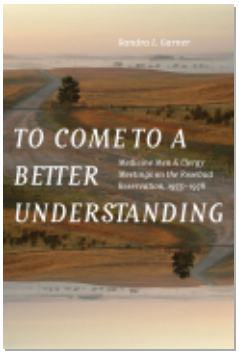
5. “Given to Them by the Supernatural”



5 "Given to Them by the Supernatural"

The understanding of kinship and reciprocal obligations expressed by the Medicine Men's Association (MMA) participants during the Medicine Men and Clergy Meetings (MMCM) was not based solely on human relatedness on earth. Rather, the Lakota concept of *mitakuye oyasin* (we are all related) embraces all of creation. The expansiveness of the Lakota concept of this network of relations includes, according to Albert White Hat Sr. (2012e), all that is physical and spiritual (seen and unseen) on earth and throughout the entire universe. The foundation of *mitakuye oyasin* is the spiritual world, which is comprised of a complex array of spirit helpers to which everyone has access when they send their voice (*hoye wayelo*), particularly when using the pipe. As a ritual tool, the pipe is considered a conduit for requests to the world of the spirits and the MMA participants believed, as Charlie Kills Enemy noted, that "the pipe is for everyone" (3/20/1973, 2–3). The MMA participants mentioned the pipe frequently throughout the years they spent discussing its history and purpose as a conduit of petitions to the supernatural. However the *iyeska wakan* (interpreters of the sacred) claimed a different, more intimate, relationship with the spiritual world via their roles as interpreter.

White Hat (2012b) emphasizes that the spiritual, unseen world is very real to the medicine men: "There's no mystery in Lakota culture . . . everything we do is reality based." During the MMCM, Big Crow translated as Arthur Running Horse described the relationship between the medicine man and the spiritual world: "The medicine man can pray anytime,

anywhere he wants and he will hear that voice [the spirit speaking to him]. And he should take that voice and listen to it and do as he says; he should pass it on to the people" (10/28/1976, 3). Big Crow then validated Running Horses' description of the process: "even Arthur . . . the spirit can communicate to him any place, anywhere as a voice. It could be day time or night; when he prays, he hears that voice" (10/28/1976, 3).

At the very beginning of the MMCM, the priests asked the MMA participants about what it meant to be a medicine man. Ben Black Bear Jr. translated for Running Horse: "First of all Art mentioned the *pejuta wicasa*, which we call the medicine men and that there is no one who could be called one today, because the medicine were given to them by the supernatural not in the same way that the doctors use medicine" (2/13/1973, 1). Running Horse was making a distinction between western doctors who choose their career, get an education, read books, and develop their skill via practice. The medicine men on the other hand, according to Running Horse, are chosen and instructed by the spirits. They are called to practice by the supernatural and only later do they hone what they've learned from the spirits through the experience of ritual practice (described in more detail in the next chapter). For many in the MMA, the sense was that this was not something that could be learned from another ritual expert (medicine man).

The MMA conceived of the spiritual world as multilayered, multifaceted, and complex and structured by codes of reciprocal obligation. This mirrored their understanding of kinship in the material world. More than one MMA participant referred to one of their spiritual helpers as belonging to a particular animal spirit nation. For example, at the first meeting Arthur Running Horse, George Eagle Elk, and Kills Enemy each noted that they were eagle medicine men (2/13/1973, 14). However, this did not mean that they had the same helper. In fact, each had a different set of reciprocal obligations with their helpers and each individual medicine man did not expect the other medicine men to have the same communication protocol, rules, or regulations. Each was different. The final authority was the communication between the unique spirit helper and each individual medicine man as interpreted by each medicine man. Accepting multiple, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, explanations,

and stories were not issues for the MMA. But it was a problem for the priests involved in the MMCM. Sometimes, as we've seen from James Walker's ([1917] 1979) work on the Sun Dance with George Sword, as well as John Cunningham's work with Albert White Hat (2012a) in *Life's Journey—Zuya*, the western impulse to organize information into a coherent whole and single truth is evoked. Frequently, as seen in the story of the origin of the pipe, multiple, diverse narratives ignored by the western impulse to singular truth are articulated by the MMA.

The Story of the Origins of the Pipe

In Arthur Running Horse's earliest communication from his spirit helper he recalled that a man came to him and told him that the pipe was holy and to go tell the people of it (3/20/2973, 8). Certainly the most famous *ohukakan* (mythic story) among, and about, the Lakotas is the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman and how she brought the gift of the pipe to the Lakotas. This is the most frequently told story meant to account for the origin of the sacred pipe used in Lakota culture. There are multiple variations of this story told by numerous storytellers. One of the earliest accounts comes from Finger, a contemporary of George Sword and another informant for Walker's ([1917] 1979) treatise on the Sun Dance ritual. Finger in fact never mentions the White Buffalo Calf Woman; rather he identifies Wohpe (Falling Star Woman) as the spiritual being who brings the pipe to the people.[1] Note the dialogue from Walker's ([1917] 1979, 154–55) translation of the interview: "Has a Lakota ever seen *Wohpe*? Yes. When She gave the pipe to the Lakota She was in their camp for many days. How did she appear at that time? Like a very beautiful young woman. For this reason the people speak of Her as the Beautiful Woman. The people do not speak of Her as *Wohpe*. Only the shamans call her that."

White Hat (2012a, 96) observes that the White Buffalo Calf Woman story is "the most common pipe-origin story out there today" and he traces this narrative to Nicholas Black Elk and the seminal, widely circulated book *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt [1932] 2000). Although there are numerous variations regarding the details, the basic plot involves two young scouts who observe an object in the distance. As the object

draws closer, it becomes clear that it is a beautiful woman who is carrying an object wrapped in animal hide. As the story goes, one young man sexually desires the woman and the other recognizes that she is sacred. The scout who does not recognize the woman is sacred is killed by his desires and the other scout, who does, lives and is instructed to return to his people and prepare for her coming, which he does. When the woman arrives she is treated with respect and hospitality and through various ritual processes she gifts the people with a pipe, telling them, "Respect and honor this pipe, and the people will live and multiply." She gives instructions to the camp about how to use and care for the pipe and as she leaves she drops to the ground and turns into a buffalo calf (White Hat 2012a, 96).

There have been so many retellings of the story that it is considered *the* sole origin story of the pipe and how it came to the Lakotas. The very first story told during the first meeting was about how the pipe came to the Lakota people but it had nothing to do with White Buffalo Calf Woman. After the meeting was opened Father William Stolzman asked the various medicine men to talk about how God "revealed Himself through the Pipe." Arthur Running Horse spoke first and announced in English that he wanted someone to interpret for him; Ben Black Bear Jr. obliged.

> As far as the canumpa, the peace pipe, before—2000 years ago—there was no such thing as—peace pipe—or as a religion so that a man was out on a high hill by himself and just raised his arms and prayed. And one incident when this one particular man did this, he had his arms upraised and was praying. He prayed "Wakantanka, have pity on me. I don't want anything bad to happen to me." Yes that's a prayer. While he was praying, the peace pipe appeared on his hands, so after that they used the peace pipe to pray with. (2/13/1973, 1)

Paying attention to the ensuing storytelling exchange is revealing. After Running Horse finished his story and it was translated for the group, George Eagle Elk was the next to speak and he also asked to use the interpreter. When Eagle Elk finished speaking, rather than translating his words, Black Bear Jr. returned to Running Horse's talk and reiterated

the key points. Black Bear Jr. in fact, never translated Eagle Elk's words. Whatever was offered by Eagle Elk was aborted in the interpretive exchange. The next speaker, Charlie Kills Enemy, spoke in English. He referred to Running Horse's story about the pipe and did not challenge the narrative. The third speaker, Big Crow, also affirmed the story: "2000 years ago they didn't have no pipe to pray with so they go out on the hill. And with outstretched hands they say 'Wakantanka.' . . . And somewhere down the line, the pipe was brought down on earth and it is still laying up in Green Grass, somewhere near Eagle Butte up there" (2/13/1973, 5).

This storytelling exchange is surprising in light of the way the White Buffalo Calf Woman story is recirculated and retold as *the* origin story for the pipe. There is no doubt that the medicine men were well aware of the White Buffalo Calf Woman story; they referred to it during other meetings and retold that story as well. Yet no one corrected Running Horse. In fact, their seconding suggests that they agreed that it was *the* story about how the pipe was brought to the Lakota people. Ethnographer Kirin Narayan (1989, 37–38) astutely observes that "all stories are told for some purpose. There are different tellings at different times that are always shaped by the interaction between teller and audience." It is not the story per se but rather the work that the story does. As N. Scott Momaday (1999, 88) argues in his seminal essay "The Man Made of Words," this exchange hints that stories may have more to tell us about the creative and imaginative ways that the Lakotas "invest and preserve" themselves "in the context of ideas" rather than a remembrance of a static event in the past, mythic or otherwise.

Stolzman (1986) never acknowledges the alternative origin of the pipe story reaffirmed via seconding by three different medicine men. It did not fit into his schema, which, I suggest, is exactly the reason it was told by the medicine men. This version was confirmed on several occasions, most notably two years later in the exchange between Big Crow and Stolzman regarding the origin of the pipe, during which Big Crow challenged Stolzman's narrative, language, and sources (discussed in chapter 2). Unlike western culture's preoccupation with origins, it is clear that for the MMA this was not a concern; rather their focus was on the work of the pipe, not where it came from.

The Power of the Pipe

The majority of the MMA referred to the pipe as the "peace pipe" and observed that the practices of colonization had destabilized the social fabric and focus of the people, thereby negatively impacting the power of the pipe as a conduit for prayers. Ben Black Bear Sr. noted, "In the old days they used the peace pipe. They were very spiritual people. They lived the good life and their religion was strong. The Indian religion was strong. And as that was disappearing with the coming of the European, this was being lost until today" (2/12/1973, 7). Embracing an idealized vision of the past when they believed the people were strong and used the pipe in a good way was a motivation for the MMA. Running Horse noted that when the non-Indians came and introduced religion they destroyed the belief in the pipe. As a result the lifeways of the people was destroyed, they weren't as strong as they were in the past, and they didn't live a good life. This was the reason "we should go back to the pipe to bring ourselves back" (3/20/1973, 11).

During the first year, the MMA participants frequently discussed the types of prayers said through, and best supported by, the pipe. Their descriptions and examples of the prayers are very similar and over the course of the meetings each seems to reaffirm the other while slightly refining the underlying belief in the possibilities of the pipe's profound, perhaps ultimate, power. At the first meeting Running Horse stated the purpose of prayers said through the pipe was "so that the people may have a long life" (2/12/1973, 2). Kills Enemy noted the pipe was for "health, peace and happiness" (2/12/1973, 4). Big Crow chimed in that the prayers were for "health, welfare and for the happiness for the people in this time" (2/12/1973, 6). During the second meeting Kills Enemy claimed that the pipe was for unity and peace: "I call it love one another and that is unity and peace." He further elaborated that "we have to love one another in order to get along in this world" (3/20/1973, 3). While "the people" in this sense might refer solely to the Lakotas or Native people more broadly, Wallace Black Elk made clear that what is at stake is world peace for all peoples, arguing that the pipe offered the way to bring about peace in a world that is fraught with violence (10/30/1973, 11–12).

The MMA members participating in the MMCM self-selected and, as already noted, were predisposed to a literal interpretation of *mitakuye oyasin*, therefore it is not surprising that they felt the pipe and ceremonies were for everyone. Big Crow acknowledged that not all agreed and offered his critique of their stance: "And some of our medicine men has made the remark 'You let the non-Indian have that Pipe and they will take it away from us.' I do not believe they can do it. If it is used right it will work. And if they do not use it right, it will not work" (2/12/1973, 6–7). This was the opinion of the majority of participants. Kills Enemy noted that "we have to share with everybody . . . whites and blacks and yellow. I don't want to push and bar anybody off . . . a black man wants to pray with me and wants to pray with the peace pipe and knows how to pray then let him pray and the yellow man too. Chinese, Japanese, same with the red and white man" (3/20/1973, 3). Medicine man Robert Stead concurred, noting that the purpose of the pipe was to bring all people together (3/20/1973, 3).

The MMA participants rationalized their openness by pointing to a fundamental observation—at the very core of life everyone's blood is red. An unknown speaker at the October 1973 spoke at length about this:[2]

> I think I would like to go a little further. . . . We have overlooked one thing very much and that is the red power. The red power has a lot to do with the spirit and almighty God has invested the red power in every human being. The Indian religion has four colors black, red, yellow, and white. And as I receive the older men and the teachings, the red power is invested in all these colors. So I am sure some of us have made the vow that I would [accept] the black race as our brothers and sisters, the red race likewise, yellow, likewise and white race likewise. As my brothers and sisters. . . . So here if we take a black man or white man or yellow man and if we cut the white man's wrists, the blood that comes out of his wrists is not white, it is red. Therefore, the teachings that there is red power invested in every one of us from almighty God. So here so many of them have asked about why does an Indian have so many relatives? Most of these medicine men's prayers, Mitakuye Oyasin, he means that he

wants more relatives. More brothers and sisters. This means more red power. (10/30/1973, 4)

The majority of MMA participants had open attitudes about who could pray with the pipe, participate in ceremony (as we'll see in the next chapter), and conduct basic rituals such as the sweat lodge. During the meetings several participants who did not identify as medicine men described how they often conducted sweat lodges—Ben Black Bear Sr. and Big Crow were among them. These required no special calling from the spiritual realm or training, however experience as a participant was assumed. To offer up prayers in basic forms was a practice open to all. However, the ability to directly communicate with the spiritual world was strictly the purview of the medicine men.

The Calling

The majority of the MMA who self-identified and were identified by others as an *iyeska wakan* (interpreter of the sacred) narrated a three-part process that described how they came to be a medicine man. For the most part, their stories were remarkably consistent. First, they were "called" by the spirits to fulfill this role. Many resisted at first and those who did were met with "bad luck" until they decided to submit to the calling. Second, once they tacitly agreed to enter into this intimate spiritual relationship they went on a *hanbleciya* (vision quest). During their vision quest, they were contacted by their spiritual helper(s) and given instructions regarding the necessary tools and reciprocal obligations for working with their particular spiritual helpers. This involved learning the names of the spirit(s), certain songs, and prayers or prayer-tie combinations.[3] Third and last, they returned to their community and began conducting rituals, honing their skills from many experiences of conducting ceremony. The ritual act of telling the story of how they were called and their vision quest was routine at ceremony (discussed in more detail in chapter 6).

The primary similarity among the majority of the MMA participants was their understanding that each was chosen and contacted by spirits through some sort of direct communication—they heard voices telling

them to do something. At first most of them resisted that calling. They explained that they did not understand what was going on and a number sought advice from established medicine men. They did not seek out this role as ritual specialist and when they chose to ignore the call they experienced difficulties and ill effects. Kills Enemy stated that the spirits started making contact with him when he was a young man—too young, he intimated. He described how he ignored their call and "bad luck turned on me" (2/13/1973, 4). Big Crow translated Running Horse's similar narrative during a meeting in the first year: "It is just like a snap of his fingers, he heard the spirit because he heard a man say that tell this four times. He did not understand this and he almost died, he said. So medicine men were brought to him to doctor him and none didn't know the answer. The answer there was that he was supposed to be a medicine man" (10/20/1973, 7). During the same meeting, Robert Stead affirmed what happened to Running Horse and noted that his experience was similar (10/20/1973, 7). Two years later, Running Horse provided more detail, and Big Crow interpreted: "he talked about . . . the vision that he got. He didn't want to be a medicine man, I think he was in his early thirties, when his wife keep bring[ing] medicine men in there about this and in the end he was a medicine man" (11/25/1975, 113).

George Eagle Elk told a similar story, which Big Crow shared: "Mr. Eagle Elk said that he got his while working for non-Indians and I gather on a ranch. He was working out and he received this spiritual power in broad daylight and what he was supposed to do." Big Crow explained that Eagle Elk went into ceremony to find out what happened (10/20/1973, 7). Several years later Big Crow explained that Eagle Elk had never prayed to be a medicine man and had delayed (ignored the calling) for six years. When he was hurt by a horse one day he went into ceremony with the medicine man Good Lance, who "told him that it will happen again [another injury] . . . so he advised Mr. Eagle Elk, that he might as well do it. Meaning to become a medicine man." Big Crow went on to explain that in the ceremony that Good Lance conducted, Eagle Elk felt like he was covered with something and the people were told to shine a light on his feet, which they did. Each person in the ceremony saw something different but there was a commonality. In each

story Eagle Elk is surrounded by people like his father, long past. It was at this time he received the necessary instruction regarding ritual tools for conducting his ceremonies (2/21/1977, 36).

Being chosen and called by the spirits was only the first step in a process. After being called it was necessary to take the next step and go into ceremony to learn the details about how they would perform their ritual and to receive information regarding the ritual tools required for establishing reciprocal obligations protocol in order to conduct their ceremonies. For Eagle Elk this was accomplished during the ceremony conducted by Good Lance, but for the majority this required at least one vision quest and most went on a vision quest annually. Referring to Running Horse, Big Crow explained it this way: "This is how he got his vision quest. . . . But after he found out that he was destined to be a medicine man, then he has been a medicine man for forty years now" (10/20/1973, 7). In Running Horse's case the calling required him to go on a vision quest.

John "Fire" Lame Deer's experience may have been different as he did not describe "the calling" aspect of the process, but rather focused on his vision quest. Big Crow summarized Lame Deer's story during a 1975 meeting:

> He was a singer for these medicine men and he named them there. This was in the twenties, he used to sing for them and they were having ceremonies on the sly. When he was twenty six, he went and done his first vision quest. That's where he got his vision as a medicine man; he has practiced his religion up to this day that started in nineteen twenty six. And within that time he has made eighteen medicine men and he still has six more to go. So in his role as a medicine man he is at the top, but he doesn't consider that. It's what he had to do and so he did it. (12/9/1975, 118)

There are discrepancies here as Big Crow quotes Lame Deer as saying he was twenty-six when he went on his vision quest and then notes the year as 1926. In his "as-told-to" autobiography Lame Deer claims he was sixteen when he went on his first vision quest, becoming a man. Born circa 1903 this would have made the year circa 1919 (Lame Deer

and Erdoes 1972, 1). Narayan (1989, 37–38) helps make sense of this by reminding us that stories are told for a purpose. While dates provide an aura of legitimacy and accuracy for a western audience, the more important point in Lame Deer's narrative is his claim that his vision instructed him to make eighteen medicine men.

Lame Deer doesn't focus on the calling and it is unclear whether or not this transpired, but there is a new element here that is never heard from the other medicine men—the notion that a medicine man can make someone else a medicine man. Indeed one of the participants, Bill Schweigman, was one of the eighteen medicine men that Lame Deer had made. Perhaps this is the reason that Schweigman noted, "We all have a different version of how we became a medicine man and how we obtain these powers" (9/24/1974, 10). Yet he, too, mentioned that he had gone on a vision quest to receive his instructions (9/24/1974, 10).

The medicine men did not question the legitimacy of Lame Deer's or Schweigman's status as medicine men and they appear to have respected both men. It is important to note that going on a vision quest did not make one a medicine man. Big Crow is an excellent example of this. He had gone on many vision quests hoping to receive the calling and instructions to become a medicine man and frankly admitted that this had yet to happen. He observed that if the Creator felt he was qualified it would happen, but it had not happened yet. In the meantime, he would just keep trying (2/12/1973, 6).

While the MMA participants generally agreed that each had a specific story, the majority also believed that there were many others purporting to be medicine men who were not—people Big Crow referred to as "fakers" (1/24/1977, 4). Yet they were hesitant to pass judgment on anyone purporting to be a medicine man because each understood that every medicine man's spirits were different and each set of instructions was different. Big Crow translated for an infrequent participant, Gilbert Yellow Hawk: "As you all know, Mr. Yellow Hawk is one of our medicine men and he said the pipe is sacred and the spirits that come to this medicine man [are sacred]. The spirit can communicate with just this medicine man and not anybody else. If it [the spirit] tells them to do something then they do it" (1/24/1977, 4). Yellow Hawk is drawing

attention to their understanding that each works with a different spirit (or spirits); medicine men must trust the communication from these spirits completely, and they must always follow the spirits' instructions.

"Each Has His Own"

The medicine men talked about receiving their vision, by which they meant the instructions they received from their spirit(s) and for each the spirit(s) and the instructions were different. In other words, none of the medicine men worked with the same spirit and as a result the specifics of what they could do, the ritual tools they used for reciprocal obligations to hail his or her spiritual helpers, and how they conducted ceremony differed according to the specific instructions given by their particular spirit helpers. Broadly, most had specific songs, required different combinations of prayer-tie sets, set up different altars, and had specific rules they followed, but the details differed among them. Charlie Kills Enemy noted that his visions and dreams gave him the rules and regulation for *his* ceremonies, implying that they applied only to his ceremonies (2/12/1973, 3).

Big Crow explained that "these medicine men have their songs with their visions. Each one has his ways and songs" (10/19/1976, 4). Being a singer himself, Big Crow was particularly observant in this area; several weeks later he noted that in addition to learning which prayer ties their spirits' required and the names of spirits that worked with them, each medicine man received a song that they are supposed to sing (11/2/1976, 1). Songs were considered a particularly potent form of communication. In fact, the ritual for doctoring and help, the Lowanpi ceremony, literally translates as "they sing" or "they are singing" (White Hat 2012a, 173). At a September 1974 meeting one MMA participant emphasized the importance of song: "We people talk German, Indian, Chinese, whatever you are. When we all use the same language it will be a song . . . God is a song" (9/24/1974, 7).

Running Horse noted that "his spirits have different names and he cannot reveal their names here and they have to be done in ceremony." He went on to explain that he worked with four spirits and each has its own name (10/20/1973, 7). For the Lakotas who went to different

medicine men and ceremonies this was understood. Mrs. Walking Eagle clarified this during a meeting in 1977. Big Crow translated for her: "She wanted to emphasize that each medicine man has his own ways, each has his own dreams, regardless how. So maybe they all have different ways, which they probably do" (5/9/1977, 10).

Sometimes the instructions were unique and challenged the MMA participants' capacity for understanding among themselves. Because each was different, they also learned about each other during these conversations. Big Crow observed, "Well, we don't understand each other among ourselves" (3/30/1973, 5). This was highlighted during discussions regarding the colors and numbers of prayer ties required by each medicine man for their ceremonies (as stipulated by their spirits). Some tested the open-mindedness of the other medicine men. For example, Kills Enemy described a spirit that required him to use a pink flag (commonly flags are of the primary colors black, red, yellow, white, blue, or green) and another who had come to him during his most recent vision quest and required a purple flag. "I use a pink, I fasted last fall and I gained a purple and I contacted a spirit last time and the only things that he could talk was [E]nglish. He told me to use this pink. When I have a ceremony, he said he was going to help me pray and so I use it. I use that pink" (3/20/1973, 5).

While often challenging for the medicine men, the differences were even more difficult for the priests to understand. Two back-to-back meetings took place in 1976 during which Stolzman was trying to grasp the concept of the required number of ties each medicine man used and who determined that number. He sought a one-rule-fits-all response, which the MMA participants were unable to provide. In answer to Stolzman's query, Frank Picket Pen responded and Big Crow translated: "I have been in this for 39 years. I don't determine how many tobacco ties I use in a service. Somebody says he will use that many. (He means his spirits). So that is how many tobacco ties I use" (10/28/1976, 4). An exchange between Stolzman and Big Crow occurred during which Big Crow sought to explain. Stolzman asked, "50 is for the spirits? For his spirits?" Big Crow replied, "For his spirits. They tell him just how many they want. Frank didn't tell how many it was for him. I know what it

is. He uses 75, I believe. Each man, his spirit, *wicasa wankata* (sacred being), that's how many he [the spirit] want. . . . And Frank's is 75 or 100, or something like that. Rudy is 50 and 75 when he is only sitting there [Lowanpi ceremony] and 405 when he is *yuwipi*, doctoring the sick" (10/28/1976, 5). Later during the transcription process Big Crow reiterated the Lakota understanding of how the medicine men learn about the ties, their color, and the required number: "You pray with the tobacco ties. And the amount? His spirits, someone who is coming, has told him to make that amount. That's his ceremony. Each has his own" (10/28/1976, 9).

The world in which the MMA participants functioned recognized, accepted, and respected difference. As such they were resistant when Stolzman tried to summarize and organize information into sets of rules, real and fake medicine men, or good and bad ceremony. These concepts were outside their Lakota cultural worldview and experience. This issue emerged regularly during the MMCM. For example, in May of 1976 the priests inquired how the medicine men knew if a ritual request was for ill intent and how they dealt with such requests. George Eagle Elk responded that "the Medicine Men know; his spirit knows what is good and wrong. So if anything comes that is wrong he advises the medicine [man] . . . not to take it. So in their visions they know what is wrong and what is right and wrong. So they don't take it at all" (5/4/1976, 31). Chief Eagle concurred: "The spirits will not accept anything which is in the area of witchcraft. The spirits will just not respond (*taku sica*) [to that which is bad]" (5/4/1976, 31). In October that year the MMA participants were again asked similar questions; this time it was framed as how they would deal with spirits with ill intent. Running Horse was clearly irritated by the recurrence of questions about bad spirits, as evidenced by the way he shifted the conversation to English to make a point, something he rarely did. "I am going to straighten something out, these ghosts . . . they don't come here for nothing" (10/12/1976, 8). In his view and experience the spirits came to help the people. He trusted that and did not spend time trying to figure out if they might have bad intentions.

The medicine men also were hesitant to affirm any rules and regulations that the priests might project onto their roles. In a "position paper" delivered to the group in January 1977, Stolzman laid out a list of four things that "a true medicine man" should or should not do. Medicine men, Stolzman declared, should not conduct ceremony when drinking; they should not take money, fool around, or make jokes. Further they should always be available for the people (1/20/1977, 4).

Big Crow repeated what he heard just to make sure that he and the medicine men understood correctly what Stolzman had said (1/20/1977, 5). Running Horse then spoke at length, totally ignoring the details of the position paper; instead he talked about the sincerity of prayer. Prayers offered with deep sincerity were answered, he said. Kills Enemy noted that he didn't always accept a pipe offered by a petitioner asking him to conduct ritual. If the request for ritual had negative intent, his spirits told him this and he didn't agree to do the ceremony. Big Crow was clearly defensive about the implications of the position paper and in a testimonial manner exclaimed that these medicine men were sincere. He focused in particular on the money aspect of Stolzman's paper. He stated that in the past whoever put up ceremony (requested the ritual) gave the medicine man something of material value—an aspect of reciprocal obligations. The respect expected in a Lakota ethos of reciprocal obligations required the petitioner of a ceremony to offer an exchange for the spirits' help in the form of prayer ties and flags, as well as gifts (often in the form of money) to the medicine man for conducting the ceremony (this was after all their work) and to those in the community who participated in the prayers by providing a meal. Big Crow noted, "But coming down the line sometimes some of these medicine men don't get paid." Big Crow proceeded to draw from a story that Kills Enemy shared about his timidity and noted that he didn't ask for payment if he was not given something (1/20/1977, 5–7).

George Eagle Elk was the only one who mentioned alcohol during this particular exchange and then only to observe that they had discussed this frequently. All were hesitant to make judgments about what others did and each strove to focus on the sincerity of prayer

rather than what was to them an arbitrary, western-constructed set of dogmatic rules. Big Crow opined: "I am no medicine man. But each medicine man, regardless how run down, they each have their vision, regardless how small and I respect that. So when I go there, what he does is his business. When I go there, I go there to pray. To give it all I got" (11/2/1976, 3–4).

The Final Authority

The discussions that ensued as each individual medicine man worked to make his own practice and spiritual guidelines intelligible to the others at the MMCM (even the other medicine men) provide insight into the way that their spirits were, for them, the final authority. One subject that was discussed at length was sweat lodge protocol and whether or not women were allowed to sweat. Today this remains an issue of debate. Are women supposed to sweat? Can men and women sweat together? Should women sweat separately from men? The importance of this conversation is demonstrated by the fact that it began in January 1975 and came up again a year later and was discussed during five separate meetings from January through April 1976.

In January 1975 Julie Walking Eagle, a Lakota woman, asked the medicine men whether women could sweat. Big Crow translated for Bill Schweigman: "the medicine men answered, that it's up to the spirit to tell the medicine men if they [women] can come in then or later" (1/20/1975, 68). For Schweigman the final authority regarding whether women should sweat, and if so when, and whether they could should sweat with the men or separately, was determined by each medicine man's spirit helper(s). Lame Deer disagreed, saying that it wasn't a vision, or message from the spirit; rather it was a "night dream."[4] He added that in the traditional way women don't sweat. "All the time since I began in 1920, I never seen a woman in my sweat bath and I'll stick to that. They could pray outside not inside" (1/20/1975, 68).

When the subject came up again a year later other medicine men weighed in on the topic as they negotiated meaning. Running Horse drew on the discourse of tradition, which he articulated as "the old days," when he advocated for separate sweats. Big Crow translated: "In the old

days just the medicine man performed the ceremony and when they were through he said the women usually went in there, they steamed their selves off the leftovers" (1/6/1976, 59). Schweigman, who was also at this meeting and conducted sweats that included men *and* women participants, discussed the importance of the sweat lodge: "The stone is very important to us, the sweat lodge, and this is the way that I received my vision, and I think that this is why that some of the people, the four generations don't come to these ceremonies that I have. . . . When the steam comes off the rocks and you sweat, you purify yourself with the sage and you come out and you live a new life again" (1/6/1976, 63). Schweigman was intimating that perhaps some people did not come to his sweat lodge because he conducted mixed sweats, but he did it that way because his spirits told him to do so. Everyone needs purification.

At the next meeting Running Horse provided context as he related a story about the origins of the sweat lodge. Big Crow translated: "It's up to the medicine man first, his vows and it's up to him. In this if he uses this with respect and uses it right he can cure anyone that is sick. . . . In his opinion he usually goes with the men folk. But, Mr. Left Hand Bull said, Chips is the one that brought this back to this country from the south and over there the women used all these things like the sweat bath and all other ceremonies. But after it got here it's up to these medicine men and to what their vision is" (1/20/1976).

At the following meeting, the Lakota "associates" reflected and weighed in on the matter again. Black Bear Sr. thought out loud through the practical implications of hard-and-fast rules about participation in the sweat lodge. Big Crow translated: "Mr. Black Bear made a long speech concerning the sweat bath, he thinks women should be allowed. . . . In his he gives medicine and he has his rules of how many rocks to use and so on. [He] brought out the naturally [obvious], if you are going to doctor sick, that if it's a woman or a girl, she would have to go in the sweat bath. So there's no way that you can bar them by saying that women shouldn't be allowed" (2/3/1976, 75). A Lakota woman, Marie,[5] offered her personal experience. She noted that generally men have their sweat first and when they are finished the women go in and that she

was uncomfortable with the idea of men and women sweating together (2/3/1976, 75). Schweigman seconded Black Bear Sr.'s comment providing additional rationale for mixed sweats. Big Crow translated and offered his own take on the topic:

> He gave a long speech there about the women being with the sweat bath, he sees no wrong with that. Like a man anywhere, he cannot live without a woman, they cook a man's food and they feed him, they wash his clothes. So I agree with him, the women they can take a lot. Using himself as an example is a very good thing . . . to bring it out he said that he had a sweat bath with his cousin and with[in] his sweat bath was also with his sister-in-law. He said that nothing was done that was out of the way. (2/3/1976, 76)

Schweigman was suggesting that the restrictions prohibiting women's participation had to do with perceptions about inappropriate behavior taking place. An unknown woman seconded this as she talked about how when she went into mixed sweats her only purpose was to pray. Big Crow chimed in and lightened the mood, noting that that was a good point as it meant that he and others who go into mixed sweats "are on safe ground" (2/3/1976, 76). Throughout these exchanges the center of the conversation was among the Lakota participants as they felt out where others stood on the topic and negotiated meaning. Only once, almost as an aside, did one of the medicine men ask the priests if they had ever recommended that one of their congregants attend the sweat.

At the following meeting in late February (the third anniversary of the first meeting), Big Crow was ill and unable to attend. Running Horse's wife, Lucille, took on the role as translator and the conversation about sweat lodge participation continued. The rhythm of the conversation shifted and the male participants seemed reticent to share with the ease they displayed when Big Crow was there. The meeting was brief and there was only a short discussion regarding the sweat lodge. At one point it is unclear, who is speaking, Black Bear Sr. or Lame Deer—both are recorded as speaking, but Lucille Running Horse did not relay this information in her translation, which was: "He says that it's really up

to the individual medicine man, they have their own rules that they follow" (2/24/1976, 78).

By April Big Crow's health was improved and he returned to his role as interpreter. Joe Eagle Elk was present. He had not been there for the previous meetings during which the issue of sweat lodge participation was discussed and he wanted to contribute his thoughts to the discussion. He went on at length about how public opinion, what he referred to as "majority's rule," put him between a rock and a hard place because he wanted to help and please everyone. Women's participation in the sweat was not the only issue under discussion, which had turned to include conversation regarding a taboo that prohibited women from participating in ceremony during menstruation. Big Crow translated:

> Now there was this interesting thing he experienced is when a woman was brought to him and she was very sick and on the verge of death. So he doctored her and gave her some medicine and so the next morning the woman had her period. So Joe said right then he thought that that was it, all the prayers and work for nothing, but he went into the sweat bath and that one of his spirits came. So this spirit told him to keep on and finishing the doctoring of this woman, because this spirit said that he had chosen a certain kind of medicine for this woman even though she had her period. So he kept on doctoring this woman and this woman got well. (4/6/1976, 3)

Underpinning the complex web of intricate relations known by the MMA participants through the concept of *mitakuye oyasin* was a spiritual world filled with helpers with the capacity to intervene in the material world of human beings. They were considered the final authority regarding questions about life in the material world. This third concentric circle shaped all interactions in the relationships engaged in by the MMA. The guidance of the spiritual helpers required the interpretation skills of certain individuals who had been chosen—the *iyeska wakan* (interpreters of the sacred). It is surprising that the MMA participants never, during the five-year-long dialogue, expressed any doubt or questions about their communication with their spirit helpers. The trust was

so strong that even if the spirits told them to do something that within the culture was considered taboo, such as allowing women to participate in ceremony during menstruation, they would do so without question. Their confidence in the authority of their helpers was powerful.

The people, conceived of broadly as all people, could benefit from the intimate relationship between the medicine man and their spirit helper(s) and they had access to this help and wisdom through the experience of ritual. The final, outer concentric circle described in the following chapter is perhaps the most important as it encompasses all the others. It is related to and informs all of the other relationships that constitute *mitakuye oyasin*. For the MMA this involved participation in ritual practices through which people would experience on multiple registers—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—what Clifford Geertz (1973) referred to as the powerful fusion of worldview and ethos.