

Native American Religion

- Until recent times, Indians nation typically had not word for religion.
- In reality, about 550 different Indian societies and distinct languages have been identified in North America.
- Some Native Americans were hunter-gatherers, others were agriculturalists, and still others were various combinations of the two.

Native American Religion

- For Native Americans, culture was tradition was religion; so there were as many American Indian religions as there were separate peoples and societies.
- Native Americans thought of a world to which they were bound by ties of kinship. There were the Granfathers who were Thunder Beings; there were Grandmother Spider. There were animals who took on human form such as Coyote the Trickster or sacred birds or sacred Buffalo. There were gifted human beings such as shamans-holy people.

Native American Religion

- The sacred beings were conceived as animals and plant guardians who, in a pact long ago, had pledged the bodies of their species as food for Indian peoples.
- Because nature, the material world, was thought sacred, Indian mostly tended to practice a natural ecology.
- For them, dreams revealed holy, hidden things that often would not be known in other ways.

Native American Religion

- The name of an Indian person should indicate his or her kinship with the natural world and also tell something of inner essence.
- The colors were significant here, for each of the four directions had its color, which brought with it certain qualities as gifts of the direction.
- Transformation was almost a law.
- Harmony with the natural world conferred power. Power was found, too, in sacred objects that manifested themselves in ritual.

Native American Religion

- Indians were preoccupied with the directional points.
- Circles were sacred.
- Their society were understood to be small-scale replicas of a large reality that surrounded them.
- In the beginning, there had been Skan, who gave movement to all, but it was Inktomi the Trickster who performed the real work of transformation that made the Oglaga a people on the earth.

The Oglala Sioux

- So tradition explained the gift of a sacred pipe by a beautiful woman in a white buckskin with a bundle on her back.
- The pipe = the sign of their felt bond to one another and to the earth.
- For the mysterious woman also offered the people a round stone containing seven inscribed circles, each of the circles representing a rite that they would receive. After she had taught them the first of these rites she turned into a red and brown buffalo.

The Oglala Sioux

- The Soul, or spirit, of a deceased person, it was believed, could be kept for a period of time ranging from six months to two or more years.
- Keeping the ghost in this way was said to enable it, through the proper rites, to be sure of return to its beginnings.
- The sweat lodge ritual

The Oglala Sioux

- The vision quest was meant to enable the person who undertook the quest to gain power through a vision in which guardians spirits would reveal their relationship to the seeker and bestow the knowledge/ power desired.
- The vision quest, despite the loneliness of the seeker's encounter with the sacred, began and ended in community.

The Oglala Sioux

- The sun dance took place in the early summer after the buffalo harvest.
- The ritual extended for four days.
- A lodge was constructed.
- Under their leader they danced themselves into an ecstasy of sacrifice until they fell exhausted. They fasted for the duration of the dance, demonstrating in return for the gift of life they acknowledged, they would offer themselves.

The Oglala Sioux

- The 'making of relatives'
- The puberty ritual for girls
- A young girl threw out a ball to people standing at the four directions. The ball stood for knowledge, and the people trying to catch it were struggling to free themselves from ignorance.
- *Wakan* (holy) was that dimension of reality that caused transformation.
- *Wakantanka* = God
- If any being was *wakan* it was the Buffalo

Letter of Chief Seattle to President

- Chief Seattle was one of the last spokesmen of the Paleolithic moral order (1852).
- "The President in Washington sends word that he wished to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?"

Letter of Chief Seattle to President

- "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people... We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers... Nature and man, all belong to the same family."

Letter of Chief Seattle

- "The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred. Each ghostly reflection in the clear waters of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father."

Letter of Chief Seattle

- "The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give to the rivers the kindness you would give any brother."
- "If we sell you our land, remember that the air is precious to us. That the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports."
- "Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth."

Letter of Chief Seattle

- "This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."
- "One thing we know: our God is also your God. The earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its Creator."

Letter of Chief Seattle

- "Your destiny is a mystery to us. What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corner of the forest are heavy with the scent of many men and the view of the ripe hills is blotted by talking wires? Where will the eagle be? Gone! And what is it to say goodbye to the swift pony and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival."

Letter of Chief Seattle

- "When the last Red Man has vanished with his wilderness and his memory is only the shadow of a cloud moving across the prairie, will these shores and forest still be here? Will there be any of the spirit of my people left?"
- "We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children and love it, as God loves us all."

Letter of Chief Seattle

- "As we are part of the land, you too are part of the land. This earth is precious to us. It is also precious to you. One thing we know: there is only one God. No man, be he Red Man or White Man, can be apart. We are brothers after all."