Shaman's Drum

A Journal of Experiential Shamanism

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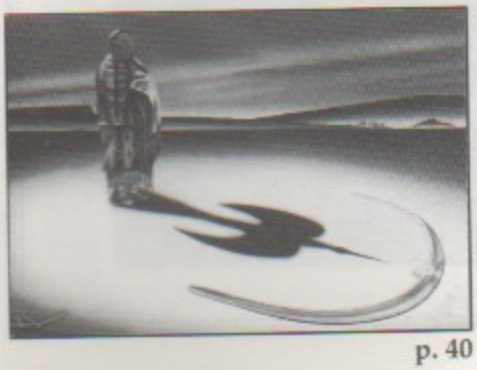

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FEATURES

ON THE FRONT COVER: A detail from *Old Man Cedar*, by Timoteo Ikoshy Montoya, depicts a vision experienced by the artist during a Tipi Way Ceremony (painting shown in full on page 42).

T. White, after photo by J. K. Hillers

CLASSICAL REPRINT

The Peyote Plant and Ceremony

by James Mooney, U.S. Bureau of Ethnology

From its early origins among the Kiowa, Apache, and Comanche, peyotism developed into a major religious movement during the 1880s and 1890s when it spread rapidly among the many tribes that had been relocated into Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Then, in a strange quirk of fate, the very government boarding schools that sought to destroy Indian culture became instrumental in disseminating this new nativistic Pan-Indian spiritual movement; they nourished new intertribal friendships and introduced a new intertribal language—English. Soon the new peyote rituals appeared on reservation after reservation across the country. The story of peyotism's growth from the early 1900s into what is now the largest, fastest-growing Native American religious movement has been documented in numerous books by Weston LaBarre, Omer C. Stewart, and others (see annotated reading list on page 53 of this issue).

One of the earliest non-Native participant-observers of the peyote ceremony was James Mooney, a former reporter turned ethnologist who was sent to Oklahoma by the Smithsonian's newly organized Bureau of American Ethnology to study the Cherokee in 1890. Shortly after the tragic massacre at Wounded Knee that same year, he was assigned to study the Ghost Dance movement. Instead of depending on rumor and hearsay, Mooney not only interviewed Indian participants and other observers, but also attended several Ghost Dances and visited the prophet Wovoka personally. His account of the Ghost Dance provided an accurate, detailed account of the movement, and was remarkable in that it put blame for the Wounded Knee Massacre on the local goverment agent and the U.S. military.

In the process of tracing and documenting the Ghost Dance movement, Mooney also became involved in another new revitalistic religious movement—the peyote religion. Again, believing that one must become a participant-observer in order to understand Indian practices, Mooney participated in several all-night peyote ceremonies. His report and photographs in "Mescaline and Lipan Apache Notes," published by the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology in 1897, provided the

first objective written account of the peyote ceremony in the United States. Based on his firsthand observations of the beneficial effects of the peyote ceremony on Native practitioners, Mooney became an ardent supporter of the peyote religion and actively encouraged Oklahoma peyote leaders to incorporate as a legally protected church—giving birth to the "Native American Church" on 10 October 1918.

The following article, written for medical professionals as a testimonial for peyote's potential medicinal and therapeutic value, was originally published as "The Mescal Plant and Ceremony" in the 15 January 1896 edition of *The Therapeutic Gazette: A Monthly Journal of General, Special, and Physiological Therapeutics*. Although peyote was often called "mescal" at that time, the term has since been abandoned because of potential confusion with mescal liquor made from agave cactus, and mescal beans that are psychoactive, but highly toxic. In order to avoid further confusion, all references to "mescal" in the original article have been converted to the more accurate term "peyote."

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About five years ago, while making investigations among the Kiowa Indians on behalf of the Bureau of Ethnology, the attention of the writer was directed to the ceremonial use of a plant for which were claimed wonderful medical and psychologic properties. So numerous and important are its medical applications, and so exhilarating and glorious its effect, according to the statements of the natives, that it is regarded as the vegetable incarnation of a deity, and the ceremonial eating of the plant has become the great religious rite of all the tribes of the southern plains.

The plant is a small cactus, having the general size and shape of a radish, and covered on the exposed surface with the characteristic cactus prickles.... In each language it has a different name, usually referring to the prickles. Among the Kiowas it was *señi;* among the Comanches, *wokowi;* with the Mescaleros, *ho;* and with the Tarahumaris, *hikori*. The traders of the Indian Territory commonly call it mescal, although it must not be confounded with another mescal in Arizona, the *Agave*, from which the Apaches prepare an intoxicating drink. The local Mexican name upon the Rio Grande is *peyote* or *pellote*, from the old Aztec name *peyotl*.

The use of the plant for medical and religious purposes is probably as ancient as the Indian occupancy of the region over which it grows. There is evidence that the ceremonial rite was known to all the tribes from the Arkansas to the valley of Mexico, and from the Sierra Madre to the coast....

In proportion as the plant was held sacred by the Indians, so it was regarded by the early missionaries as the direct invention of the devil, and the eating of the peyote was made a crime equal in enormity to the eating of human flesh. From the beginning it has been condemned without investigation, and even under the present system severe penalties have been threatened and inflicted against Indians using it or having it in their possession. Notwithstanding this, practically all the men of the Southern Plains tribes eat it habitually in the ceremony, and find no difficulty in procuring all they can pay for. In spite of its universal use and the constant assertion of the Indians that the plant is a valuable medicine and the ceremony a beautiful religious rite, no agency physician, post surgeon, missionary, or teacher—with a single exception—has ever tested the plant or witnessed the ceremony.

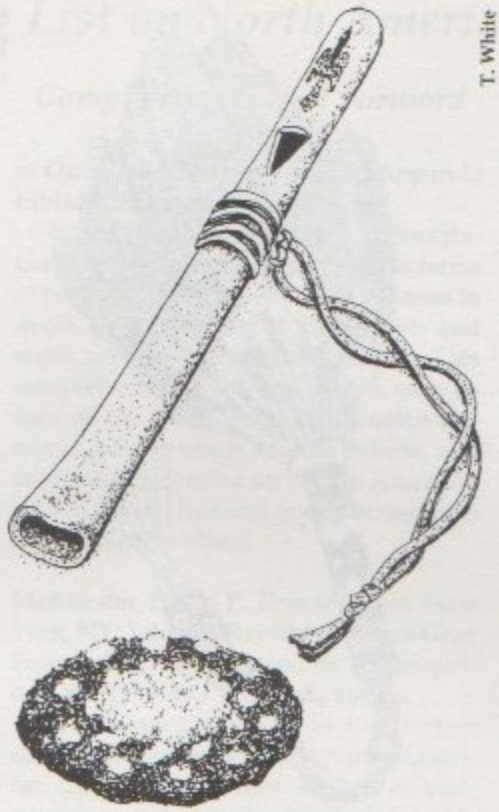
A detailed account of mythology, history and sacred ritual in connection with the peyote would fill a volume. Such an account, to be published eventually by the Bureau of Ethnology, the writer is now preparing, as the result of several years of field study among the Southern Plains tribes. As this article is intended primarily for medical readers, the ceremonial part will be but briefly noted here.

The ceremony occupies from twelve to fourteen hours, beginning about 9 or 10 o'clock and lasting sometimes until nearly noon the next day. Saturday night is now the time usually selected, in deference to the white man's idea of Sunday as a sacred day and a day of rest. The worshippers sit in a circle around the inside of the sacred tipi, with a fire blazing in the cent[er]. The exercises open with a prayer by the leader, who then hands each man four peyotes, which he takes and eats in quick succession, first plucking out the small tuft of down from the cent[er]. In eating, the dry peyote is first chewed in the mouth, then rolled into a large pellet between the hands, and swallowed, the man rubbing his breast and the back of his neck at the same time to aid the descent. After this first round the leader takes the rattle, while his assistant takes the drum, and together they sing the first song four times, with full voices, at the same time beating the drum and shaking the rattle with all the strength of their arms. The drum and rattle are then handed to the next couple, and so the song goes on round and round the circle—with only a break for the baptismal ceremony at midnight, and another for the daylight ceremony—until perhaps 9 o'clock the next morning. Then the instruments are passed out of the tipi, the sacred foods are eaten, and the ceremony is at an end. At midnight a vessel of water

is passed around, and each takes a drink and sprinkles a few drops upon his head. Up to this hour no one has moved from his position, sitting cross-legged upon the ground and with no support for his back, but now any one is at liberty to go out and walk about for a while and return again. Few, however, do this, as it is considered a sign of weakness. The sacred food at the close of the ceremony consists of parched corn in sweetened water; rice or other boiled grain; boiled fruit, usually now prunes or dried apples; and dried meat pounded up with sugar. Every person takes a little of each, first taking a drink of water to clear his mouth.

After midnight the leader passes the peyote around again, giving to each man as many as he may call for. On this second round I have frequently seen a man call for ten and eat them one after the other as rapidly as he could chew. They continue to eat at intervals until the close. There is much spitting, and probably but little of the juice is swallowed. Every one smokes handmade cigarettes, the smoke being regarded as a sacred incense. At intervals some fervent devotee will break out into an earnest prayer, stretching his hands out towards the fire and the sacred peyote the while. For the rest of the time, when not singing the song and handling the drum or rattle with all his strength, he sits quietly with his blanket drawn about him and his eyes fixed upon the sacred peyote in the cent[er], or perhaps with his eyes shut and apparently dozing. He must be instantly ready, however, when his turn comes at the song, or to make a prayer at the request of some one present, so that it is apparent the senses are always on the alert and under control of the will.

There is no preliminary preparation, such as by fasting or the sweat-bath, and supper is eaten as usual before going in. The dinner, which is given an hour or two after the ceremony, is always as elaborate a feast as the host can provide. The rest of the day is spent in gossiping, smoking, and singing the new songs, until it is time to return home. They go to bed at the usual time, and are generally up at the



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usual time the next morning. No salt is used in the food until the day after the ceremony.

As a rule, only men take part in the regular ceremony, but sick women and children are brought in, and, after prayers for their recovery, are allowed to eat one or more peyotes prepared for them by the priest.

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Briefly stated, it may be said that the Indians regard the peyote as a panacea in medicine, a source of inspiration, and the key which opens to them all the glories of another world. They consider it particularly effective in hemorrhage and consumptive diseases. For this reason the returned students from the East, who almost inevitably acquire consumption in the damp eastern climate, are usually among the staunchest defenders of the ceremony, having found by experience that the plant brings them relief.

A marked instance is the case of my Kiowa interpreter, Paul Setkopti, a man now forty-two years of age. Twenty years ago, at the close of the last unsuccessful outbreak of these tribes, he was one of sixty warriors sent as prisoners of war to Fort Marion, Florida. Here, being young and unusually intelligent, he attracted the notice of a benevolent lady from the North who taught him English and finally secured permission to take him with her to her home in New York State, where she undertook to educate him to go back as a missionary and physician to his people. But he had already contracted consumption in Florida, and during nearly the whole of his four years in New York he was stretched upon a sick-bed, racked with cough and frequent hemorrhages, until at last, as there seemed no chance for life, he was sent back, at his request, to die among his own people. He arrived completely prostrated; and, being strongly urged by his Indian friends, he ate a few peyotes—with such speedy relief from the cough that he continued the practice. That was thirteen years ago, and he is still alive and in fairly good health, although he spits constantly, has occasional hemorrhages, and is not strong enough for hard labor. His mind is keen, however, and he makes an excellent interpreter, faithful above the average. He is a leader in the ceremony, and defends it in eloquent English, because, as he says, the peyote keeps him alive. He never misses an opportunity to be present at the ceremony if he can reach the place in time. It is particularly to be noted that this man, after years of training and education in a refined home for the special purpose of making him a Christian missionary and a physician in his tribe, has become an apostle of the proscribed peyote rite, on account of his personal experience of the virtues of the plant.

On one occasion, when I was present alone in a camp where they were preparing to eat peyote that night, he rode in late in the evening, through a cold drizzling rain, and told me that he had been eating peyote the previous night at a camp about twenty miles away, and hearing that they were going to eat in our camp that night and that I had no interpreter with me, he had come to stay with me and explain the ceremony. I tried my best to get him to go to bed and not to lose two nights' sleep, in addition to the exposure in the rain in his weakened condi-

Annotated Reading List on North American Peyote Religion

Compiled by Austin Forward

Aberle, David F. ***The Peyote Religion among the Navajo.*** **Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982 (1966). Append.; biblio.; illus.; index; 454 pp.**

Aberle provides a scholarly, detailed, and systematic exploration of peyotism as it appears among the Navajo, including a chronicle of peyotism's growth from a small, persecuted sect to widespread acceptance alongside other forms of Navajo religious expression. Testimonials from individual members are cited, along with detailed accounts of a prayer meeting. Theological ramifications of peyotism are compared to traditional Navajo religion. Good black and white photographs of a meeting.

Anderson, Edward F. ***Peyote: The Divine Cactus.*** **Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1980. Append.; biblio.; illus.; index; 248 pp.**

Well researched and written in a scholarly format, this interdisciplinary treatise describes the history, botany, chemistry, pharmacology, and ritual usage of peyote in both the U.S. and Mexico. This work provides one of the best scientific overviews of the "divine cactus," and is illustrated with maps of peyote's native range and biochemical diagrams of its alkaloids.

D'Azevedo, Warren L. ***Straight With the Medicine.*** **Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 1985 (1978). Illus.; 52 pp.**

D'Azevedo records accounts by Washo Indians from California and Nevada about their involvement in the Tipi Way or peyote religion. Written in their vernacular, it describes various elements of the ceremony, such as how to sing and pray, or what feathers to use. Its folksy style and heartfelt testimonials convey how much the medicine and church mean to some Washo. Illustrations are simple woodblock prints of peyotism symbols.

Fintzelberg, Nicholas. "Peyote Paraphernalia," ***Ethnic Technology Notes,*** **No. 4 (October). San Diego, CA: San Diego Museum of Man, 1969. Illus.; 9 pp.**

Includes a series of black and white photographs of Native American Church paraphernalia, such as fans, rattles, drumsticks, and other instruments; plus a five-page description of these items.

La Barre, Weston. ***The Peyote Cult*** **(5th ed., enlarged). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989 (1938). Append.; biblio.; illus.; index; 334 pp.**

Initially written as a doctoral dissertation, La Barre's book examines major forms of peyotism within the U.S. It discusses in depth the symbolism of instruments and altars used in different ceremonies. This comprehensive work also covers such issues as the assimilation of Christian elements, peyote usage by non-Indians, and peyotism's influence on Native American art and music. Includes good photographs and pictures of altars.

McAllester, David P. ***Peyote Music.*** **New York, NY: Johnson Reprint (Wenner-Gren Foundation, Publications in Anthropology, no. 13, 1949.) Append.; 166 pp.**

A musicologist examines the content and context of chants used in Native American Church ceremonies, as well as variations from tribe to tribe. Musical elements are clearly explained. Appendix contains scores and lyrics for eighty songs.

Marriott, Alice and Carol K. Rachlin. ***Peyote.*** **New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971. Illus.; 111 pp.**

This book offers a very basic introduction to the Peyote Church in the U.S. It opens with a simple narrative account about Quanah Parker, the Comanche credited for popularizing the religion among the plains tribes, and continues with a short description of its diffusion to other tribes. The all-night peyote ceremony is briefly described. Poorly illustrated with two diagrams of altars or "moons."

Siskin, Edgar E. ***Washo Shamans and Peyotists: Religious Conflict in an American Indian Tribe.*** **Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1983. Biblio.; illus.; index; 236 pp.**

This monograph details the introduction of peyotism among the Washo of the eastern Sierra slopes during the 1930s, and discusses the acrimonious dispute that developed between the peyotists and traditional Washo shamans. Includes good black and white photographs of peyote ceremonies, shamans, and power places.

Slotkin, J. S. ***The Peyote Religion: A Study in Indian-White Relations.*** **Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1956. Illus.; 195 pp.**

The peyote religion's role as a bulwark against White eradication of Native American identity is analyzed in this academic study of adaptation to radical social change. Contrasted with the Ghost Dance that stressed supernatural removal of Whites, the peyote religion accommodated them, while keeping a truly Native spirituality. Legal and theological issues are considered in detail. Black and white photographs are interspersed with drawings of early 1900s ceremonies.

Steinmetz, Paul B. ***Pipe, Bible and Peyote Among the Oglala Lakota: A study in religious identity.*** **Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion, no. 19, 1980. 188 pp.**

Steinmetz, a Jesuit priest serving on the Oglala reservation, explores the relationship between traditional Lakota spiritual practices, Christianity, and peyotism. This anthropological monograph includes firsthand accounts of peyote visions, testimonials of peyote's healing power, and the story of Pope Paul VI's 1975 papal blessing of the Native American Church.

Stewart, Omer C. ***Peyote Religion: A History.*** **Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. Append.; biblio.; illus.; index; 454 pp.**

A comprehensive history of peyotism in the U.S. and Canada, with an emphasis on the individuals responsible for its spread. Some subtle variations of the basic ceremony and their geneses are considered in detail. Legal battles between peyotists and their adversaries are highlighted. Includes black and white pictures of early peyotists, and maps of peyotism's spread.

Stewart, Omer C. and David F. Aberle, eds. ***Peyotism in the West.*** **Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, Anthropological Papers no. 108, 1984. Append.; biblio.; illus.; 291 pp.**

This scholarly work summarizes the spread of peyote religion among the Ute, Navajo, Washo, and Northern Paiute. It includes accounts of ceremonies, documenting the slight variations among these groups. Some charismatic personalities associated with the religion's spread are given in-depth treatment. Black and white photographs of ceremonies are provided.

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tion, but all I could get for reply was: "I will stay with you." I finally persuaded him to lie down at least until he should hear the drum. On hearing the signal, about 11 o'clock at night, he came into the tipi and bent over the fire to warm himself, when he was seized with such a fit of coughing that it seemed as if his lungs would be torn to pieces. I again tried to persuade him to go back to bed, but he said: "No; I shall eat peyote, and soon I shall be all right." He then took and ate four peyotes, stepped into his place, and when it was his turn then and throughout the night sang his song like the others, and came out as fresh as they in the morning, after two consecutive nights without sleep. There was no more coughing after eating the first four peyotes.

The Indians frequently use the peyote in decoction, without any ritual, for fevers, headaches, and breast pains, and it is sometimes used in the same way by the Mexicans of the lower Rio Grande. I have also seen an Indian eat one between meals as a sort of tonic appetizer. The habit never develops into a mania, but is always under control.

As to its effect upon age or condition, I have seen a twelve-year-old boy, at his first initiation, eat six peyotes and sit through the long night ceremony, without any worse result than a sleepiness which came over him after dinner, so that he slept all that afternoon and night until the next morning. I have seen a tottering old man, who had been a priest of the ceremony for half a century, led into the tipi by the hand like a child, eat his four peyotes, and then take the rattle and sing the song in a clear voice, and repeat it as often as his turn came until morning, when he came out with the rest, so little fatigued that he was able to sit down and answer intelligently all the questions I asked. Imagine a white man of eighty years of age sitting up in a constrained position, without sleep, all night long and nearly all morning, and then being in condition to be interviewed.

As to the mental effect of the habitual use of the plant, it may be sufficient to say that the great high priest of

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the rite among the Comanches is Zuanah [Quanah Parker], the half-[blood] chief of the tribe, and any who know him at home or in Washington will admit that there is no more shrewd or capable business man in the Southwest. On one occasion I was with him when he sat up all night leading the ceremony, eating perhaps thirty peyotes. Coming out in the morning, he found two cattlemen awaiting him on important business, which occupied him and his white secretary all that afternoon; next day he was up before daylight ready for an early breakfast before starting for Texas to conclude the deal. This after eating a large quantity of the cactus and losing a night's sleep; and Zuanah is entirely too smart a man to attend to business when his brain is not in working order.

On every occasion when I have been present at the ceremony I have carefully observed the participants, sometimes as many as thirty at a time, to note the after-effects, but have seen no indication of a reaction that day or afterward. They unanimously declare that there is no reaction; which agrees with my own experience. After sitting twelve or fourteen hours in a constrained position, each in turn enacting his part several times in the course of the night, and eating from ten to possibly fifty peyotes apiece, they come out bright and cheerful, eat their dinner with good appetite, and afterward sing, smoke and gossip until it is time to return home. There is no sign of fatigue or any abnormal physical or mental condition, unless it be the tendency to continue singing the songs in an undertone and beating time with the finger for a rattle for hours afterward. I am unable to say whether this is the effect of the plant or is due to pure fondness for the songs; probably it is a result of both these influences. Once after the ceremony I found myself involuntarily beating time to a song that had particularly struck my fancy. I think, however, that this was largely because I wanted to learn the song, as immediately after coming out from the tipi I had spent some time posing and photographing the company, which I could hardly have done without full control of my faculties and movements.

I know from experience that the peyote is a powerful stimulant and enables one to endure great physical strains without injurious reaction; in which respect it seems to differ from all other known stimulants. During my first all-night attendance at the ceremony I ate none, as I did not feel sure that I could keep my brain clear for observation otherwise, and the result was that from cold, numbness and exhaustion I was hardly able to stand upon my feet when it was over. Since then I have always taken three or four, and have been able to take note of all that occurred throughout the night, coming out in the morning as fresh as at the start to make pictures of the men, afterward writing, reading, or talking with my friends until bedtime. I have never felt the full mental effect of the plant, having eaten only small quantities at a time, and keeping my mind constantly tense and alert for observation. I am probably also less sensitive to such influences, from long familiarity with Indian ceremonies. I have experienced enough, however, to be satisfied that what the Indians say of the mental effect is true.