its superiority and the validity of its goals.

We are still very far from being aware of the dimensions and ramifications of our ethnocentric illusions. Nevertheless, by the very nature of things we are now forced to undergo a process of intense self-examination; to engage in a serious re-evaluation of the premises and orientations of our society. The inescapable reality of the ecological crisis, for example, has shattered for many a kind

of dream world, and has forced us not only to seek immediate solutions to the kinds of problems which a highly developed technology has fostered, but also, and above all, to look to our basic values concerning life and the nature and destiny of man. The new generations today may not as yet be sure of the most effective means by which to further this process of re-evaluation, but many are looking with sincerity to the kinds of models which are represented by the American Indians.

In their relationships to this troubled America, Indian groups are seen to be situated across a wide spectrum of positions. On the one hand are the few traditional and conservative groups which, against enormous pressures, have miraculously remained very close to the essence of their ancient and still viable life-ways; and on the other hand are those groups which have been completely assimilated within the larger American society. Yet today, virtually all Indian groups who retain any degree of self-identity are now also re-evaluating, and giving positive valuation to, the fundamental premises of their own traditional cultures. They are also re-examining, through a wide range of means and expressions, their relationships to a larger society which today tends to represent diminishing attractions.

If there is validity to the above statements, it seems clear that it is too early to say that Black Elk's mission to bring his people back to "the good red road" has failed as he thought it had. Rather, it may be succeeding in ways which he could not have anticipated.

As an Oglala Sioux, Black Elk belonged to one of the seven sub-bands of the Western Teton, all of which speak the Lakota dialect of a Siouan language. These Western Teton are one of the seven bands, or "Seven Council Fires," of the Dakota (the "Allied"), which is one of the nations belonging to the large Siouan linguistic family. This linguistic group also includes the Assiniboin, Crow, Hidatsa, Iowa, Kansa, Mandan, Missouri, Omaha, Osage, Oto, Ponca, and Quapaw. According to the early history of the Dakota, they were established in the sixteenth century on the headwaters of the Mississippi, and in the seventeenth century they were driven westward from Minnesota by their enemies the Chippewa. In

leaving the forests and lakes the Dakota substituted the horse for the bark canoe with remarkable ease, and in the nineteenth century they were known and feared as one of the most powerful nations of the prairies; indeed, it was these Dakota Sioux who offered perhaps the strongest resistance of all the Indian groups to the westward movement of the whites.

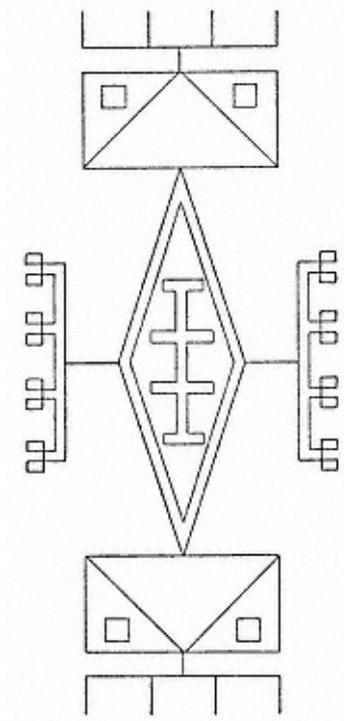
This account of the sacred pipe and the rites of the Sioux, was handed down orally by the former "keeper of the sacred pipe," Elk Head (*Hehaka Pa*), to three men. Of these three, Black Elk was the only one living at the time this history was written. (Black Elk died in August, 1950.) When Elk Head gave this account to Black Elk, he told him that it must be handed down. For as long as it is known, and for as long as the pipe is used, their people will live; but as soon as the pipe is forgotten, the people will be without a center and they will perish.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Benjamin Black Elk, who acted as interpreter for this work and who is the son of Black Elk, to whom we owe this book. It is unusual to have an interpreter who understands both English and Lakota perfectly, and who is also familiar with the wisdom and rites of his people. I wish also to mention Benjamin's wife, Ellen Black Elk, a remarkable person of strong faith and character, who with quiet dignity always saw to it that everyone in her warm home was fed and cared for. Her death in September of 1970 was a loss for all who knew her. Black Elk's close friend Little Warrior assisted us in many ways.

I also acknowledge my gratitude to the Smithsonian Institution for the Barry photograph of Sitting Bull, and to the Illuminated Photo-Ad Service of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who gave permission for the use of their photograph of the seven Sioux who participated in the battle of the Little Big Horn. These warriors were all close friends of Black Elk.

JOSEPH EPES BROWN
BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA
FEBRUARY, 1971

Foreword



In the great vision which came to me in my youth, when I had known only nine winters, there was something which has seemed to me to be of greater and greater importance as the moons have passed by. It is about our sacred pipe and its importance to our people.

We have been told by the white men, or at least by those who are Christian, that God sent to men His son, who would restore order and peace upon the earth; and we have been told that Jesus the Christ was crucified, but that he shall come again at the Last Judgment, the end of this world or cycle. This I understand and know that it is true, but the white men should know that for the red people too, it was the will of *Wakan-Tanka*, the Great Spirit, that an animal turn itself into a two-legged person in order to bring the most holy pipe to His people; and we too were taught

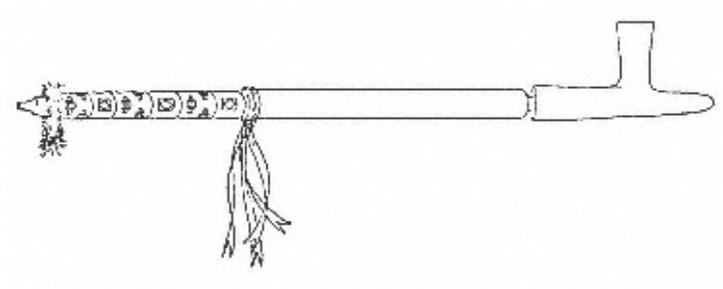
that this White Buffalo Cow Woman who brought our sacred pipe will appear again at the end of this "world," a coming which we Indians know is now not very far off.

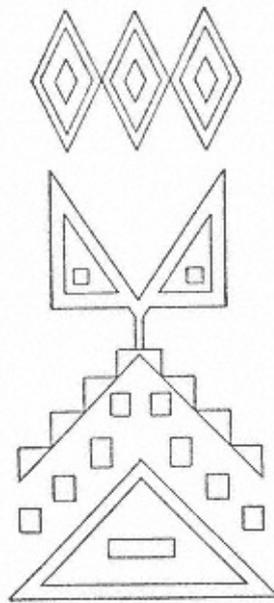
Most people call it a "peace pipe," yet now there is no peace on earth or even between neighbors, and I have been told that it has been a long time since there has been peace in the world. There is much talk of peace among the Christians, yet this is just talk. Perhaps it may be, and this is my prayer that, through our sacred pipe, and through this book in which I shall explain what our pipe really is, peace may come to those peoples who can understand, an understanding which must be of the heart and not of the head alone. Then they will realize that we Indians know the One true God, and that we pray to Him continually.

I have wished to make this book through no other desire than to help my people in understanding the greatness and truth of our own tradition, and also to help in bringing peace upon the earth, not only among men, but within men and between the whole of creation.

We should understand well that all things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things: the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, and all the four-legged animals, and the winged peoples; and even more important, we should understand that He is also above all these things and peoples. When we do understand all this deeply in our hearts, then we will fear, and love, and know the Great Spirit, and then we will be and act and live as He intends.

BLACK ELK
MANDERSON, S.D.





Chapter I

The Gift of the Sacred Pipe

Early one morning, very many winters ago, two Lakota were out hunting with their bows and arrows, and as they were standing on a hill looking for game, they saw in the distance something coming towards them in a very strange and wonderful manner. When this mysterious thing came nearer to them, they saw that it was a very beautiful woman, dressed in white buckskin, and bearing a bundle on her back. Now this woman was so good to look at that one of the Lakota had bad intentions and told his friend of his desire, but this good man said that he must not have such thoughts, for surely this is a *wakan* woman.¹ The mysterious person was now very close to the men, and then putting down her bundle, she asked the one with bad intentions to come over to her. As the

¹ Throughout this work I shall translate the Lakota word *wakan* as "holy" or "sacred," rather than as "power" or "powerful" as used by some

(footnote continued on next page)

young man approached the mysterious woman, they were both covered by a great cloud, and soon when it lifted the sacred woman was standing there, and at her feet was the man with the bad thoughts who was now nothing but bones, and terrible snakes were eating him.²

"Behold what you see!" the strange woman said to the good man. "I am coming to your people and wish to talk with your chief *Hehlokecha Najin* [Standing Hollow Horn]. Return to him, and tell him to prepare a large tipi in which he should gather all his people, and make ready for my coming. I wish to tell you something of great importance!"

The young man then returned to the tipi of his chief, and told him all that had happened: that this *wakan* woman was coming to visit them and that they must all prepare. The chief, Standing Hollow Horn, then had several tipis taken down, and from them a great lodge was made as the sacred woman had instructed.³ He sent out a crier to tell the people to put on their best buckskin clothes and to gather immediately in the lodge. The people were, of course, all very excited as they waited in the great lodge for the coming of the holy woman, and everybody was wondering where this mysterious woman came from and what it was that she wished to say.

Soon the young men who were watching for the coming of the *wakan* person announced that they saw something in the dis-

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ethnologists. This latter term may be a true translation, yet is not really complete, for with the Sioux, and with all traditional peoples in general, the "power" (really the sacredness) of a being or a thing is in proportion to its nearness to its prototype; or better, it is in proportion to the ability of the object or act to reflect most directly the principle or principles which are in *Wakan-Tanka*, the Great Spirit, who is One.

² Black Elk emphasized that this should not only be taken as an event in time, but also as an eternal truth. "Any man," he said, "who is attached to the senses and to the things of this world, is one who lives in ignorance and is being consumed by the snakes which represent his own passions."

³ The Sioux ceremonial lodge is constructed with twenty-eight poles. One of these poles is the "key," holding up all the others, and this pole the holy men say represents *Wakan-Tanka*, who sustains the universe, which is represented by the lodge as a whole.