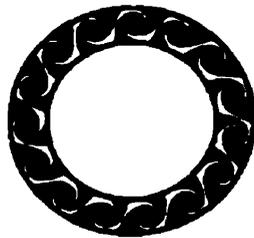


**Spirituality, Holism and Healing  
Among the Lakota Sioux:**



**Towards an Understanding of Indigenous Medicine**

**By Jonathan H. Ellerby**

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
of The University of Manitoba  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts**

**Interdisciplinary Degree Program in Native Studies  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada**

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## Dedication

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**This thesis work is dedicated to my two fathers:**

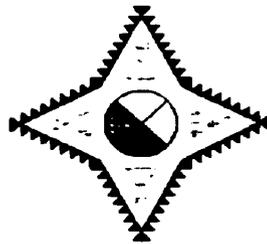
**William E. Ellerby, my Dad,  
who brought me into and through this world with love and wisdom,  
always giving me the best he had and the best he knew;**

**and Gene Thin Elk, my *At'é*  
who has been my good friend, wise mentor, and loving teacher  
on this wonderful Human Journey.**



**This cycle of unnatural living is in direct contrast  
to the Original Teachings of our people.  
We must utilize our ceremonies and belief systems  
to break this unnatural cycle.  
We must become whole once again,  
in balance, walking the sacred Red Road.  
- Gene Thin Elk, Sican'gu, Sioux**

**Let's put our minds together  
and see what kind of future we can make for our children.  
- Sitting Bull, Hun'kpapa, Sioux**



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**Preface:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Hau mitakȳapi. Anpetu ki'le micante etan wowagalake.*

My relatives, I would like to greet each of you with a good handshake; in this work I speak from my heart.

My name is Jonathan Ellerby, I am Jewish and was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where I was raised. As well, I grew up spending three months of every year in Lake of the Woods, Ontario, where my family owns a cabin on an island in Ptarmigan Bay. In many ways, I consider that area of Lake of the Woods my true home.

I was born to Isabel and Bill Ellerby. Both sides of my mom's family were Jewish and came from Odessa, Russia. My grandmother, Sadie Shein, was a first generation Canadian, and my grandfather, Lou Trepel, was born in Russia. My father's parents were third and fourth generation Canadians and trace their roots largely from Scotland, and to some degree from England as well.

Writing this thesis put me in a very difficult place. Many academics will reject my unorthodox style and inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing and sharing information. On the other hand, many Indigenous people will reject some of the content and condemn me as a non-Indigenous person writing so candidly about sacred subjects like healing and the Spirit World. I acknowledge both positions as valid and important. Nevertheless, I have tried to write a paper that demonstrates both my academic sophistication and knowledge of the literature, and a deep respect for and understanding of Lakota healing and spirituality.

I understand that some things are not meant to be studied. Some things are inherently beyond materialistic examination and evaluation. For many Indigenous people, spiritual leaders, and traditional healers, Indigenous medicine and spirituality are matters that should remain beyond the microscope, beyond study and the written word. The strange path of history however, has made it such that the non-Indigenous study and understanding of Indigenous spirituality and healing has become essential to the healing of Indigenous nations. If non-Indigenous institutions are to provide culturally appropriate care and to support Indigenous systems of healing, a meaningful understanding of Indigenous healing must come first. I have undertaken this project to contribute to the preservation and strengthening of Indigenous healing traditions through education. The maintenance of traditional healing ways is a matter of central importance to many Indigenous nations and carries implications for all people. The health and freedom of one nation shapes the health and freedom of all.

In his autobiography, Sacred Fireplace, revered Lakota Holy Man, Pete Catches shares a prayer for his readers. I respectfully offer these good words as a prayer for those who read this:

May the Great Spirit's love, and in His goodness, bless you. The Great Spirit will bless those people who may read this book. I pray He will implant in their hearts a love and compassion for the sick. If we can each in our own way, and according to our own means, be able to lend a hand to others, then we know that we live in the light of the Great Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Catches, P. S. and P. V. Catches. Sacred Fireplace Oceti Wakan: Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light, 1999. 35.

## Acknowledgements: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to extend my deepest love and gratitude to my family in Wase Wakpa, both immediate and extended, friends and Elders. *Wo'pila* (deep gratitude) to my Lakota mom, and all my brothers and sisters (big and small), Grandma, and my Kola, I have learned so much from each of you about family, love and relationships - the essence of healing.

As well, I want to express my gratitude to my own family and friends who have encouraged and supported me throughout my academic work and spiritual adventures. *Wo'pila* to Rachel, who shared much of the journey in this Master's program with me and helped me with critical thought, love and support. *Wo'pila* to James for being my eternal academic colleague and spiritual brother. *Wo'pila* to my committee: Chris, Yvonne, Stan, and David, for supporting my creativity and spiritual Vision of academic work. I am honoured to have had each of you involved; a more gifted committee in mind and spirit I cannot imagine. A special *wo'pila* to Joe, who showed great support, interest and unconditional regard for me throughout this process.

*Wo'pila* to the additional reviewers of this paper, Barbara and Gladys, Marlyn, Cathy, Laura, John, and Mark, who gave of their time and wisdom. My deepest gratitude to my mom who read through my work as it unfolded, and has always supported me unconditionally in all that I do. A special *wo'pila* to my brother Lawrence who gave so much of himself to a detailed reading of this, and for his companionship on our parallel journeys. Also to my sister Shauna for her support and readings. Finally, to Gene, *Atë*, what can I say that you don't already know: with all my love, *wo'pila*.

I must extend additional gratitude to the Indigenous traditional healers and spiritual leaders who unknowingly contributed to my work through our association during the time of my writing process. To Calvin; Fabian, Clem, and Bill; Don Umberto and Don Francisco: *wo'pila*.

To the reader, *wo'pila*, I am thankful that you have taken time to read this. I encourage you to read it with an open heart and mind. I believe that you will find an original contribution to the literature, and a personal experience that will nourish your own understanding and experience of healing in your life. Of course there are many others who go unnamed, and to them I offer my respect and gratitude as well.

*Wakan'tanka, Tunkašila: Wo'pila Tanka.*

*Mitakuye oyasin.*

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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This paper was not written out of a desire to know, but out of a compulsion to help. By the time I had written the proposal for this thesis project, I had already had a six year relationship with the Lakota culture and Gene Thin Elk, the person on whom I hoped to focus this study. I realize that I may always be a beginning student of Lakota culture and spirituality; nevertheless, my attraction to this project was based on a desire to share what I have learned in a way that can help Indigenous people through the facilitation of cross-cultural understanding.

In the last eight years of my life I have seen and been involved with the Indigenous struggle for health, security and independence. Among the Maori of New Zealand; the Anangu People of Aboriginal Australia; Tibetan Monks exiled in Dharamsala, India; in desert villages in Tanzania, Africa; river villages along the Amazon headwaters of Peru; and the Indigenous nations of Native America and Canada, I have been touched by the ongoing struggle for health and prosperity. My life has been enriched immeasurably by my friendships and family relationships with Indigenous people. I have received much in love and healing; and I hope to find ways to give back in return.

I have been fortunate to have walked a beautiful path that has lead me to the side of many Indigenous teachers and healers. In their work I have seen healing ways that can sustain and revitalize their nations. I have learned from a healing way of life that offers something to all of humanity. I have written this for the First People, and the Indigenous healers of this world; but, I believe that anyone who approaches this paper with an open

mind and an open heart will feel the power of a unique way of being in the world that is in its essence, healing.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this thesis is to impart an understanding of the distinct nature of Indigenous healing systems in a manner that is both congruent with Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies and intelligible to a non-Indigenous reader. In order to examine and describe an Indigenous system of healing, a case study of my own experience of the philosophy and work of a Lakota spiritual leader is presented. Through original fieldwork and a review of the literature, a basic personal understanding of Lakota healing is achieved and described.

Central to this presentation of Lakota healing is the understanding that Lakota healing is fundamentally spiritual and holistic. The spiritual, holistic nature of Lakota healing is explained in the process by which it is learned (Chapter Four), basic philosophical principles (Chapter Five), and comparisons with Western principles of medicine (Chapter Six). Many of the qualities of Lakota healing that are different from the Western biomedical model are emphasized. The juxtaposition of these two medical systems stresses those things which cannot readily be grasped by non-Indigenous observers and, therefore, are most critical to cross-cultural communication and understanding. An understanding of the conceptual world behind Lakota healing is stressed over the investigation of healing practices or devices.

Historically, Indigenous healing traditions have been studied primarily in the fields of medical anthropology and ethnography. The majority of texts that deal with Indigenous healing practices in North America focus on descriptions of ritual, and the recording of prescriptions and procedures in healing treatments.<sup>1</sup> There has also been an emphasis, in recent decades, on the narrative life histories of healers.<sup>2</sup> Medically driven studies have tended to focus on the evaluation of efficacy, the establishment of interdisciplinary correlates, the inventory of pharmaceuticals, and the rationalization of elements that are incongruent with the biomedical model.<sup>3</sup> Through fieldwork and a

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<sup>1</sup> Feraca, S. "Wakinyan: Contemporary Teton Dakota Religion." Studies in Plains Anthropology and History 2 (1963). Hultkrantz, A. Shamanic Healing and Ritual Drama: Health and Medicine in Native North American Religious Traditions. New York: Crossroad, 1992. Hurt, W. and Howard, J. "A Dakota Conjuring Ceremony." In Southwestern Journal of Anthropology 8 (1952): 286-296. Jilke, W. Indian Healing. Surrey, BC: Hancock House, 1982. Lewis, T. The Medicine Men. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Vogel, V. American Indian Medicine. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970. Young, D., G. Ingram, and L. Swartz. Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Young, D., J. Morse, and J. McConnell. "Documenting the Practice of a Traditional Healer Methodological Problems and Issues." Ed. D. Young. Health Care Issues in the Canadian North. Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1988. 89-94. Young, D., J. Morse, and J. McConnell. "A Cree Indian Treatment for Psoriasis: A Longitudinal Study." Culture 7.2 (1988): 31-41.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, D. Rolling Thunder. New York: Delta, 1974. Boyd, D. Mystics, Magicians and Medicine People. New York: Marlowe & Company, 1991. Boyd, D. Mad Bear. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994. Castaneda, C. The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge. New York: Washington Square Books, 1968. Erdoes, R., and L. Crow Dog. Crow Dog: Four Generation of Sioux Medicine Men. New York: HarperCollins, 1995. Erdoes, R., and A. Lame Deer. Gift of Power: The Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man. Santa Fe: Bear & Co. 1992. Erdoes, R., and J. F. Lame Deer. Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972. Fitzgerald, M. O. Yellowtail: Crow Medicine Man and Sun Dance Chief. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. Fitzgerald, M. O. Yellowtail: Crow Medicine Man and Sun Dance Chief. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. Lyon, W., and W. Black Elk. Black Elk: The Sacred Ways of a Lakota. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990. Mails, T. E. Fools Crow. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979. Neihardt, J. Black Elk Speaks. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979. Young, D., G. Ingram, and L. Swartz. Eagle.

<sup>3</sup> Ackerknecht, H. Primitive Medicine and Cultural Pattern. Bulletin of the History of Medicine II (1942): 503-21. L. Kemnitzer, "White Man's Medicine, Indian Medicine, and Indian Identity on Pine Ridge Reservation." Pine Ridge Research Bulletin 8 (1966): 12-23. Lewis, T. "An Indian Healer's Preventative Medicine Procedure." Hospital and Community Psychiatry 25 (1974): 94-95. Swartz, L. (1988). "The Healing Properties of the Sweat Lodge Ceremony." Health Care Issues in the Canadian North. Ed. D. Young. Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1988. 102-107. Waldram, J. The Way of the Pipe. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1997. Waldram, J., A. Herring, and T. K. Young. Aboriginal Health in Canada: Historical, Cultural and Epidemiology Perspectives. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995. Press. Young, D., J. Morse, and J. McConnell. "Documenting the Practice of a Traditional Healer

review of the literature, it is evident that such approaches to the study of Indigenous healing are both inadequate and often inappropriate from an Indigenous point of view.

Studying the details of ceremony, the practices of healers and the scientific merits of Indigenous healing methods are generally considered either disrespectful or incongruent from the perspective of traditional healers.<sup>4</sup> This is of increasing importance to the non-Indigenous scholar. If academic material is not recognized as valid by the individuals it seeks to represent, then its validity and merit must be questioned. Increasingly, scholars are recognizing the importance of research that is able to be supported by emic and etic perspectives. While discussing a draft of this project, Gene Thin Elk commented:

In the scientific way of research they try to understand things by reducing them to parts. Then, they study those parts, and in doing that, they claim ownership over them. That is how they try to achieve control: because they can take something apart, name it, and then reconstruct it and make it work. That is how they claim dominance: the sub-parts become more important than the whole. But these things [traditional Lakota healing and spirituality] cannot be understood in parts. When you break a ceremony down into smaller details, or try to analyze the content of a

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Methodological Problems and Issues." Ed. D. Young. Health Care Issues Young, D., J. Morse, and J. McConnell. "A Cree Indian Treatment for Psoriasis: A Longitudinal Study." Culture.

<sup>4</sup> Deloria, V. Custer Died for Your Sins. New York: MacMillan, 1969. Deloria, V. God is Red. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994. Deloria, V. Red Earth, White Lies. New York: Scribner, 1995. Ellerby, J. Working with Aboriginal Elders. Winnipeg MB: Earth Concepts, 1999. Ellerby, J., and L. Ellerby. Understanding the Role of Elders and Traditional Healers in the Treatment of Aboriginal Sex Offenders. Ottawa: Aboriginal Peoples Collection, 1999. Ellerby, 1999; Ellerby & Ellerby, 1999. Mihsuah, D. Natives and Academics: Researching and Writings about American Indians. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. Thornton, R. ed. Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

medicine, the Spirit is lost. Then when they try to make sense of it, or put it back together, there is no Spirit - it is not the same. It will never work.<sup>5</sup>

That which makes Indigenous healing systems truly unique cannot be grasped through an evaluation of the practices and procedures employed. Ethnographic methodologies and materialistic science are generally unsuitable epistemologies for the comprehension of Indigenous healing, because Indigenous healing is about a way of life, a lifestyle and belief system. In order to understand Indigenous healing, it is essential to understand the philosophy that lies behind the procedures, practices and practitioners.

Practices and practitioners are central to the tradition; however, these things can be studied, and even replicated and employed without a sound understanding of the philosophical context in which they exist. Used as such, as Thin Elk has indicated, they become meaningless and largely ineffective. There is an underlying set of assumptions about reality from which Indigenous medical systems and perspectives on healing emerge. The things which define Indigenous healing are not the tools used, but the philosophy behind the use of them. The power to heal is beyond formulas and techniques; it emerges from a dynamic relationship between human beings and the Spiritual World. During the *Wiwangwacipi*, Sun Dance, last year, Thin Elk commented:

Sometimes we have anthropologists here. They watch every little detail. They count everything and write notes on everything. They want to know 'why.' 'Why does he turn like this; Why does he put that there; Why did he cover his mouth

---

<sup>5</sup> Thin Elk, G. Personal Communication. Spring 2000.

when he coughed?' But they don't understand. These physical realities aren't what matter most.<sup>6</sup>

Without an understanding of Indigenous philosophy, Western researchers and health care providers will continue to misunderstand and misinterpret Indigenous approaches to health. For example, the employment of an Indigenous Elder does not make a medical model Indigenous. The use of a Medicine Wheel framework for treatment delivery does not instantly make a treatment Indigenous. Holism is not about the inclusion of alternative therapies or increased attention to the spiritual and psychological. Holism is about the relationship between parts of the self - the integrated experience. Holism affirms the simultaneous importance and interdependence of all aspects of the human self and experience. In Indigenous cultures, such as the Lakota, healing and spirituality are inseparable categories of thought and experience. To speak of Lakota holism, healing or spirituality, all three (and more) must be included as essential. In my own understanding of Lakota healing, the division of these terms is largely intellectual and false, creating a fragmented vision of healing that could only make sense in a Western, Cartesian-based worldview.

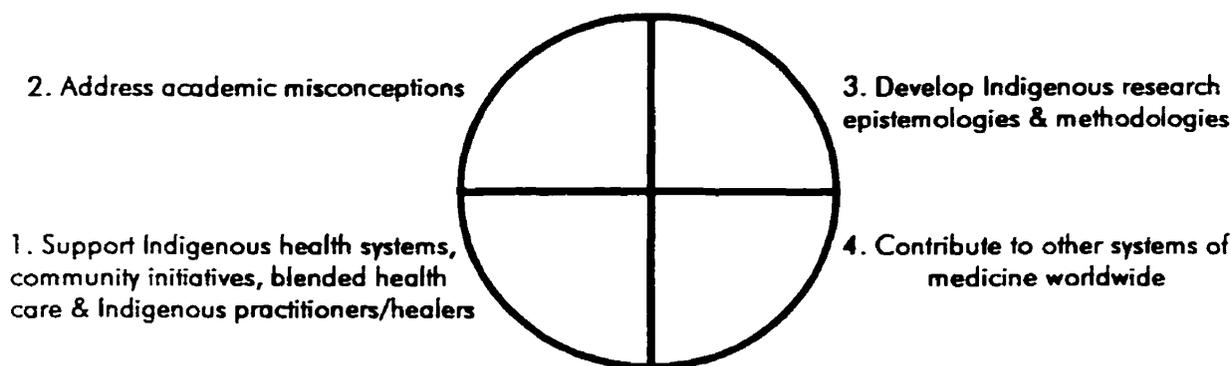
#### **Four Directions of Change: Why the Academic Study of Indigenous Healing?**

While I recognize the sacred and private nature of Indigenous healing ways, further study of Indigenous spirituality and healing is vital to the health of Indigenous people and the preservation of their traditions. I see the reasons for this as being fourfold.

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<sup>6</sup> Thin Elk, G. Personal Communication. Summer 1999.

**Figure 1. Four Project Justifications**



### **1. Preserve and Maintain Indigenous Healing Systems**

The primary reason for the study of Indigenous forms of healing and medicine is to support the practice, preservation and continuity of Indigenous tradition. Indigenous healing offers wellness to Indigenous communities in its innate efficacy and its capacity to enhance Western models of care. The inclusion of Indigenous methods and philosophies in Western treatment, rehabilitation and health care delivery is essential to the improvement of the health status of Indigenous people.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Arbogast, D. Wounded Warriors: A Time for Healing. Omaha: Little Turtle Publications, 1995. Bordewich, F. Killing the White Man's Indian. New York: Anchor Books, 1996. Clarkson, L., V. Morrissette, and G. Regallet. Our Responsibility to the Seventh Generation: Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development. Winnipeg, MB: International Institute for Sustainable Development, 1992. Couture, J. (1996). "The Role of Native Elders: Emergent Issues." Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues. Eds. D. Long and O. Dickason. Toronto: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1996. 42-56. Ellerby, L. "Community Based Treatment of Aboriginal Sex Offenders: Facing Realities and Exploring Possibilities." Forum on Corrections Research 4 (3) (1994): 23-25. Ellerby, J., and L. Ellerby. "Role of Traditional Healers in the Treatment of Aboriginal Sex Offenders." Forum on Correctional Research 12:1 (2000): 40-44. Frisch, D. "Spiritual Leaders Tolerated: But Never Fully Supported by Modern Health Care Providers." Masters Thesis University of North Dakota, 1998. Hammerschlag, C. (1988) The Dancing Healers: A Doctor's Journey of Healing with Native Americans. New York: Harper & Row. ---. The Theft of the Spirit: A Journey to Spiritual Healing. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. Havemann, P. "The Indignization of Social Control in Canada." Law and Society: A Critical Perspective. Eds. B. W. Morse and G. Woodman. Providence, RI: Foris Publications, 1988. 71-100. Jorgenson, J. The Sun Dance Religion: Power for the Powerless. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972. Kaufert, J. "Cultural Mediation in Cancer Diagnosis and End of Life Decision-Making: the Experience of Aboriginal Patients in

Until recently, typical approaches to health education, disease prevention, and health promotion in Native American communities have ranged from a modification of existing programs to suit local needs, to an imposition of predominantly Eurocentric values and standards.<sup>8</sup>

As an example, in Canada, Indigenous people are expressly requesting the involvement of traditional healing and its influence in their care. Many are seeking it at a

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Canada." Anthropology & Medicine 6.3 (1999): 405-421. Kaufert, J., and W. Koolage. "Culture Brokerage and Advocacy in Urban Hospitals: The Impact of Native Language Interpreters." Santee Culture Health 3.2 (1985): 3-8. Kaufert, J., M. Lavallee, S. Koolage, and J. O'Neil. (1996). "Culture and Informed Consent." Eds. J. Oakes and R. Riewe Issues in the North 1 (1996): 89-93. Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute. Kellough, G. "From Colonialism to Economic Imperialism: The Experience of the Canadian Indian." Structured Inequality in Canada. Eds. J. Harp and J. Hofely. Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1980. 343-376. Kim, U. and Berry, J. (Eds.). Indigenous Psychology: Research and Experience in Cultural Context. New Bury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993. Long, D. A., and T. Fox, T. "Circle of Healing: Illness, Healing, and Health Among Aboriginal People in Canada." Eds. D. A. Long and O. P. Dickason. Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues. Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996. 239-269. Longclaws, L. "New Perspectives on Healing." Issues in the North 1. Eds. J. Oakes & R. Riewe. Alberta: Community Issues in the North, 1996. 1-5. Louataunau, M. O., and E. J. Sobo, E. J. The Cultural Context of Health, Illness, and Medicine. Wesport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1997. Mehl-Madrona, L. Coyote Medicine. New York: Scribner, 1997. O'Neil, J. (1988). "Referrals to Traditional Healers: The Role of Medical Interpreters." Health Care Issues in the Canadian North. Ed. D. Young. Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1988. 29-38. O'Neil, J. "Aboriginal Health Policy for the Next Century: A discussion Paper for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People." Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. The Path to Healing Report of the National Round Table on Aboriginal Health and Social Issues. Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993. Pan American Health Organization, World Health Organization, Canadian Society for International Health. Indigenous Peoples & Health Workshop '93. Canada: Author, 1993. Ross, R. Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996. Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. The Path to Healing: Report of the National Round Table on Aboriginal Health and Social Issues. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1993. Thorpe, D. ed. People of the Seventh Fire: Returning Lifeways of Native America. New York: Akwe:kon Press, 1996. Tripartite Working Group on Aboriginal Health. The Federal/Provincial/Territorial/National Aboriginal Organizations Working Group on Aboriginal Health: Report to the Ministers of Health and National Aboriginal Organizations. Ottawa, 1993. Waldram, Pipe, Waldrum et al. Aboriginal Health. Warry, W. Unfinished Dreams: Community Healing and the Reality of Aboriginal Self-government. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. Young, D. and L. Smith, L. The Involvement of Canadian Native Communities in Their Health Care Programs: A Review of the Literature Since the 1970s. Edmonton, AB: Canadian Circumpolar Institute/University of Alberta, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Young, T. K. The Health of Native Americans: Towards a Biological Epidemiology. New York: University of Oxford Press, 1994. 226.

community level.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, recent research on Indigenous-specific treatment programs in various institutions indicates that the inclusion of cultural components, specifically spiritual and healing traditions, leads to more effective programs and the most efficient use of resources.<sup>10</sup> These facts combined, stress that Indigenous healing philosophies and practices are vital to the future health and health care delivery of Indigenous people, from both an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous perspective. At a World Health Organization conference on the health of Indigenous people in November of 1999, Director-General Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland's opening address affirmed the importance of this position:

A commitment to preserving the dignity of human beings, and to assuring human rights tell us that we must do everything possible to maintain the culture and livelihoods of indigenous peoples. Adding more weight to this are studies which show that when this is done, the health status of indigenous peoples is higher.

Maintenance of traditional lifestyles and culture has been associated with decreased rates of infant mortality, low birth weight, cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ellerby Working With, Ellerby and Ellerby Understanding, O'Neil Referrals, Severson and Lafontaine. "The Search for Wellness." First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Survey: National Report 1999. Ottawa: First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Survey National Steering Committee. 1999.

<sup>10</sup> For examples see Arbogast Warriors, Bordewich Killing, Duran, E., and B. Duran, Native America Postcolonial Psychology. New York: State University of New York, 1995. Duran, E., and B. Duran, Native America Postcolonial Psychology. New York: State University of New York, 1995. Ellerby and Ellerby Role of Traditional, Ellerby and Ellerby Understanding, Lewis Medicine.: PanAmHo, WHO, CSIH Indigenous. RCAP. Path to Healing. Brundtland, G. H. International Consultation on the Health of Indigenous Peoples. World Health Organization, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Brundtland, G. H. "International Consultation on the Health of Indigenous Peoples." Opening Address. World Health Organization, 1999.

Western political, social and economic authorities will remain a barrier to the practice of traditional healing until there is adequate understanding and respect for traditional culture, spirituality and healing traditions.

## 2. Addressing the Past

The academic study of Indigenous healing has historically been problematic. Contemporary critics, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, easily point to a range of problems in the literature.<sup>12</sup> Ethnocentrism, skepticism, poor scholarship, misrepresentation and even intentional degradation are common in historical records and writings. Native American scholars in particular have emphasized the importance of new, responsible scholarship to make corrections in and improvements to the literature.<sup>13</sup>

## 3. Indigenous Scholarship

Further to the need to correct and critically review the literature on Indigenous culture and healing is the need to expand the manner in which these things are presently being studied and written about. An increasing number of scholars are recognizing the necessity of Indigenous cultural influence and involvement in academics. In order to produce data and literature of high academic quality, new epistemologies, methodologies,

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<sup>12</sup> Mihesuah, D. Natives and Academics: Researching and Writings about American Indians. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. Murry, J. and Rice, K. eds. Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Rice, J. Before the Great Spirit: The Many Faces of Sioux Spirituality. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. Thornton, R. ed. Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998. Young, D. and J. Goulet. Being Changed: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Deloria, Red Earth. Garrouette, E. Allowing the Ancestors to Speak: Creating an American Indian Scholarship. American Academy of Religion, Annual Meeting: Boston, 1999. Jocks, C. "American Indian Religious Tradition and the Academic Study of Religion: A Response to Sam Gill," in Journal of the American Academy of Religion 65.1 (1997) 172. Mihesuah Natives. Thornton Studying.

and pedagogy must be introduced and integrated. In order to be relevant and authentic to Indigenous experience, Indigenous people and communities must be involved in the creation, direction, and character of research. Additionally, Indigenous methods of education and information sharing must be accepted as valid within academia if Indigenous cultures and traditions are to be adequately understood.<sup>14</sup>

Traditional healing is a primary example of an aspect of Indigenous culture and history that cannot be effectively studied or understood without the use of Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. This is discussed further in Chapter Two and demonstrated in Chapter Four.

#### 4. Sharing the Gift: Global Lessons

In recent years Western nations have experienced a rapidly growing trend in public attention to "alternative" healing systems.<sup>15</sup> In connection with the growing number of individuals who are experiencing and/or practicing alternative medicine, there is a growing public criticism of the Western biomedical model of healing. The nature of this criticism is reflected in a rapidly expanding body of literature by medical doctors who are calling for the integration of aspects of the alternative systems into the Western

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<sup>14</sup> Deloria Red Earth, Garrouette Ancestors. Jocks American Indian. Ridington, R. Trail to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1988. Ridington, R. Little Bit Know Something: Stories in an Language of Anthropology. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990. Tedlock, D. and B. Tedlock, B. Teachings from the American Earth. New York: Liveright, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> Ballentine, R. Radical Healing: Integrating the World's Great Therapeutic Traditions to Create a New Transformative Medicine. New York: Harmony Books, 1999. Dossey, L. Reinventing Medicine: Beyond the mind-Body to a New Era of Healing. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999. Gordon, J. S. Manifesto for a New Medicine: Your Guide to Healing Partnerships and the Wise use of Alternative Therapies. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1996.

model.<sup>16</sup> Among the qualities sought after, an increased attention to holism and spirituality is predominant.<sup>17</sup>

Indigenous healing systems, as explored through an understanding of Lakota healing in this paper, exemplify philosophies and practices of health that are fundamentally holistic and spiritual. When clearly understood on their own terms, Indigenous models of healing stand to be instructive to Western practitioners and the non-Indigenous public. While acknowledging the excellence that the biomedical model has achieved in materialistic sciences, Indigenous systems of healing offer exemplary frameworks for interdisciplinary and holistic medicine.<sup>18</sup>

Many of the Indigenous Elders, Spiritual Leaders and Healers that I know often speak of the "gifts" that Indigenous traditions have to offer the world. Though some fear appropriation and a lack of respect for what they know to be sacred, many note the potential for an important dialogue to occur between Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations. Thin Elk often expresses his openness to dialogue between Lakota and Western medical practitioners:

We have a tremendous amount to share. So let us come to the table as equals. We see that Western medicine is excellent: its ability to perform surgeries and remove

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<sup>16</sup> Benor, D. Healing Research. Munich: Helix Verlag GmbH. 1993. Benor, D. Survey of Spiritual Healing Research. Complementary Medical Research 4:1 September (1990). Benson, H. & Stark, M. Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1997. Dacher, E. S. Intentional Healing: A Guide to the Mind/Body Healing System. New York: Marlow & Company. 1996. Dossey, L. Recovering the Soul: A Scientific and Spiritual Search. New York: Bantam. 1989. Dossey, L. Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine. New York: Harper. 1993. Gordon Manifesto. Hammerschlag Dancing. Schulz, M. L. Awakening Intuition. New York: Three Rivers Press. 1998. Shealy, C. Sacred Healing: The Curing Power of Energy and Spirituality. Boston, MA: Element. 1999.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> This is further explored in Chapter Six.

cancers, and all kinds of things like that. But, we also know that Native American people have healing gifts as well: how to heal the mind, the spirit, the emotions; how to work with families and communities. We also have gifts in working with the body: through our ceremonies and our plant medicines. There are things that we can treat that Western medicine still struggles with. We can share that, and work together so that we can offer all people the best of all worlds... We have been waiting along time to share these things.<sup>19</sup>

### *An Overview*

The chapters of this paper reflect Indigenous, Western academic, and blended approaches to research. Chapter Two provides a discussion of the research design and methodology employed in the research and writing of this thesis. Indigenous epistemologies and methods of data collection and analysis are explored in contrast to the standard methods of Western academics.

Since the entire concept of a literature review and its potential in understanding Lakota healing is a Western concept and construct, the literature review in Chapter Three is largely in keeping with Western tradition. Many Lakota spiritual leaders would reject the notion that healing can be learned about through written texts. Experiential education is regarded as essential to spiritual education. In contrast, Western academic tradition generally does not validate knowledge systems that are not systematically documented in writing. Accepting guidance from the mentor of this project, Gene Thin Elk, a review of the literature is considered acceptable and valuable, but secondary to experience. Chapter

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<sup>19</sup> Personal Communication, Summer 1999.

Three establishes the intellectual framework and literature within which this thesis and its research is situated.

Chapter Four engages a distinct style of writing to discuss the field experiences of the author. This chapter is written in a manner which affirms the Indigenous emphasis on personal experience and personal voice. It stresses that the understanding of Lakota healing is based on personal experience and as such can only reflect the opinion of the author. The nature of the author's experience is explained and discussed. Highly personal, Chapter Four demonstrates a significant departure from standard Western academic style and incorporates emotional and spiritual dimensions of the author's experience.

Chapter Five examines sixteen essential qualities of Lakota healing. Also reflecting an Indigenous style, this chapter uses personal, spiritual and emotional language to discuss the holistic nature of each central principle. Each principle is described through explanations, the teachings of Thin Elk, personal anecdotes and the words of Lakota spiritual leaders in the literature. Based on the author's experience of the healing work and philosophy of Thin Elk, this chapter is written to appeal to the mental, emotional and spiritual nature of the reader.

Chapter Six returns to a more blended style of writing and discussion. Drawing conclusions from the principles outlined in Chapter Five, Chapter Six reviews the implications of improved cross-cultural understandings of Indigenous healing. Contrasting Lakota and Western biomedical philosophies of health care, the integration of Lakota philosophies into Western models of healing is explored. As well, the vital importance of traditional healing to the future wellness of Indigenous people is affirmed.

The final Chapter Seven is a notable departure from Western tradition and concludes by inviting readers to continue the process of understanding holism, spirituality and healing in their own life. This chapter reflects the Indigenous emphasis on personal experience and the cyclical nature of life and learning. In many ways, this final chapter aims to be as much a beginning, as an ending.

The appendices that follow are largely based on the literature and provide supplemental knowledge and explanation for the non-Lakota reader. These have been written in a more traditional Western style. In sum, Chapters One, Two, Three, and the Appendices reflect a Western dominant, Indigenous influenced style. Chapters Four, Five, and Seven, almost stand independently, as Lakota/Indigenous in style, with a Western influence. Chapter Six features a blended style.

### **Breaking Tradition to Follow Tradition**

Indigenous scholars in the Society for the Study of Native American Religious Tradition reflect the community-based dissatisfaction with the Western academic treatment of Indigenous spirituality and healing. At the 1999 American Academy of Religion conference, Indigenous scholar, Eva Garroutte carefully voiced the feelings and theoretical positions of many Indigenous scholars. Garroutte asks scholars of Indigenous traditions to examine and revise the way Indigenous religious traditions are studied:

Unlike Galileo's contemporaries, who refused to look through his telescope, researchers within Indigenous [scholarship] must be brave enough really to stand inside what may, in fact, be to them a foreign means of encountering the world. They must be willing to look through the lens of our traditional ways of knowing.

They must be willing to look for answers *where* Indigenous philosophies direct them to look, and, *how* those philosophies direct them to look.<sup>20</sup>

This passage reflects the academic process and theoretical position asserted in this paper.

A common theme that will be discussed in Chapter Two and throughout this work is the importance of developing and utilizing Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies and philosophies in the research of Indigenous spirituality and healing. In keeping with this position, the language, writing style, research design and visual layout of this paper differs in some respects from Western academic tradition. This alternative approach has been developed to exemplify a blended scholastic form that reflects some of the qualities that make Indigenous methods of education and communication distinct.

A number of steps have been taken in the writing of this paper to maximize the communication of information on the subject of Lakota healing and spirituality. The visual layout of sections and the use of a stylized type font is intentional to maintain a sense of creativity and aesthetic. This connotes the importance of holism, and rejects the tendency towards being conservative in academic writing. When subject material transcends the written word, the stark written word alone is often not adequate. The use of colour and artwork would have been preferable, however, time and financial restraints have limited such contributions to this work. The use of visual models is also an important aspect of this presentation. Many Indigenous educators, including Thin Elk,

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<sup>20</sup> Garrouette Ancestors.

assert the notion that Indigenous people are "more visual" in their learning styles, and culture, than are Western people.<sup>21</sup>

The inclusion of personal information and sentiment, such as in Chapter Four and Five, is also critical to the merit of this project. In keeping with Lakota principles of healing and holistic education, the author is expected to write in a manner which does not seek to undermine or deny the non-intellectual aspects of the human experience. Personal views, relationships, and the language of spirituality and emotions are included to better facilitate the presentation of information on Lakota healing philosophies. To suggest that Lakota healing could be presented in purely academic terms runs counter to the nature of Lakota healing. Holism is essential.

The inclusion of sacred numbers is another way this paper aligns itself with Lakota spirituality and thought. The sacred numbers four, seven, and sixteen, are integrated into the structure of the text. For example, the use of four reasons for research, seven chapters, and sixteen principles in Chapter Five, was intentional. It is said by some Lakota that organizing things according to sacred numbers will enhance the power and effectiveness of those things by imbuing them with the sacredness of those numbers.<sup>22</sup>

The use of footnotes and the Old MLA style manual has also been included in this paper for a number of reasons.<sup>23</sup> Footnotes maximize the number of research references

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<sup>21</sup> The notion that Indigenous people are "more visual" is discussed in a number of texts, see Duran and Duran Post-Colonial, and Ong, W. J. Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World. New York: Routledge, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Bopp, J., Bopp, M., Brown, L., and Lane, P. The Sacred Tree. Lethbridge, AB: Four Worlds Development Project, The University of Lethbridge, 1984. Deloria God is Red; Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer.

<sup>23</sup> Thin Elk affirmed the use of footnotes, indicating the importance of having reference citations easily available for academic readers, but removed for the reader who is not concerned with the literature. MLA

presented; while not interrupting text, they remains easily accessible. The absence of in text references allows for an uninterrupted flow of reading for the reader who is not concerned with academic references (which many Indigenous healers may not be). Additionally, the use of footnotes (Old MLA style) will allow for the natural inclusion of references and tangential information which, though not critical for all readers, will enhance the experience of some.

Finally, the inclusion of a glossary for non-Lakota readers supports the Indigenous position that the "educated reader" is not necessarily one who is familiar with academic jargon, but in some cases, may be cultural experts.<sup>24</sup> Explanations are not included in the text, assuming that the reader is familiar with the Lakota language; a glossary is provided for the non-Lakota reader. Many academics with interest in Lakota healing, culture and spirituality, will have to consult the glossary for definitions and explanations of terms that may be self-evident to most Lakota/Dakota people and Indigenous scholars. Language is a critical vehicle of power in academia. The terms which are assumed or explained in a text naturally address certain readers while alienating others. Assuming that Lakota terms must always be translated in text presumes an unfamiliar non-Lakota reader. This paper seeks to strike a balance between Lakota and non-Lakota academic readers by assuming a basic level of understanding about Lakota culture, while providing footnotes and appendices for the reader who is unfamiliar with Lakota culture.

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style taken from: Amato, C. The Word's Easiest Guide to Using the MLA. Westminster, CA: Stargazer, 1999. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research papers. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Mod. Lang. Assoc., 1988.

<sup>24</sup> Mihesuah Natives and Academics. Thornton Studying.

The described stylistic adjustments may appear superficial, however, the intentional divergence from academic status quo to include characteristics common to Indigenous forms of education and information presentation is critical. If Indigenous models of research, epistemologies and methodologies are to be accepted in academia, notions of acceptable form and style must begin to change and become more open to creativity.

### The Truth of This

The understanding of Lakota healing presented in this paper may be used as a tool in cross-cultural work and the study of Indigenous tradition. Its quality, however, lies in the degree of approval shown by Indigenous healers and spiritual leaders. Its value lies only in its capacity to have some meaning for Indigenous people and use in serving the four categories of implications outlined in the previous section. The universality of the understanding presented herein is for each individual reader to discern. To suggest that it is possible to present a single interpretation and articulation of Indigenous spirituality and healing that is "true" or universally relevant, would be a grave error - and impossible.

What is presented in this paper is my own understanding from my own experience, based on the teachings of one Lakota spiritual leader, Gene Thin Elk. This is complemented by experiences with other healers from other cultures, and a review of the literature. In no way could I encapsulate or entirely summarize the teachings of Thin Elk, or describe the metaphysics of the entire Lakota nation. Like all scholarship, this is my own understanding, said in the best way I know.

Matthew King, an *Oglala* Lakota, spiritual leader spoke of how non-Indigenous people can help Indigenous people and said:

They say, "how can we help [Indigenous] people? How can we make this a better world?"/ I can't really tell them. It's got to come from them, not from me. I'm looking for their hearts. I'm trying to find their hearts. If I can touch them in their hearts, I know this will be a better world./That's what I'm trying to do. Touch your heart. If I do that, then you'll know what to do.<sup>25</sup>

By writing this paper I hope to touch the hearts of the readers - not just their minds. That way people will feel where healing begins, and how to better respect traditional Indigenous healing ways.



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<sup>25</sup> Arden, ed. Noble Red Man: Lakota Wisdomkeeper Matthew King. Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words. 1994. 69.

## Chapter 2: Research Design & Methodology

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We see in the world around us many symbols that teach us the meaning of life. We have a saying that the white man sees so little, he must see with only one eye. We Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and the commonplace are one.

To you symbols are just words, spoken or written in a book. To us they are a part of nature, part of ourselves...

We try to understand them not with the head but with the heart, and we need no more than a hint to give us the meaning...

This is funny because we don't have a word for symbolism...

You have the word, but that is all.

- Lame Deer, Minniconjou Sioux<sup>1</sup>

The world is complex, dynamic, multidimensional; the paper is static, flat. How are we to represent the rich visual world of experience and measurement on mere flatland?

- Edward Tufte<sup>2</sup>

### A Bicultural Research Experience

The research design for this study has incorporated two distinct influences: one Indigenous, and one Western academic. University institutional protocol and scholastic expectation largely governed the characteristics of the written material submitted throughout the research process. Previous experience with Indigenous communities and healers, 6 years of relationship with the project mentor, Gene Thin Elk, and Thin Elk himself guided the fieldwork and experiential aspects of the process.<sup>3</sup> These two distinct methodological aspects of the research process were at times in conflict and often existed with little interplay. Though the two systems can retrospectively be seen as

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<sup>1</sup> Erdoes, R., and J. F. Lame Deer. Lame Deer. Seeker of Visions. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972. 96-97.

<sup>2</sup> Tufte, E. Envisioning Information. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 1990.

complementary, originally the complete open-ended trust in Thin Elk's direction and teaching approach was too full of uncertainty and potentially unorthodox methods and results to integrate into a research plan. Nevertheless, in the final data analysis and the presentation of this paper, the two systems of knowledge and study are blended, through the singularity of the researcher's experience.

The following table outlines the chronology of the research process as it occurred concurrently under Indigenous and academic influence. This chart highlights an Indigenous spiritual leader's approach to research and education and both the incongruent and parallel qualities of Western academic research methods.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1. Comparison of Indigenous and Western Research**

<b><i>Indigenous Based Research Process</i></b>	<b><i>Western Academic Research Process</i></b>
Context/Background: Six year relationship with Thin Elk, involving ceremonial experience and commitments. Nine years of relationships with Indigenous spiritual leaders and healers. Ongoing personal commitment to spiritual study and healing work.	Context/Background: Interfaith minister, Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Religion
Casual conversations with Thin Elk regarding the possibility of working together on a project.  Thin Elk declares interest.	Formation of committee, declaration of intent to study Lakota/Indigenous healing.
Discussions around the nature of the study and approaches to learning. A variety of approaches to studying spirituality and healing are raised by the researcher.	Initial research: literature review.

<sup>3</sup> Ellerby, J. Aboriginal Elders.

<sup>4</sup> Support for the traditional/historic character of Thin Elk's approach to education can be found in a number of texts; see Beck, P. V., A. L. Walters, and N. Francisco. The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life. Tsaiile, Az: Navajo Community College Press. 1992. Deloria Red Earth. Looks for Buffalo Hand, F. Learning Journey on the Red Road. Toronto: Learning Journey Communications. 1998. Young Bear, S. Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press. 1994.

<p>Thin Elk affirms interest in project.</p> <p>Tobacco is offered to Thin Elk and is accepted.</p> <p>Mutual acceptance and affirmation of the researcher's commitment to learning as a student according to Lakota epistemology.</p>	<p>Case study with a Lakota healer is presented as the foundation of the study to committee.</p>
<p>It is understood that Thin Elk will have full control over the information shared and the manner in which it is taught.</p> <p>Researcher accepts the uncertainty involved in the research design and data collection techniques; commitment to Lakota/Indigenous paradigm is paramount.</p>	<p>Research proposal written. Cross-cultural research design is included.</p> <p><b>Methodology: Qualitative</b> <b>Method: Case Study</b> <b>Data Collection Techniques:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participant Observation</li> <li>- Person-centered Interview</li> <li>- Narrative Self-Inquiry</li> </ul> <p>(Data collection techniques chosen to closely parallel Indigenous learning styles: experience, story, reflection.)</p>
	<p>Proposal approved by committee.</p> <p>Committee accepts that mentor will strongly influence outcome. Projected data is expected to change somewhat before conclusion of project.</p>
<p>Ethics and intellectual property discussed with Thin Elk; Thin Elk asserts oral contract and relationship of trust. Thin Elk tells researcher to fill out ethics forms however needed to achieve approval.</p>	<p>Ethics forms are acquired, and filled out.</p> <p>Faculty of Arts Ethics forms used in combination with Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Research Ethics form.</p>
	<p>Ethics forms approved with the inclusion of specialized consent forms.</p>
<p>Thin Elk re-asserts oral contract and relationship of trust. Avoids signing ethics form. Implies that paper contracts devalue traditional concepts of spoken contracts and the existing relationships of trust.</p>	<p>Upon beginning fieldwork ethics forms are produced and given to mentor to review.</p>
<p>Fieldwork is conducted in South Dakota: Researcher fulfills obligation to complete <i>Hanblecha</i> (Vision Quest) ceremony, assist in <i>Wiwangwachipi</i> (Sun Dance) Ceremony, and to assist and participate in Red Road Gathering (Lakota psychology, healing and spirituality conference).</p>	<p>Fieldwork is conducted in South Dakota:</p> <p>Summer of 1999: 5 day visit in May; 21 days in June; 19 days in July; 5 days October, 5 days in November.</p>
<p>Thin Elk deems recorded interviews as unnecessary; field log is recognized as depersonalizing, and counterproductive</p>	<p>Projected methods are abandoned. Projected data is forgone.</p>

removing researcher from immersion experience, and is discontinued; photographs are also viewed as inappropriate particularly in ceremonial and healing settings.	
<b>Post-Field Work: November/December 1999</b> <b>Development of Data.</b> At Thin Elk's request, transcriptions are made of his educational video series. 6 videos in total, addressing Native American counseling theory, Lakota ceremony, and Lakota approaches to health and healing.	<b>Post-Field Work: November/December 1999</b> <b>Development of Data.</b> Conclusion of literature review, notes made on field experiences, additional literature is consulted to support findings.
Followed spiritually based "Natural Process" in content analysis and writing. <sup>5</sup>	Thesis writing.
Submission to Indigenous cultural teachers and spiritual leaders for review.  Copy taken to Thin Elk in person, tobacco offered for the review process: Tobacco accepted, paper reviewed and discussed.	Submission to advisor, and various professors to review before final submission.
	Re-writing and corrections.
<b>Wo'pila (Thanksgiving) Ceremony:</b> Prayers offered, Feast Provided, "Results" and process are affirmed as the property of the Creator and Spirit World.	Final submission and Defense

### Cross-Cultural Research Design: An Overview

While a qualitative methodology and case study method were effective in this project, standard Western data collection techniques and conceptualizations of data were inappropriate. In place, Lakota data *reception* techniques and concepts of data were

<sup>5</sup> See Thin Elk. G. Natural/Unnatural Worlds. Video cassette. Lakota Concepts. Inc. 1990c.

used.<sup>6</sup> The blending of these Indigenous and Western styles of research and learning was highly effective, but contingent on the dominance of Lakota epistemologies and ontology. It is not possible to adequately examine or experience Lakota healing and spirituality without the belief or knowledge that Lakota ontology and ways of knowing are valid and available to all people.<sup>7</sup> The most effective way to enter a study such as this is with an openness to the existence of Spiritual Beings, a Creator Spirit/God, and the interplay between these forces and human beings.

**Materialistic-scientific and academic Cartesian-based social science** epistemologies assume an ontology/cosmology which excludes elements essential to Lakota/Indigenous ontology/cosmology. Lakota/Indigenous ontology, however, includes and incorporates the realities contained in Western academic thought. Western academic ontology (and epistemology) is based on assumptions about objective materialistic, and subjective individual and social realities. Some Western academics do, in highly specialized fields, include non-physical spiritual realities as a part of their paradigm of knowledge and inquiry.<sup>8</sup> However, non-physical spiritual realities are generally not integrated in the actual methods used, nor are they necessarily accepted to be universally,

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<sup>6</sup> In my experience, data "reception" involves the complete suspension of projected goals, data, methods and intention. Research is not directed in anyway, but left to the direction of the individual who takes on the role of educator. The academic risk in data reception lies in the potential for a lack of data. Having worked with traditional healers in a number of settings, I have had the experience, using data reception, of concluding visits or meetings without any academically suitable data at all. Forwarding questions, asserting the need for answers, and discussing timelines are generally not acceptable to a data reception technique and thus it often conflicts with standard Western research designs. Interpersonal relationship and a sense of "good timing" will often determine the success of data reception in Indigenous studies.

<sup>7</sup> Young and Goulet.

<sup>8</sup> Such as in the fields of Religious Studies, Theology, Parapsychology and Transpersonal Psychology.

objectively "true" phenomena.<sup>9</sup> As such, Western investigations into spiritual realities are heavily conditioned and distorted by limited paradigms of thought and experience.

The majority of studies addressing Lakota healing are reductionistic in their use of Western academic models, and generally focus on descriptions or inventories of procedures, equipment and/or practitioners. Lakota/Indigenous paradigms are most effectively (and logically) understood by research designs that are based on Lakota/Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies.<sup>10</sup> Not only must spiritual realities be a part of the subject of study, but spiritual realities must be integrated in the actual methods and research design itself: from beginning to end. The remainder of this chapter provides a review of the research design utilized in this study and the role of both Lakota and Western academic elements within.

#### **Western Methodology: Qualitative Research**

The qualitative research framework is particularly well suited to the needs and objectives of this project. Multi-method in practice,<sup>11</sup> qualitative research is designed to enable researchers to understand people and the cultural contexts in which they live.<sup>12</sup> In particular, qualitative methodology is significantly open ended enough to accommodate the divergent elements of Lakota epistemologies, experiences and information gathering

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<sup>9</sup> Young and Goulet.

<sup>10</sup> Wilber, K. The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion. Toronto: Random House, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Denzin, N. and Y. Lincoln. Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Kaplan, B. and Duchon, D. "Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Information Systems Research: A Case Study," MIS Quarterly 12:4 (1988) 571-587. Kaplan, B. and Maxwell, J.A. "Qualitative Research Methods for Evaluating Computer Information Systems," Evaluating Health Care Information Systems: Methods and Applications. Eds. J.G. Anderson, C.E. Aydin and S.J. Jay, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994. 45-68.

techniques. Maxwell<sup>13</sup> and Merriam<sup>14</sup> identify some of the basic principles of qualitative research which elucidate the appropriateness of its use in this study.

Maxwell notes five research purposes to which qualitative research is suited. They are: understanding the meaning participants find in their lives and experiences; understanding the context in which the participants act and the influences the context has on them; recognizing unexpected phenomena and influences in order to generate new theories and understandings about them; understanding the processes by which events and actions take place; and developing causal explanations.<sup>15</sup>

Merriam<sup>16</sup> identifies a number of common characteristics of qualitative research, including: an overall interest in understanding the meaning people have constructed; the inductive approach to knowledge generation; the focus on gaining an emic, or insider's, perspective; the inclusion of the researcher's own perception in the identification of meaning; and the centrality of the researcher as a primary instrument for data collection and analysis.<sup>17</sup>

When compared, the qualitative research framework closely matches the research goals and traditional instruction styles associated with this project. The importance of

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<sup>13</sup> Maxwell, J. A. "Designing a Qualitative Study." Eds. L. Bickman and D. J. Rog. Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Merriam, S. B. Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 1988. Merriam, S. B. Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Maxwell "Designing".

<sup>16</sup> Qualitative Research.

<sup>17</sup> See also Goetz, J. P. and LeCompte, M. D. Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research. Orlando, FL: 1984. Guba, E. G., and Lincoln, Y. S. "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research." Eds. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 1994. Rubin, H. and Rubin, I. Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data Sage Publications, 1995.

cultural meaning, personal meaning, and the centrality of the researcher in the intimate experience of data collection/reception in this project makes qualitative methodologies essential.

#### **Western Method: Case Study**

Due to the very specific focus of this study on the author's experience of the healing work and philosophies of Thin Elk, the case study method was employed to optimize data collection/reception and to best suit the research objectives of both the mentor and the researcher. A common qualitative method, case study allows for the unique collection of data through various tools that focus on the study of "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."<sup>18</sup>

In order to gain an understanding of the nature of Lakota/Indigenous approaches to health and healing, it is necessary to look in great depth at a very specific case in order to recognize the depth and diversity of Indigenous belief and practice as well as the complex subtleties that tend to escape survey studies.<sup>19</sup>

While at one level research can focus on Native Americans nationally and internationally, with their many shared experiences and needs, there is an equally important place for health research at the individual tribe and community level, taking into account the unique historical experience, cultural background, and socioeconomic conditions of each community.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Yin, R.K. Case Study Research, Design and Methods. 2nd ed. Newbury Park, Sage Publications, 1994. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Waldram, et. al. Aboriginal Health.

<sup>20</sup> Young Health. 226.

In this project, the relationship between mentor and researcher is, at one level, deeply personal and based on years of development. It is also possible, however, to identify an additional level of relational dynamic during the research process in terms of the case study method. The investigation of Thin Elk's philosophies and practices may be viewed as the study of a singular "integrated system"<sup>21</sup> of health and healing, or it may be seen as the examination of a significant "bounded" social unit and phenomenon: a Lakota spiritual leader.<sup>22</sup> My experience of Thin Elk's belief and practice as a spiritual leader is well suited to the case study method and the intimacy necessary in the study of Indigenous healing. Additionally, it is increasingly asserted that the unique qualities of the individuals involved in research must be creatively exhibited in the analysis and presentation of "their" material. This position is supported by scholars who recognize how essential lived experiences and community contexts are in the study of Indigenous healing and spirituality.<sup>23</sup>

Frequently, the need to collect data from large numbers of people means that only very superficial questions can be asked. The resulting generalizations may be well supported, but they will be based on such a thin slice of reality that they run the

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, L. M. "An Evolving Logic of Participant Observation, Educational Ethnography and Other Case Studies." Ed. L. Shulman. Review of Research in Education. Itasca, IL: Peacock, 1978.

<sup>22</sup> Merriam Case Study: Qualitative.

<sup>23</sup> For examples see Babcock, B. "Arrange Me in Disorder: Fragments and Reflections on Ritual Clowning." Reading in Ritual Studies. Ed. R. L. Grimes. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996. Erdoes, R., and A. Lame Deer. Gift of Power: The Lif and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man. Santa Fe: Bear & Co, 1992. Erdoes, R., and J. F. Lame Deer. Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972. Ridington Trail, Little Bit. Tedlock, B. The Beautiful and the Dangerous. New York: Viking, 1992. Tedlock, D. and B. Tedlock, B. Teachings from the American Earth. New York: Liveright, 1975.

danger of being trivial. We prefer the in-depth approach. In the living person reality comes together in a meaningful way.<sup>24</sup>

The case study method was particularly well suited to this investigation since it maintains the capacity to employ a variety of epistemological approaches and research goals. Since the intent of this project is to remain responsible to Indigenous paradigms, and the distinct views and practices of Thin Elk, it was important to employ a research method that is specifically suited to the broad objectives, with a high degree of flexibility in terms of data collection/reception, analysis, and presentation. The holistic focus on description and explanation in case study method<sup>25</sup> disposes the need to force non-Indigenous paradigms of theory and study on the subject in question. The case study method further addresses the complications of cross-cultural investigation by allowing for an intense and intimate focus on the experience and philosophy of an individual person. Robson acknowledges this as one of the central functions of case study, particularly in regard to its suitability in descriptive research and phenomenological content analysis.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the intrinsic capacity for the case study method to be successful at exploring research questions in uncontrolled environments and field work best suited Thin Elk's willingness to participate in this study in his home community and "normal" context.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Young et al. Cry Eagle. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Gall, M. G., W. R. Borg, and J. P. Gall. Educational Research: An Introduction. (6th ed.) White Plains, NY: Longman, 1966.

<sup>26</sup> Robson, C. Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers. London: Blackwell, 1993.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

## Indigenous Data Collection and Analysis

American Indian cultures contain tools of inquiry which allow for the creation of *knowledge*. By this construction of Native cultures, one might draw upon them as part of a process of learning about *the world*, and one might do so without leaving the proper domain of scholarship.<sup>28</sup>

There is a tremendous amount of precedent and scholarly justification for the use of the three data collection techniques which were originally proposed for this study. Participant observation, person-centered interview, and narrative self-inquiry are all techniques that have been used successfully in the study of Indigenous North American traditions, and the Lakota in particular.<sup>29</sup> In this study, however, when put into practice, these techniques and their inherent effects on interpersonal relationships proved inadequate for and incongruous with the task. The Indigenous educational style of Thin Elk was established as the primary process for learning. This naturally invalidated the three traditional Western techniques when they were found to be in conflict. Similarly, the final process of data analysis, or content analysis, was largely guided and shaped by the model of data analysis taught by Thin Elk. The following sections explore these conflicts as they emerged in the research process.

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<sup>28</sup> Garroute Ancestors.

<sup>29</sup> For examples see Brown, J. E., ed. The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Ogalala Sioux. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953. Bucko, R. The Lakota Ritual of the Sweat Lodge: History and Contemporary Practice. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. Densmore, F. Teton Sioux Music and Culture. Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1918. Fitzgerald Yellowtail. Josselson, R., ed. Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996. The Space Between Us: Exploring the Dimensions of Human Relationships. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992. Mails Fools Crow. Pond, G. "Dakota Gods." Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society 2 (1889b): 219. Pond, S. The Dakota Sioux in Minnesota, as They Were in 1834. St. Paul: Minnesota. Reprint, 1986. Riddington Trail. Little Bit. Tedlock The Beautiful.

### Lakota Data Collection

I have given you an experience. I have let you follow me around. You have seen and felt these things; and that experience - that is what I have given you for this project. Now that you understand some of these things it is your job to go back and translate it. You have your own experience you can speak from. You will have to find the language to explain it for the people who want to understand.<sup>30</sup>

Thin Elk's chosen approach to education and the transmission of knowledge for the researcher in this project was full experiential immersion as a family member and spiritual student. The researcher was expected to participate, *holistically*, in *all* aspects of community life and culture in order to learn about an aspect of community life and culture. The holistic nature of Lakota healing is such that no category of experience can be separated from the education process. Watching movies, looking after children, and cutting grass are all as important as the experience of ceremony or the recording of herbal remedies. Chapter Four explores the quality and diversity of experience that was a part of this project in more detail.

It will not suffice to *read about* or *think about* [Indigenous] means of inquiry; one must trust them, practice them, live within them. This requires a level of devotion, and perhaps a level of intellectual flexibility, which many scholars may be unwilling to give. But those who are willing may learn to understand the world in ways that have never before been available to them.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Thin Elk. *Personal Communication*. Summer 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Garrouette Ancestors.

In this manner of education the outcome is minimally directed. What is finally understood by the student is entirely unpredictable and based on the dynamic interrelationship between the mentor, student, and Spirit World. Factors like the researcher's intuition, spiritual maturity, willingness, patience, receptiveness and spiritual providence shape the learning process. Lessons are emergent, often intuitive, and always developmental. One level of understanding and experience is necessary for further levels of learning to ensue.

The Lakota form of education utilized in this study contrasts Western education where, short of the university degree process, any individual is entitled to virtually every type of knowledge recorded. A person who has never studied chemistry or physics, may go to a bookstore and buy a text book or armchair introduction to quantum physics. Similarly, spiritual and religious texts, no matter how old or sacred, are available to most people. By simply consulting the Internet or a local bookstore, a person of any age, culture, religion or experience may learn about sacred Jewish Kabbalah, Tantric Buddhist meditation, or secret early Christian Nag Hammadi scriptures. There is rarely a sense of required maturity, or developmentally based entitlement in the learning process of the West. Knowledge is a commodity available to all.

In my experience of Lakota healing and spirituality, knowledge is earned through trust, respect, commitment to community, and preparation through ceremony and personal growth. *Data collection* is, more accurately, *data reception*. The student rarely asks questions, but trusts in the natural progression of life experience and the intention of God and the Spirit World. In my own research with Thin Elk, directed questioning was rarely employed (or acceptable). I have learned over the years that questions receive less

answers than patience and trust. I have been taught that the things that you need to know, you will learn without asking; the rest is not for you.<sup>32</sup> Academically speaking, it is my experience that there is a certain type and quality of Indigenous information that can never be gained through Western academic techniques. In Lakota culture, for example, most teaching of spirituality and healing must occur on Lakota terms - or not at all.

*The Rejection of Western Data Collection Techniques.* Given this discussion of Thin Elk's traditional Lakota style of education<sup>33</sup> it becomes clear why the projected data collection techniques were incongruous. Person-centered interviews featured a number of problems: recording spiritual information is generally not acceptable to Spirit Beings; many spiritual leaders have experienced the loss of personal power (*sicun* and *wakan*) by sharing their understanding of healing and spiritual things too publicly; open-ended questioning is also viewed as inappropriate questioning; and, because they are situated in staged sessions, interviews are non-holistic, non-experiential for the researcher.

Self-narrative inquiry, though a reflective form of self-interview and recording insights and experiences, was also problematic. There are three primary reasons why self-narrative inquiry, such as writing a field log, was discontinued in this study. First, due to the constant activity of Thin Elk in service of his and other communities, the researcher was engaged from early morning until late at night every day. Second, in order to take isolated time to journal or make notes of any substance, the researcher would have to sacrifice time with Thin Elk and his community. Setting time apart would require the categorization of experiences as "educational" or "not." As discussed, in a holistic

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<sup>32</sup> Beck et al. *Sacred*. Deloria, E. *Waterlily*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1988. Deloria, E. *Speaking of Indians*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

<sup>33</sup> Also discussed in chapter four.

worldview, no time can be considered non-educational. It was often my experience that in unexpected moments - breaks between work, during meals, or conversations with visitors from other communities - important cultural concepts or philosophies were shared, briefly and indirectly. Sometimes discussions about ceremony or healers would occur without warning, and impart significant ideas or stories.

Finally, participant observation was the most successful data collection/reception technique employed; "participant observation, allow[s] for insights into things which may well be invisible to outsiders."<sup>34</sup> In its classical form, however, participant observation requires the researcher to maintain an element of detachment during research experiences and requires regular extraction to examine the data collected.<sup>35</sup> In this respect, participant observation does not fully match the Lakota model of full experiential immersion, and so may be regarded as most appropriate, but only when modified.

*What is data?* Unlike many Western academic disciplines, science in particular, many Lakota/Indigenous people view experience itself and memory of experience and story as data. During a discussion about this thesis after the first draft was written, Thin Elk commented on the idea of "data" and "results:"

For the academic, the important thing is the results. They focus on the results because that is how they get recognition, it feeds the ego to be able to say 'I discovered this.' Then it is sanctified by the institution and that person becomes an expert and is treated like a God - or high priest. You can see how it is more like a religion... Their research starts in individual motivation, then breaks the subject

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<sup>34</sup> Jocks "American Indian." 172.

<sup>35</sup> Bernard. R. H. Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology. Beverly Hill, CA.: Sage. 1988.

down into parts, then names those parts, then they claim ownership over that process and it becomes a result... In the Lakota way, in the Indigenous way, research, or learning, starts with community and family: the individual must first know their relationships, who they are. Then you have the process. For us, the process is what counts. The process is a ceremony, it is sacred. Then the result is a better understanding of creation. But that is not a product really, that belongs to the Creator, the Spirits and the Ancestors. It was theirs in the beginning and the end: you never really 'discover' anything. The Creator is always complete...

We recognize that the process is a ceremony, and those results don't belong to us, they belong to the Creator. So when we finish, we hold a *Wo'pila*. And we give thanks, offer our respect and acknowledge that these things don't belong to us. We are just thankful to be a part of the process.

Particularly among human cultures that are essentially oral and do not have extensive forms of writing, people, not books, are containers of knowledge.<sup>36</sup> Memory, not audio cassettes or transcripts, is sufficient to the recording of song and story. Academics maintain that some details may be lost or changed through human memory. It is understood by Lakota people, however, that the most important aspects of knowledge are in fact best and perhaps only able to be preserved in lived memory. The feeling, energy, intent and spirit of a lesson cannot be recorded on tape or in writing. Only a whole human being, multivalent, multi-sensory, can contain the holistic nature of

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Dobbert, M. L. Ethnographic Research: Theory and Application for Modern Schools and Societies. New York: Praeger, 1982.

<sup>36</sup> This is well discussed by Guédon in "Dene Ways and the Ethnographer's Culture." Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters. Ed. Young and J. Goulet. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1994. 39-70.

knowledge. As it is said colloquially of many things, "you just had to be there to really understand."

### **Content Analysis: A Red Road Approach**

Indigenous [based research asks] scholars to enter (rather than merely study) tribal philosophies, asks them to abandon any notion that mainstream academic philosophies, interpretations, and approaches based upon them are, in principle, superior. It asks them, instead to accept those philosophies as articulable rationalities alternative to those of the conventional academic disciplines... it requires that researchers also honour the *methods* and *goals of inquiry* toward which indigenous philosophical assumptions direct us.<sup>37</sup>

Within the methodology, method and data collection/reception design of research, an analytic approach must be employed in the evaluation and processing of data. For the purpose of this study, content analysis of the researcher's experiences/data and subsequent feelings, thoughts and reactions form the foundation of this project's findings.

Both the analysis of the data/experience and the development of this paper have followed a unique approach that is central to the teachings of Thin Elk. Reflective of Lakota epistemologies and culture, Thin Elk has developed an approach to understanding, creation, and the active life process that he has termed the "Natural Process." Discussed in his Red Road Approach instructional video series and often taught in workshops,<sup>38</sup> the Natural Process integrates the role of the spirit, mind, body and heart in an effective process of action and creation. The following diagram (figure 4) illustrates

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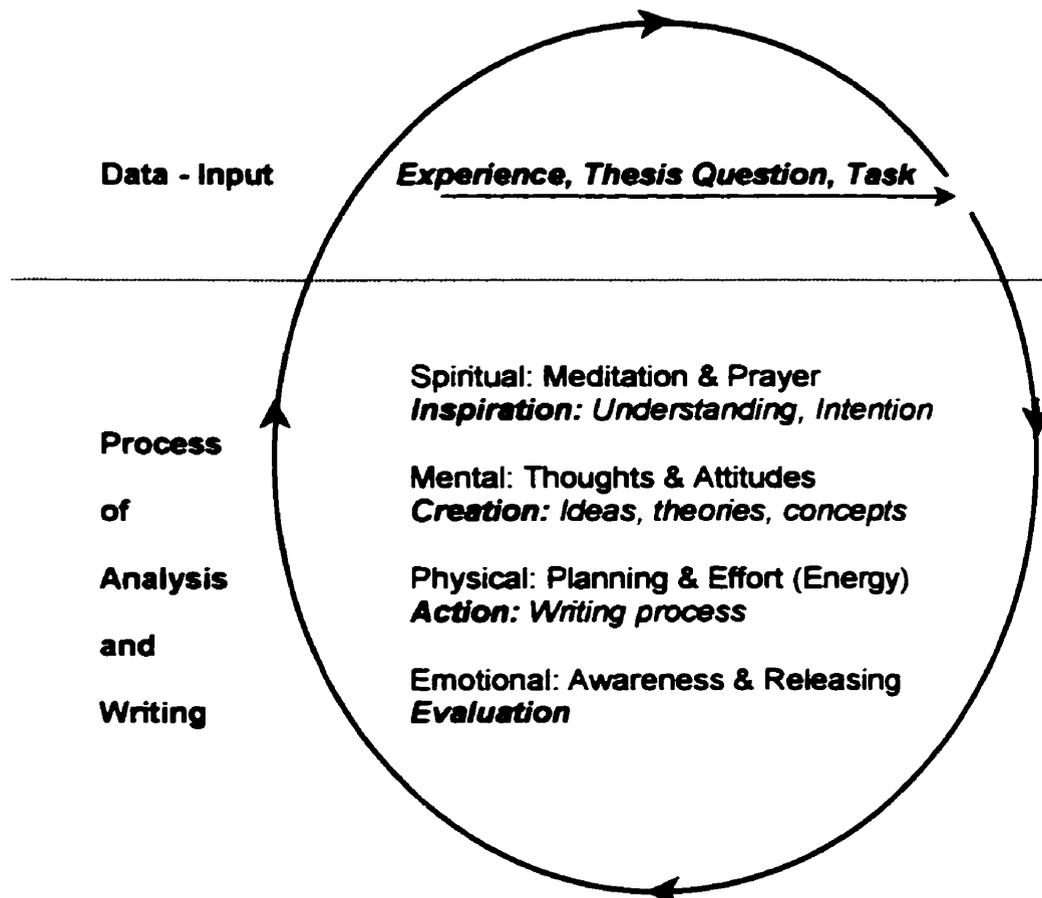
<sup>37</sup> Garrouette Ancestors. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Thin Elk Natural/Unnatural.

the role of each primary aspect of the human self in the data analysis and thesis writing process.

Discussed by Thin Elk in the video *Natural/Unnatural Worlds*, and represented in figure 2, the Natural Process begins with a spiritual approach to data. The researcher "meditates" on what she or he has learned during fieldwork and the literature review, and "prays" for help and guidance in the interpretation and writing process. These acts involve "listening to creative forces" and "giving a verbal commitment" to proceed with work in a "good way" that will help and benefit others.<sup>39</sup>

**Figure 2. The Natural Process: Utilized in Thesis Work**



<sup>39</sup> Thin Elk *Natural/Unnatural*. This "Natural Process" is not recognized as a cultural construction; it is understood to express a naturally occurring order in nature and the Spirit/ual World.

By doing these things, the researcher is then "inspired" and develops a sense of how to proceed and what to focus on and address in her or his thesis work.

The next stage in the Natural Process involves the "translation" of inspiration and fieldwork into "thoughts" and "attitudes" (theoretical positions). Originating in spiritual inspiration and experience, the researcher arrives at "mental creation." In this stage ideas, understandings and concepts are developed for the thesis.

In the physical stage of the Natural Process "planning" and "effort" or "energy" result in action. In this stage the thesis is planned, chapters organized and research and references prepared for use. The Physical Stage is the writing process. Within this stage the entire Natural Process occurs many times as new concepts and memories of fieldwork emerge. For example, during the writing of this thesis, the transcripts of Thin Elk's video series were reviewed again, four Sweat lodges were attended in the early writing stages, and daily prayers and smudging accompanied the writing process. Each of these spiritual actions, meditations and prayers, resulted in new cycles and concepts in the Natural Process.

Finally, each cycle in the Natural Process, all component cycles and the entire thesis project itself is subject to the evaluation of the heart, or "emotional self." "The emotional life is important because it is the report card of the condition of the [other] three... The emotional [is] the evaluation."<sup>40</sup> In this stage a healthy critical "awareness" of what has been created is developed. Elements that do not "feel" right or congruous with field experiences or the teachings of Thin Elk and material in the literature, are evaluated and, if inappropriate, "released."

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

This process was designed to be a model of a Lakota healing way of life. Though the Natural Process reflects the nature of life experience and the course of action that is followed by healthy individuals, the Natural Process is holistic and naturally applied to all aspects of life and work. The Natural Process has been central to the development and writing of this thesis.<sup>41</sup>



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<sup>41</sup> The importance of this approach is significant to Indigenous spiritual studies. Research must not be corroborated by literature alone. The merit of Indigenous scholarship is measured by the heart: according to the feelings and experiences of Indigenous spiritual Elders and healers. This thesis was reviewed by seven Indigenous individuals whose lives reflect traditional spiritual values, practices and beliefs. Among these seven some were Spiritual Elders, some healers, and some traditionalists with a strong interest in traditional healing and spirituality.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

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### Introduction

Academically, the study of Indigenous healing traditions has been the subject of many fields of inquiry. The range of material that addresses and records Indigenous healing in North America has been dominated by anthropology,<sup>1</sup> but spans the disciplines of history,<sup>2</sup> community medicine,<sup>3</sup> government inquiry,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Densmore Teton. Densmore, F. "The Sun Dance of the Teton Sioux." Nature 104 (1920): 437-440. Feraca, S. "The Yuwipi Cult of the Oglala and Sicangu Teton Sioux." Plains Anthropologist 6 (1961): 155-63. "The Teton Sioux Medicine Cult." American Indian Tradition 8 (1962): 195-196. "Wakinyan: Contemporary Teton Dakota Religion." Studies in Plains Anthropology and History 2 (1963). Fitzgerald Yellowtail. Grim, J. The Shaman: Patterns of Religious Healing Among the Ojibway Indians. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1983. Jilke, W. Indian Healing. Surrey, BC: Hancock House, 1982. Kalweit, H. Dreamtime and Innerspace. Boston: Shambhala, 1988. Kalweit, H. Shamans, Healers, and Medicine Men. Boston: Shambhala, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, J., and Brightman, R. The Orders of the Dreamed: George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1988. Corlett, W. T. The Medicine-Men of the American Indian and His Cultural Background. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1935. Glover, R. ed. A Journey from Prince Whales's Fort in Hudson Bay to the North Ocean, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, by Samuel Hearne. Toronto: Macmillan, 1958. Williams, G. ed. Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay 1767-91. London: Hudson's Bay Historical Society, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Kaufert, J. "Cultural Mediation in Cancer Diagnosis and End of Life Decision-Making: the Experience of Aboriginal Patients in Canada." Anthropology & Medicine 6.3 (1999): 405-421. Kaufert, J., and W. Koolage. "Culture Brokerage and Advocacy in Urban Hospitals: The Impact of Native Language Interpreters." Santee Culture Health 3.2 (1985): 3-8. Kaufert, J., M. Lavallee, S. Koolage, and J. O'Neil. (1996). "Culture and Informed Consent." Eds. J. Oakes and R. Riewe Issues in the North (1996): 89-93. Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute. O'Neil, J. "The Politics of Health in the Fourth World: A Northern Canadian Example." Human Organization 45 (1986): 119-28. O'Neil, J. (1988). "Referrals to Traditional Healers: The Role of Medical Interpreters." Health Care Issues in the Canadian North. Ed. D. Young. Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1988. 29-38. Severson, K. and Lafontaine, C. "The Search for Wellness." In First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Survey: National Report 1999. Ottawa: First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Survey National Steering Committee, 1999. Waldram Pipe, Warry Dreams. Young and Smith Involvement.

<sup>4</sup> Ellerby and Ellerby Role of Traditional, Understanding RCAP Healing. Solicitor General Canada. Aboriginal Peoples Collection. No. APC 10 CA. Understanding the Role of Healing in Aboriginal Communities. Ottawa, 1994. Tripartite Working Group on Aboriginal Health Working Group.

religious studies,<sup>5</sup> medical science,<sup>6</sup> natural sciences,<sup>7</sup> psychology,<sup>8</sup> and popular literature.<sup>9</sup> Interdisciplinary studies of North American Indigenous health and healing traditions have been useful for the development of general understandings of the broad issues involved in Indigenous health. Survey texts that explore themes in Indigenous healing practices and traditions are also of use when looking at the similarities among Indigenous cultures.

This study focuses on the healing work and philosophies of one Lakota spiritual leader within a single Indigenous tradition to elucidate a greater depth of understanding than is possible in survey studies. By examining the subtle and specific qualities of a

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<sup>5</sup> Eliade, M. Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964. Gill, S. Native American Religion. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1982. Grim Shaman. Hultkrantz, A. Concepts of the Soul Among North American Indians. Stockholm: Caslon Press, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> Ackerknecht "Primitive Medicine." Ballentine Radical Healing. Hammerschlag Dancing, Theft. Lewis, T. "The Changing Practice of Oglala Medicine Man." Plains Anthropology 25 (1980a): 265-267. Lewis, T. "A Sioux Medicine Man Describes His Own Illness Approaching Death." Annals of Internal Medicine 92 (1980b): 417-418. Lewis, T. "The Contemporary Yuwipi." In Sioux Religion. Eds. R. DeMallie and D. Parks. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. Mehl-Madrona Covote Medicine. PanAm. WHO. CSIH Indigenous. Swartz "Healing Properties." Young, Morse, McConnell "Documenting." Young, T.K. Native Americans.

<sup>7</sup> Colorado, P. "Indigenous Science: The Time is Ready for Indigenous People to Share Their Knowledge." Edges: New Planetary Patterns 4:1 (1991). Colorado, P. "Bridging Native and Western Science." Convergence 2:3 (1988): 49-86. Peat, F. D. Lighting the Seventh Fire: The Spiritual Ways, Healing and Science of the Native Americans. New York: Birch Lane Press, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Devereaux, G. Reality and Dream: Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian. New York: International University Press, 1951. Duran, E., and B. Duran. Native America Postcolonial Psychology. New York: State University of New York, 1995. Erikson, E. "Observations of a Sioux Education." Journal of Psychology 7 (1939): 110-56. Life History and the Historical Moment. New York: Norton, 1975. Freud, S. Totem and Taboo. New York: Vintage Book, 1946. Gustafson, F. R. Dancing Between two Worlds: Jung and the Native American Soul. New York: Paulist Press, 1997. Larsen, S. The Shaman's Doorway. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions Press, 1988. Sandner, D. and Wong, S. The Sacred Heritage: The Influence of Shamanism on Analytical Psychology. New York: Routledge, 1997. Walsh, R. The Spirit of Shamanism. Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Boyd Rolling, Mystics, Mad Bear. Casteneda Don Juan. Ross, R. Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992. Ross, R. Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996. Twofathers, M. The Road to Sun Dance: My Journey into Native Spirituality. New York: Hyperion, 1994.

Lakota philosophy of healing, the unique nature of Indigenous healing traditions are emphasized. By studying one tradition with great intimacy, it becomes possible to identify a greater range of themes common to the healing ways of Indigenous people.

In order to gain a sound understanding of healing in a North American Indigenous spiritual tradition, it is clear "that individual healing traditions require in-depth singular treatment".<sup>10</sup> It is no longer academically acceptable to forward vast generalizations about North American Indigenous healing practices without simultaneous regard for the dynamic and varied range of beliefs, practices and philosophy on the North American continent.<sup>11</sup> Even within a single Canadian province or American state, Indigenous communities differ in language, culture, history and social health. Each Indigenous nation, community, family, and individual sustains unique healing and spiritual traditions, and relationships to them.<sup>12</sup>

The Lakota Sioux represent one Indigenous culture whose system of health and healing exemplify the spiritual and holistic nature of healing in Indigenous cultures.<sup>13</sup> In order to establish an intellectual context for fieldwork examining the healing philosophies and practices of Thin Elk and the Lakota, it was necessary to understand the historical

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<sup>10</sup> Waldram et al. Aboriginal. 275.

<sup>11</sup> Gill Native Religion. Longclaws, L. "New Perspectives on Healing." Issues in the North 1. Eds. J. Oakes & R. Riewe. Alberta: Community Issues in the North, 1996. 1-5. O'Meara, S., and West, D. eds. From our Eyes: Learning from Indigenous Peoples. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996. Thornton Studying. Waldram, et al. Aboriginal.

<sup>12</sup> Beck et al. Sacred. Longclaws "New Perspectives." O'Meara and West Eyes. Thornton Studying. Young and Goulet Being Changed.

<sup>13</sup> Catches, P. S. and P. V. Catches. Sacred Fireplace Oyeti Wakan: Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light, 1999. DeMallie, R. The Sixth Grandfather. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1984. Erdoes Gift. Erdoes Lame Deer. Looks for Buffalo Hand, F. Learning Journey on the Red Road. Toronto: Learning Journey Communications, 1998. Lewis Medicine Men. Lyon and Black Elk Black Elk. Schwarz, D. 1981. Plains Indian Theology. New York: Fordham University. St. Pierre, M., & Longsoldier, T. Walking in the Sacred Manner. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

and cultural literature on the Sioux. More specifically, a detailed examination of texts dealing with spirituality, and healing was undertaken. This chapter reviews and references in detail the literature that formed the intellectual foundation of this study.

### The Great Sioux Nation

Relative to most other North American Indigenous traditions, the Sioux have been the subject of a great deal of research and study.<sup>14</sup> Today there is a wide body of literature from which to draw images and impressions of Lakota spirituality and healing practices. The Indigenous nations known as the Sioux were originally known among themselves as Lakota, Dakota and Nakota. *Oceti Šakowin* or the Seven Fireplaces was the term they used to refer to the united confederation of these three nations, which reflected their further division into seven socio-political groupings.<sup>15</sup>

The first definite recorded European contact with the *Oceti Šakowin* took place in 1640. The record of European contact with the “Sioux” can be found in *Jesuit Relations*, noted by Jean Nicolet during his visit to the Winnebagos of Green Bay.<sup>16</sup> The term Sioux, which came from a French appropriation of a derogatory Algonquian term for the *Oceti Šakowin*, soon became common and acceptable to ethnographers, missionaries, and

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<sup>14</sup> Rice Great Spirit.

<sup>15</sup> Powers, W. Oglala Religion. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975. 3-14, 161, 172.

<sup>16</sup> Thwaites, R. ed. Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791. Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1959.

settlers.<sup>17</sup> In time, this title was also accepted by the people of the *Oceti Šakowin* themselves. Between 1700 and 1900 the term "Dakota" also became common among ethnographers as a name for the Sioux, the *Oceti Šakowin*.

The history of the Sioux can be traced through archival texts<sup>18</sup> as well as more recent re-constructions of their history.<sup>19</sup> Among the earlier works recording Sioux culture, a number of them focused on religious belief and practice.<sup>20</sup> Since those earlier works, several comprehensive texts have examined both Sioux sociopolitical history and

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<sup>17</sup> Powers, Oglala 5. Riggs, S. A Dakota-English Dictionary. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Boas, F., and E. Deloria. "Notes on the Dakota, Teton Dialect." International Journal of American Linguistics 7 (1932): 3-4. Lowie, R. "Dance Associations of the Eastern Dakota." Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History 11. 2 (1913). Robinson, D. A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians. Reprinted Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1904. Wissler, C. "Societies and Ceremonial Associations in the Oglala Division of Teton Dakota." Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History 11.1 (1912).

<sup>19</sup> DeMallie, R. Teton Dakota Kinship and Social Organization. Diss. University of Chicago, 1971. DeMallie, 1971; Hassrick, R. The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964. Howard, J. "Dakota Winter Counts as a Source of Plains History." Bulletin of the Bureau of American Ethnology (1960): 173. Hyde, G. Red Cloud's Folk. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937. Hyde, G. A Sioux Chronicle. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956. Hyde, G. Spotted Tail's Folk. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961. Matthiessen, P. In the Spirit of Crazy Horse. New York: Viking, 1980. Robinson,

<sup>20</sup> Benedict, R. "The Concept of Guardian Spirit in North America." American Anthropological Association, Memoir 29 (1923): 3-23. Boas and Deloria "Note." Densmore Teton. Dorsey, J. O. (1890). "A Study of Siouan Cults." Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of Ethnology, Annual Report 11 (1890): 351. Dorsey, J. O. "Teton Folk-lore." American Anthropologist, Old Series. 2.2 (1889): 143. Forbes, W. H. "Traditions of Sioux Indians." Minnesota Historical Society 6 (1894): 413. Lowie "Dance." Lynd, J. "The Religion of the Dakotas." Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society 2 (1989): 150. Pond, G. "Dakota Superstitions." Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society 2.2 (1889a): 215. Pond, G. "Dakota Gods." Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society 2 (1889b): 219. Pond, S. The Dakota Sioux in Minnesota, as They Were in 1834. St. Paul: Minnesota. Reprint, 1986. Wissler, C. "Some Dakota Myths." Journal of American Folk-Lore 20 (1907): 121-131, 195-206. Wissler, C. "Societies and Ceremonial Associations in the Oglala Division of Teton Dakota." Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History 11.1 (1912). Wissler, 1905; 1912.

movement, as well as their religious customs.<sup>21</sup>

Studies among the Sioux prior to 1900 tended to be divided among the various Sioux nations, Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, and their subgroups. The majority of these studies focused on the Dakota of the eastern Plains and lower Great Lakes area.<sup>22</sup> The twentieth century demonstrated a significant turn of attention towards the Lakota with an increased focus on religious belief and practice. This focus seems to have emerged due to the influence of a number of factors including: a few foundational texts,<sup>23</sup> the participation of certain Lakota spiritual leaders in biographical studies,<sup>24</sup> the relative stability of Lakota religious belief and practice; and the fact that a great deal of the historical material on the Sioux religion remained congruent with Lakota communities of the present which make text-based research possible.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Grobsmith, E., "Wakunza: Uses of Yuwipi Medicine Power in Contemporary Teton Dakota Culture." Plains Anthropologist 19 (1974): 129-33. "The Lakota Giveaway: A System of Social Reciprocity." Plains Anthropologist 24 (1979): 123-31. "The Changing Role of the Giveaway Ceremony in Contemporary Lakota Life." Plains Anthropologist 26 (1981a): 75-79. The Lakota of Rosebud. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981b. Hassrick The Sioux. Hyde Red Cloud. Sioux Chronicles. Spotted Tail. Matthiessen Crazy Horse. Nurge, E., ed. The Modern Sioux: Social Systems and Reservation Culture. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1970. Powers Oglala. Sandoz, M. Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942.

<sup>22</sup> Rice Great Spirit.

<sup>23</sup> Note unpublished work by Bushotter and Deloria, Walker and Sword; as well as Dorsey Siouan. Walker, J. R. Lakota Belief and Ritual. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> Such as Nicholas Black Elk, followed by Frank Fools Crow, and John Fire Lame Deer.

<sup>25</sup> Rice, J. Before the Great Spirit: The Many Faces of Sioux Spirituality. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing its Lakota Purpose. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. Ella Deloria's the Buffalo People. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994. Lakota Storytelling: Black Elk, Ella Deloria, and Frank Fools Crow. New York: Peter Lang, 1989.

Though there can be no doubt that Lakota tradition has undergone development and change due to contact with European cultures,<sup>26</sup> the degree to which this has occurred can only be evaluated on an individual community level. It has been suggested that Lakota communities, in part due to their size, political resistance, and efforts to secretly maintain culture during times of colonial persecution, have been able to maintain many of their traditional ceremonies and customs over time.<sup>27</sup> It should also be noted that the public profile of the Lakota Sioux, due to political movements and activism in the 1970's, likely also contributed to the attention they received by scholars.<sup>28</sup>

### The Lakota

The home of my tribe, the Western Sioux, was all the territory which is now called North and South Dakota, and all this land once belonged to my people. It was a beautiful country. In the springtime and early summer the plains, as far as the eye could see, were covered with velvety green grass. Even the rolling hills were green, and here and there was a pretty stream. Over the hills roamed the buffalo and in the woods that bordered the streams were luscious fruits that were ours for the picking. In the winter everything was covered with snow, but we always had plenty of food to last through the winter until spring came again. Life was full of

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<sup>26</sup> Feraca "Yuwipi Cult," "Medicine Cult," Wakinyan." Fox and Asher Red Fox. Grobsmith "Changing Role." Lewis Medicine. Powers Oglala.

<sup>27</sup> Deloria Custer, Red Earth. DeMallie, R., & Parks, D. R. (Eds.) (1987). Sioux Indian Religion. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. Feraca "Yuwipi," "Medicine Cult," "Wakinyan." Pettipas, K. Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994. Powers Oglala.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, D. Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West. New York: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1970. Deloria Custer. Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer. Matthiessen Crazy Horse.

happiness and contentment for my people. The Sioux have lived a long time in this region. No one knows how long. But there are many legends about my tribe and also about the Badlands and the Black Hills, showing that we have lived there many, many years. *Luther Standing Bear, Lakota*<sup>29</sup>

The Tetons [Lakota] are perhaps the best known of all the Sioux. They may be regarded as the “typical” Plains Indian: they lived in tipis, hunted buffalo on horseback, and were involved in numerous battles with other tribes and with Euro-Americans, including the Red Cloud wars of the 1860s, the Custer battle of 1876, and the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890.<sup>30</sup>

The Lakota, or Teton Sioux, are made up of seven closely related yet distinct sociopolitical units that, according to Western academics and some Sioux people, were formed during periods of movement and migration westward across the Great Plains.<sup>31</sup> These seven groups, *Oglala*, *Sicangu*, *Hunkpapa*, *Mnikowoju (Minneconjou)*, *Sihasapa*, *Oohemunpa*, and *Itazipco* modeled their heptatic division after the original structure of the Seven Fireplaces and the sacred numerology common to Sioux cultures.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Standing Bear, L. *My Indian Boyhood*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska. 1931. 5-6.

<sup>30</sup> Powers, *Oglala* 25.

<sup>31</sup> Hassrick *The Sioux*. Hyde *Red Cloud*. Sioux, *Dream*. Powers *Oglala*. Sandoz *Crazy Horse*. These are historically based Western academic views on the migrations of the Lakota. Many Sioux have a differing view on the origin of their people. It is important to note that many Sioux reject academic notions of migration and stress their indigenous relationship to the land where they presently reside.

<sup>32</sup> Powers *Oglala*.

Due to the political prevalence of Lakota nations and their leaders,<sup>33</sup> ethnography of the Sioux became increasingly focused on the Lakota over time. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most studies of the Sioux were focused on the Lakota. Early epic works focusing on the Oglala Lakota,<sup>34</sup> also created a foundation of study which inspired and facilitated further research. It is because of consistent academic interest and research that studies of Lakota religion may draw from a relatively substantial body of literature.

### Lakota Religion and the Literature of the Twentieth Century

Much of the Sioux ethnography since 1900 has focused on the religious beliefs and practices of the Lakota. The popularization of the life history and narratives of Black Elk, a spiritual leader among the Sioux, have contributed to the increased attention to religious beliefs and practices.<sup>35</sup> Black Elk's influence on the development of Lakota religion and the academic perception of Lakota religion has raised issues of authenticity, syncretism and cultural homogeneity. The investigation of these issues has generated a body of Black Elk theological criticism<sup>36</sup> and calls for more diverse and comparative studies of Lakota healers and spiritual leaders.

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<sup>33</sup> Brown, D. Bury My Heart. Churchill, W. Indians are Us? Toronto: Between the Lines, 1994. Deloria Custer. Matthiessen Crazy Horse.

<sup>34</sup> See Brown Sacred. Neihardt Black Elk. Walker Lakota Belief. Walker, J. R. Lakota Myth. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

<sup>35</sup> DeMallie Sixth Grandfather. Holler, C. Black Elk's Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995. Neihardt, H. Black Elk and Flaming Rainbow: Personal Memories of the Lakota Holy Man and John Neihardt. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Rice Storytelling. Black Elk's Story. Great Spirit. Steltenkamp, M. Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

<sup>36</sup> Holler. Steltenkamp. Stolzman, W. The Pipe and Christ: A Christian-Sioux Dialogue. Chamberlain, SD: Tipi Press, 1986a. Rice Purpose. Storytelling.

The literature on Lakota religion can be viewed in terms of its two main styles of research and presentation: the recorded narratives of Lakota spiritual leaders and the systematized surveys of scholars.

*Lakota Narratives.* A great deal of the literature on the Lakota appears in the form of narrative.<sup>37</sup> Lakota studies that focus on collaborative research and narrative life histories have the advantage of being closely shaped by the direct input of Lakota informants. Though this material cannot be seen as existing outside of non-Indigenous influence, its strength lies in its propensity to reflect Indigenous tradition with more accuracy and holism than those studies without Indigenous input.<sup>38</sup>

*Systematized Surveys.* The second and most common category of Lakota material - systematized surveys - draws from narrative ethnography as well as other sources, such as archival records and original fieldwork.<sup>39</sup> The advantage of this second category is that Lakota religion is presented as systematized, and beliefs and practices are categorized by the author. Themes and patterns in belief and practice are identified and organized. Such analysis facilitates cross-cultural comparison as well as the inference of

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<sup>37</sup> Brown Sacred Pipe. Catches and Catches. Deloria, V. Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light, 1999. Erdoes Crow Dog, Gift, Lame Deer. Keeney, B., ed. Lakota Yuwipi Man: Gary Holly Bull. Philadelphia: Ringing Rocks Press, 1999. Fox and Asher. Lewis Medicine Men. Looks for Buffalo Hand. Lyon and Black Elk. Mails Fools Crow, Mails, T. E. Fools Crow: Wisdom and Power. Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1991. Neihardt Black Elk. Standing Bear, L. My Indian Boyhood. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska, 1931. Standing Bear, L. Stories of the Sioux. Lincoln, NB: Bison Books, 1934. Walker Lakota Belief, Walker, J. R. Lakota Myth. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. Young Bear, S. Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

<sup>38</sup> Colorado Indigenous. O'Meara and West. Young & Goulet.

<sup>39</sup> For examples see DeMallie Sixth Grandfather. Holler. Powers, M. Oglala Women: Myth, Ritual and Reality. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986. Powers Oglala, Powers, W. Yuwipi: Vision & Experience in Oglala Ritual. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska, 1982. Powers, W. Sacred Language: The Nature of Supernatural Discourse in Lakota. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986. Rice Great Spirit. Stolzman Pipe and Christ, How to Participate in Lakota Ceremonies. Chamberlain, SD: Tipi Press, 1986b. Steltenkamp. Walker Lakota Belief, Myth, Lakota Society. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

metaphysical tenets. The problem with this category of literature is that it is potentially (and often) as misleading as it is informative.<sup>40</sup> The merit of a system can only be evaluated by its coherence with Indigenous experience and belief.<sup>41</sup> Within the Lakota literature this coherence is often questionable.<sup>42</sup> This study has emphasized the authority of fieldwork, original data, and community perspectives in the evaluation of systematized survey studies of the Sioux.

### Healing Among the Lakota Sioux

In identifying the primary texts that address the nature of Lakota healing, two categories of material are consulted. The first category draws from the texts that describe and discuss Lakota spiritual belief and practice.<sup>43</sup> Since all Lakota healing takes place in the context of religious ceremony and their spiritual cosmology, it is necessary to

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<sup>40</sup> Mihesuah, O'Meara and West. Thornton.

<sup>41</sup> Mihesuah, O'Meara and West. Thornton. Young and Goulet.

<sup>42</sup> Rice Great Spirit.

<sup>43</sup> Amiotte, A. "The Lakota Sun Dance: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives." Sioux Indian Religion. Eds. R. DeMallie and D. Parks. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. Amiotte, A. (1989). "Our other selves." I Become Part of It. Eds. D.M. Dooling and P. Jordan-Smith. New York: Harper Collins, 1989. 161-172. Brown Sacred Pipe. Animals of the soul. Rockport, MA: Element, 1992. Bucko Sweat. DeMallie Sixth Grandfather. DeMallie, R., and Parks, D. R. (Eds.) (1987). Sioux Indian Religion. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. Densmore, F. "The Sun Dance of the Teton Sioux." Nature 104 (1920): 437-440. Densmore, F. Teton Sioux Music and Culture. Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1918. Deloria, E. Dakota Texts. New York: AMS Press, 1932. Deloria, E. Waterlily. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1988. Deloria, E. Speaking of Indians. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. Deloria, V. God is Red. Singing. Dorsey "Siouan," "Teton." Eastman, C. The Soul of the Indian. Lincoln, NB: Bison Books, 1911. Old Indian Days. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. Indians Heroes and Great Chieftains. New York: Dover Publications, 1997. Erdoes Crow Dog, Gift, Lame Deer. Feraca "Wakinyan." Forbes "Sioux Indians." Grobsmith "Wakurza." "Giveaway." "Lakota." Holler. Jorgenson. Lynd, J. "The Religion of the Dakotas." Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society 2 (1989): 150. Mails, T. E. Mystic Warriors of the Plains. New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972. Fools Crow. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979. Fools Crow: Wisdom and Power. Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1991. Spirits of the Plains. Tulsa: Council Oaks Books, 1997. Sundancing: The Great Sioux Piercing Ritual. Tulsa: Council Oaks Books, 1998. Neihardt Black Elk. Black Elk and Flaming Rainbow: Personal Memories of the Lakota Holy Man and John Neihardt. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Pond "Dakota Gods," "Superstitions." Powers, M. Oglala Women. Powers, W. Oglala. Sacred Language. Rice Great Spirit. Riggs, S. "Concerning Dakota Beliefs." American Philological Association Proceedings of Third Session. (1872). "The Theogony of the Sioux."

understand essential ceremonies and spiritual tenets in order to identify and articulate healing practices and philosophies. The inseparability of Lakota healing from its spiritual foundations is evident in studies on Lakota religious belief and practice. Though authors direct their attention towards religion as a whole, Lakota informants invariably highlight the healing aspect of all spiritual tradition. This alone is clear evidence of the holistic nature of Lakota spirituality. Virtually all of the texts examining spirituality include discussions of health beliefs, healing practices, and the role of healing practitioners.

The second category of literature features the specific examination of healing among the Lakota. Such studies naturally address the context of religion and spirituality, but focus directly on the practice, practitioners, experience, and medical efficacy of healing in Lakota ceremony.<sup>44</sup> The main difference between these studies and the more general investigations of Lakota spirituality lies in the intentional focus on healing, and the process by which Lakota ceremony and traditional medicines are used as treatment for physical disease and other human problems. Of the texts cited in this category, those

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American Antiquarian 2.4 (1880). "Dakota Grammar. Texts and Ethnography." Ed. J. O. Dorsey Contributions to North American Ethnology 9 (1893). Standing Bear Boyhood Stories. St. Pierre and Long Soldier Walking Sacred. Steinmentz, P. "The Relationship Between Plains Indian Religion and Christianity: A Priest's Viewpoint." Plains Anthropologist 15 (1970): 83-86. Meditations with Native Americans: Lakota Spirituality. Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co. 1984. Pipe, Bible and Peyote among the Oglala Lakota: A Study in Religious Identity. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press. 1990. Steltenkamp. Stolzman Pipe and Christ, Ceremonies. Walker Lakota Belief, Society, Myth. Walker, J. R. The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota, 1917. New York: AMS Press, 1979. Wissler "Society and Ceremonial."

<sup>44</sup> Arbogast Wounded. Feraca "Yuwipi." "Teton." "Wakinyan." Grobsmith "Wakunza." Kemnitzer Kemnitzer, L. "Structure, Context, and Cultural Meaning of Yuwipi: A Modern Lakota Healing Ritual." American Ethnologist 3 (1976): 261-80. "Yuwipi." Pine Ridge Research Bulletin 10 (1969): 26-33. "Cultural Providence of Objects Used in Yuwipi: A Modern Teton Dakota Healing Ritual." Ethnos 35 (1970): 40-75. "White Man's Medicine. Indian Medicine, and Indian Identity on Pine Ridge Reservation." Pine Ridge Research Bulletin 8 (1966): 12-23. Lewis "Indian Healer." "Changing Practice." "Sioux Medicine." "Yuwipi," Medicine Men. Linden, G. "Mystic Medicine: Black Elk's First Cure." Dakota History Conference. 1982. Looks for Buffalo Hand. Mails Wisdom. Powers Sacred.

most specifically focused on healing tend to be articles, while larger texts that are solely devoted to the study of Lakota healing are rare.<sup>45</sup>

It is difficult to speculate why highly focused studies on Lakota healing are not more common. Perhaps it is because healing is so commonly addressed in the broader studies of Lakota religion. It may also be due to the reluctance of Lakota experts to participate in such research. It is also possible that, despite the wide interest in Lakota spirituality, the obvious relationship between healing and spirituality has not been isolated by scholars and thus is not intentionally emphasized as the thesis of any work.

### Gene Thin Elk

*An Introduction.* Gene Thin Elk, *Sichangu*, Lakota, is the spiritual leader of the Wase Wakpa "off-reservation" Sioux community in Vermillion, South Dakota. Professionally, Thin Elk has been a pioneer in the field of Native American/Indigenous drug and alcohol counseling and treatment. Based on traditional spirituality/healing and a personal devotion to the spiritual service of humanity, Thin Elk's models of treatment and counselor education have been well used by Indigenous communities across the Great Plains. As well, Thin Elk has conducted ceremonies, run workshops and helped to set up healing programs in parts of Canada and across the United States. Due to his unique success and widespread respect, Thin Elk has been invited to work with professionals, patients and institutions in fields as diverse as health care, corrections, justice, community development and business management. Deeply modest in his public profile, Thin Elk's commitment to service remains firm in responding to the needs of the people, communities and institutions that approach him for help.

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<sup>45</sup> Lewis. Medicine Men. presents one of the only in-depth studies focused on Lakota healing.

Though in high demand for his skills as a counselor, speaker, and program developer, Thin Elk's commitment to traditional healing and Lakota Ceremonial Ways is the most prominent part of his life and work. As a spiritual servant to his people, Thin Elk leads many ceremonies including the *Inipi* (Sweat Lodge), *Hanblecha* (Vision Quest), *Wiwangwacipi* (Sun Dance), memorials, funerals, weddings, and Wiping of the Tears.<sup>46</sup> A true practitioner of holistic medicine, Thin Elk engages the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual problems of people in a variety of ways. His healing work takes many forms, and includes doctoring *Inipis*, the development of community programs, prayer, *Chamupa* (Sacred Pipe) ceremonies, counseling, Spirit releasing, and the prescription of basic herbal medicines to list only some. Regardless of the nature of the work he is asked to do, or where he travels to do it, Lakota spirituality and ceremony form the foundation of his healing work.

The ceremonial roles of healer and ritual leader occupies a great deal of Thin Elk's time, and culminates in the summer months when he is ceaselessly devoted to the people who pledge to *Hanblecha*, and to making the necessary preparations of the *Wiwangwacipi*. During these months Thin Elk travels very little professionally and focuses his energies on educating, guiding, preparing and leading people through traditional ceremonies. Thin Elk remains closely connected with his relations across the Sioux territories throughout the year, and constantly networks with other healers of differing specializations.<sup>47</sup> In the summer, however, these relationships are deepened and

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<sup>46</sup> Consult glossary and Appendix A for more on these.

<sup>47</sup> For example: *Yuwipi* men (shamans), or *Pejuta Wicasha* (herbalists); these are explored further in chapter five and Appendix B.

renewed through the annual ceremonies and the *Wiwangwacipi* he helps to facilitate out in the Pine Ridge Nation.

*Published Work.* Due to Thin Elk's focus on traditional culture, he has not pursued publications or public press in his life. Always modest, Thin Elk has rejected many offers to commercialize or popularize various aspects of his work and culture. Despite his reluctance to publish or accept financial incentives to publicize his healing work, some of Thin Elk's treatment models and philosophies have been recorded, specifically for use in education and treatment facilities.<sup>48</sup> Thin Elk's *Red Road Approach Video Series* provided great insight in this project and a range of material to draw from. None of these publications depict actual ceremonial methods used or the details of procedures involved in Thin Elk's spiritual work. This video series reflects both Thin Elk's belief in the protection of sacred rites, and his emphasis on the importance of understanding Lakota/Indigenous healing philosophies in cross-cultural work with Indigenous people.

Though little of Thin Elk's work and philosophy has been formally documented, a number of recent studies on the healing of Indigenous communities have featured his work as being exemplary of an effective spiritually based, traditional healing approach to contemporary health problems.<sup>49</sup> These accounts support the work of Thin Elk and identify him as a spiritual leader who utilizes traditional ceremony and philosophy to treat contemporary holistic health issues. This study expands on these works by presenting a description of a philosophy of healing experienced through work and study

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<sup>48</sup> See Thin Elk "Red Road Approach" video series: 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1990d, 1990e, 1990f.

<sup>49</sup> Abrogast, Bordewich, Doll, D. Vision Quest: Men, Women and Sacred Sites of the Sioux Nation. New York: Crown Publishers, 1994. Duran and Duran, Robbins, S., P. Chatterjee, and E. Canda. Contemporary Human Behavior Theory: A Critical Perspective for Social Work. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1998.

with Thin Elk. A variety of unpublished materials are available through the various health and academic institutions that Thin Elk has worked with. These have not been consulted for this project.

Born to a long lineage of revered traditional healers, Thin Elk's spiritual leadership reflects a natural birthright. Many of Thin Elk's relatives, such as *Wicaša Wakan*, *Woptuh'a* (Horn Chips), were greatly revered and known to have exceptional spiritual power as well as great community influence. Some of Thin Elk's ancestors taught and cured some of the most popular figures in Lakota history, including his Great Uncle Crazy Horse and Black Elk. Among Thin Elk's immediate relations, like Chief Ted Thin Elk, Joe Thin Elk, Holy Horse Road Woman, the Crow Dog family, and Moves Camp family have been featured in texts about Lakota healers.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, many of the Sioux holy men who Thin Elk has learned from and shared ceremony with during his life and work as a spiritual leader are also featured in the literature on Sioux culture and healing.

### Complementary Literature

#### Indigenous Healing in North America

Given a lack of literature specifically addressing healing in Sioux cultures, it was also necessary to consult material that addressed Indigenous healing and spirituality generally, particularly those that included special attention to the Great Plains cultures.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Arbrogast. Erdoes Crow Dog. Frisch. Steltenkamp. St. Pierre and Long Soldier.

<sup>51</sup> Ackerknecht. Duran and Duran. Eliade. Grim. Halifax, J. Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives. New York: Arkana, 1979. Shaman: The Wounded Healer. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1982. Halifax, 1979; Hultkrantz Soul. Shamanic. Irwin, L. The Dream Seekers. Norman: University of

These studies examine how Indigenous people understand health and illness in the context of a spiritual worldview. Further, there is an attempt to identify how Indigenous people treat illness through ceremony and the role of traditional healers. In some cases, these works featured Lakota practices only in part, however, these texts provide additional sources of Lakota research, as well as analytic and theoretical systems for contrast and comparison.

The close relationship between North American Indigenous healing practices and their religious traditions have been explored by a number of scholars.<sup>52</sup> Among these scholars, however, few have made the clear assertion that spirituality is foundational to the origin and efficacy of Indigenous healing philosophy and practice – medical and otherwise. Rather, most have asserted the importance of spirituality as an aspect of healing<sup>53</sup> and the importance of spiritual healing.<sup>54</sup> These concepts are functionally and conceptually distinct from the recognition of the spiritual and holistic nature of Indigenous healing and medicine.

### Alternative and Complementary Medicine

For the literature review of this thesis it was also necessary to consult the literature that addresses other non-Western forms of medicine and the current trend

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Oklahoma. 1994. Jilke, Jorgenson. Kalweit Dreamtime. Shamans. Keeney, B. Shaking out the Spirits. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press. 1994. Yuwipi. Lewis Medicine. Lyon, W. Encyclopedia of Native American Healing. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. 1996. Mahl-Madrona. Mails Warriors. Ross, R. Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality. Toronto: Penguin Books. 1992. Teachings. Vogel.

<sup>52</sup> Hammerschlag Dancing. Theft. Hultkrantz Shamanic. Kalweit Dreamtime. Shaman. Long and Fox. Mahl-Madrona. Ross Ghost. Teachings. Tedlock and Tedlock. Waldram et al. Warry. Young Eagle.

<sup>53</sup> Long and Fox. Waldram. Waldram et al.

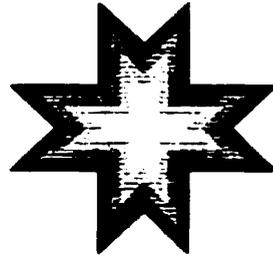
<sup>54</sup> Hammerschlag Dancing. Theft. Ross Ghost. Teachings. Young, et al. Eagle.

towards holism in Western societies.<sup>55</sup> This final category of literature is particularly useful in the articulation of the relationship between Lakota/Indigenous healing and the future of Western biomedicine, as in Chapter Six. These texts were essential in providing comparative material for the formulation of concepts on holism, healing and spirituality. Additionally, this complementary body of literature incorporates Western science and the findings of scientific studies that validate the efficacy of religious and spiritual forms of healing.<sup>56,57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ballentine, Benson and Stark, Bryan, L. A Design for the Future of Health Care. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1996. Carlson, R. and Shield, B. Healers on Healing. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989. Dacher Intentional Healing. Darling, D. Soul Search. Toronto: Villard Books, 1995. Dossey Soul, Healing Words, Reinventing. Gordon, Judith, A. Eastern Body, Western Mind. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1996. Koenig, H. G. The Healing Power of Faith: Science Explores Medicine's Last Great Frontier. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. McKenna, T. True Hallucinations. Audiocassette. Berkeley, CA: Lux Natura, 1984. McKenna, T., and D. McKenna. The Invisible Landscape. New York: Seabury, 1975. Mehl-Madrona, Morrisseau, C. Into the Daylight: A Wholistic Approach to Healing. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. Myss, C. Anatomy of the Spirit. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1996. Myss, C., and C. N. Shealy. The Creation of Health. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993. Noel, D. The Soul of Shamanism: Western Fantasies, Imaginal Realities. New York: Continuum, 1997. Schulz, Shealy, Targ, R. and J. Katra. Miracles of Mind: Exploring Non-local Consciousness and Spiritual Healing. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1998. Tiwari, M. Ayurveda: Secrets of Healing. Wisconsin: Twin Lakes, 1995. Weil, A. Spontaneous Healing. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. Wilber, K. The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion. Toronto: Random House, 1998. The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad. Boston: Shambala, 1997.

<sup>56</sup> Benor Healing Research. "Survey." Benson and Stark. Dacher. Darling. Dossey Soul, Healing Words, Reinventing. Hawk Wing, P. (1997). "Lakota Teachings: Inipi, Humbleciya, and Yuwipi Ceremonies." The Sacred Heritage: The Influence of Shamanism on Analytical Psychology. Ed. D. Sander and S. Wong 193-202. Koenig, McKenna, McKenna and McKenna, Modi, S. Remarkable Healings: A Psychiatrist Discovers Unsuspected Roots of Mental and Physical Illness. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 1997. Murphy, M. The Future of the Body. Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1992. Myss and Shealy. Pargament, K. I. The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice. New York: Guilford Press, 1997. Peat, F. D. Lighting the Seventh Fire: The Spiritual Ways, Healing and Science of the Native Americans. New York: Birch Lane Press, 1994. Perry, J. W. Trials of the Visionary Mind: Spiritual Emergency and the Renewal Process. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999. Pert, C. B. Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine. New York: Touchstone, 1997. Schulz, Scotton, B. W., A. B. Chinen, and J. R. Battista, J. R., eds. Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology. New York: Basic Books, 1996. Shealy, Sheldrake, R. A New Science of Life. Rochester, VT: Parker Street Press, 1995. Targ and Katra. Tart, C. Body, Mind, Spirit: Exploring the Parapsychology of Spirituality. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Co, 1997. Weil, Wolf, F. A. The Spiritual Universe: How Quantum Physics Proves the Existence of the Soul. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. Wong, S. "The Sun Dance: Wiwayang Wacipi." Eds. D. Sander and S. Wong. The Sacred Heritage: The Influence of Shamanism on Analytical Psychology 1992. 207-214. Wulff, D. M. Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991.



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<sup>57</sup> The need for the scientific validation of Indigenous spiritually based healing methods is antithetical to the position taken in this paper, nevertheless it should be mentioned that a wide range of rigorous, well documented studies on the efficacy and empirically quantifiable effects of spiritual healing, prayer, and Spirit related ceremonies has been available for decades. A review of the referenced literature will provide ample examples of studies and resources regarding the scientific support for spiritual healing and holistic healing approaches. Most of the above noted texts include references for primary data supporting the efficacy of spiritually based healing.

## Chapter 4: Fieldwork and Beyond ---

For it is the wish of *Wakan-Tanka* that the Light enters into the darkness, that we may see not only with our two eyes, but with the one eye which is of the heart [*chante ishta*], and with which we see and know all that is true and good.

- Black Elk, Oglala, Lakota<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

The fieldwork for this study took place largely in the Wase Wakpa non-reservation Sioux community of Vermillion, South Dakota in the summer of 1999. During *Wiwangwacipi* (Sun Dance), and some of the ceremonial, counseling, and consulting work of Thin Elk, time was also spent in other Lakota communities of South and North Dakota. The time period of my fieldwork was laid out in my original research proposal and was accepted by academic departments and committees. The ease with which I was able to declare my subject topic and fieldwork plan is something I regard with mixed feelings. I do not know an Indigenous Elder, healer, or cultural teacher who would readily accept the notion that a person can "understand" traditional spirituality or healing in a summer - no matter how many books were read before, during or after.

One simply cannot gain an accurate understanding of what goes on in Indian Country without living in and around an Indian community for a long period of time... In fact, one really needs not just to reside, but to reside *as a relative*, since there are vast dimensions of meaning that are only acted out in this way.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brown *Sacred Pipe* 42.

<sup>2</sup> Translations of Lakota terms appear in the glossary; a brief description of the major ceremonies discussed in this section appear in Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> Jocks 172.

My ongoing commitment to working towards the betterment of Aboriginal communities, and Gene Thin Elk's interest in working together were central factors in the justification and approval of this project. Intellectual curiosity, the pursuit of a degree, or data for a publication are simply not reason enough to justify the research and study of Indigenous spirituality. In Indigenous research the motive of a researcher is intrinsically related to the quality of her/his data. Few traditional healers will work with academics who have selfish or purely academic interests. Unique academic standards must be recognized and formulated for the study of Indigenous traditions. This study offers one alternative approach to Indigenous scholarship: one based on relationship and intimate personal involvement.<sup>4</sup>

#### What is Fieldwork?

The *reception of knowledge* in Lakota tradition is unlike *the acquisition of knowledge* in Western academia. Knowledge of spiritual things, which healing intrinsically is, comes slowly, with time and experience. Holistic things are taught holistically: fieldwork regarding traditional healing cannot focus on a single type of ceremony, or a study of healing plants. Indigenous healing fieldwork must include an open, willing participation in all aspects of Indigenous life. For me, staying up late visiting with family, going to a local football game, helping to build a relative's shed, or going to see the paintings of a friend are among the most rich and rewarding aspects of Indigenous life and learning.

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<sup>4</sup> As similar position is taken by the Society for the Study of Native American Religious Tradition: see also Jacobs, S., W. Thomas, and S. Lang. Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender, Identity, Sexuality and Spirituality. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997; Jocks; Garrouette; Mihesuah; Thornton.

Holism is rooted in *relationship*: the relationship between a person and other people, environments, places, experiences, things and experiences. Relationship is always happening. It cannot be divided, subject to subject, or grasped by participant observation. Holism is understood in each moment of a day and is engaged with the whole self: one's mind, body, heart and soul. The things I have come to know of Lakota spirituality and healing, though little, have taken years and have come through many forms.

### What Do I Know?

Though I have surveyed the majority of the literature on the Lakota Sioux, and though I have been a part of a Lakota family for over seven years, I can claim only a limited knowledge of Lakota tradition. No matter how many *Inipi* ceremonies I attend, no matter how many times I *Hanblecha*, I will remain a young student, a "beginner", for most of my life. Language is also a barrier to my understanding. While I understand some of the ceremonial lyrics and how to recognize when a joke is being made at my expense, I do not speak the language. As such, vast realms of Lakota wisdom and experience are beyond my reach. Language alone remains a tremendous barrier and I acknowledge that. Respected spiritual leader Pete S. Catches, believed strongly in the importance of the Lakota language, and its central role in understanding Lakota spirituality. He said, "When you learn the Lakota language, you know that you have entered into the realm of a unique religion, a religion that is beautiful and of the Western Hemisphere."<sup>5</sup>

What does work in my favour, is the Lakota belief in the universal nature of the human spirit and the universal ability to see with the *cante išta* or "eye of the heart."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Catches 141.

<sup>6</sup> This is taught by Thin Elk, see also Brown *Sacred Pipe* 42.

Through relationship and a sincere commitment to learn I have been taught to be patient and observe; to look and listen with my heart; and to think and feel with my spirit. From this, I feel that I have been able to glimpse the vast terrain that comprises the distinct world of the Lakota healers and spiritual leaders. This has been possible only through the grace of God (*Wakan'tanka*), the *Tunkashila* (Spirits) and the generous teaching and mentoring of my Lakota father, Gene Thin Elk, who has chosen to show me things - carefully and over time.

This chapter reviews my years of experience that lead to the material featured in this project. Reviewing my "fieldwork" and the prior six years of experience is essential to communicating the source, process and authority that lies behind my conclusions and ability to identify central aspects of Lakota healing. As well, reviewing my learning process is itself a telling discussion of the nature and process of Lakota spirituality, healing and holism. It all depends on the reader's relationship to the material. Some, likely non-Indigenous people, will see the following sections as the descriptions of a means to an end: how I acquired knowledge and information. To others, like many Indigenous people, *how* I came to know things *is* the same as an exploration of *what* I know: what its nature is, and its depth and character. Indeed, for some, the process is more important than the outcome. When given pause for reflection, most people conclude that the journey is more important than the destination.

## The Making of Relatives:<sup>7</sup> Before Fieldwork

Where does it begin?

Since before the time I entered this world, my family owned a cabin on an island in Ptarmigan Bay, near Clearwater Bay, Lake of the Woods, Ontario. From the time I was born we spent the entire summer at our cabin, only returning to Winnipeg to begin school again. At a young age I took to exploring the unsettled islands near our cabin, which I still consider my true home. My deep connection with the land and animals of that place naturally led me to a spirituality and an awareness of Spirit which I tried to apply in my life in Winnipeg, during the school years.

As I matured into my teen years, my spirituality took on a more active, intellectual nature and I began to read from the sacred books of the world's religious traditions, as well as some of the great philosophers and poets of the West. I began to meet with spiritual leaders and teachers when I could; I began to question my friends and family about their relationship to the questions of God, Creation, and how to live properly on the earth, in a spiritual way. Through Buddhist and Hindu scriptures it became clear to me that enlightenment, and the knowing of one's Self, was not only possible, but a lifelong duty.

Among my most profound, and some might say accidental encounters, were two which brought me near the Indigenous world of spirituality and healing. At sixteen I met an Ojibway healer through my brother and his work in corrections. Over the next few

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<sup>7</sup> Noted and discussed in many Lakota texts. see DeMallie Teton, Grandfather. DeMallie, R., and Parks, D. R. eds. Sioux Indian Religion. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. DeMallie, R., and R. Lavenda. "Wakan: Plains Siouan Concepts of Power." The Anthropology of Power. Ed. R. Fogelson and R. Adams. New York: Academic Press Inc., 1977. Throughout Waterlily Ella Deloria emphasizes the importance of relatives and of making relatives of people and Spiritual Beings before asking for help or entering into pragmatic relationships with them.

years we met occasionally to philosophize about life, and to share spiritual views and experiences over french fries at a fast food restaurant. While we never discussed Ojibway ritual or ceremony in any detail, I believe that I was learning about new ways to see the world in an indirect manner.<sup>8</sup> I was being affirmed in my own spirituality and exposed to the possibility of previously unimaginable things, like the ability to see Spirit Beings, and the ability for the soul to travel outside the body with conscious awareness.

When I was seventeen I met a Hawaiian healer while visiting Kauai, Hawaii with my parents. The healer and I met soon after my arrival and experienced an instant rapport; over the next ten days I learned about traditional Hawaiian culture and healing. This healer seemed to take me one step further into the experiential world of Indigenous spirituality and healing. I was assigned various exercises and tasks that took place in different parts of the island. In those days I experienced things that would forever change my life. I began to see beyond belief into Spiritual realms; I began to experience the things I had, until then, only read about.

There are many other stories of spiritual study and experience that preceded the day I met Thin Elk. I had met a few Canadian Indigenous healers and had been to a couple of sweat lodge ceremonies. I had studied Eastern philosophy and had some profound experiences during prayer and meditation sessions. While the details of the years that preceded meeting Thin Elk are not important in this study, it is significant to note that even before we had met, I was personally committed to and somewhat experienced in a life of spiritual study. Indicative of this was my study and ordination as an Interfaith minister. In 1996 I completed a special seminary training program with an

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<sup>8</sup> Indirect education and communication is common to Indigenous people and the Lakota in particular, see Deloria, E. Waterlily 25, 36, 50.

interfaith/cross-cultural seminary in New York City. For me, this marked the beginning of a focused, life long commitment of spiritual service.

It is also important to acknowledge my home environment which provided so much of the context and support for all I have experienced and pursued. My mother is a profoundly open minded Jewish woman, who has developed her own spirituality through many cross-cultural avenues. Though I was raised to understand my own culture as Judaism by my mother, I was also aware of the fact that she practiced yoga and Eastern meditation every morning. My Mom always celebrated the richness of human spirituality and emphasized personal choice and direction in my religious education. My dad did not consider himself spiritual and did not practice any aspect of his Christian upbringing since he was in his late teen years. Repulsed by a number of negative experiences with the leaders of different churches, my dad found peace and spirituality in our family and the time we spent at the lake. Out of social convention, and my mom's desire to maintain some of my dad's heritage, we did celebrate Christmas and Easter. These, however, were times of family, not of religious meaning.

#### **When Paths Converge: Meeting Gene Thin Elk**

I met Gene Thin Elk in the spring of 1993. I was a student in a liberal arts program in Prescott, Arizona. The program I was enrolled in was self-directed and allowed for a great deal of choice, creativity and personal direction. I was pursuing an education to become a spiritual counselor. I hoped that by combining training and education in psychology, religious studies and wilderness leadership I would be able to guide people in the sorts of transformative spiritual experiences in nature with which my own life had been filled.

I had reached the mid-point of my first year and wanted to arrange a practicum with a psychologist who integrated spirituality and culture into a therapeutic process. A few friends in Canada told me of two Lakota men who did such a thing: Gene Thin Elk and, his partner Rick Thomas. Those who had attended "Red Road" workshops by these men assured me that it was perhaps one of the most powerful experiences of their lives. I initiated telephone calls to Thin Elk based on his gifts as healer/counselor. I cannot say that I was drawn to work with him because of his culture; however, it was certainly of some interest. A month-long internship was arranged after some difficulties making contact.

For the month of May, 1993, I was to follow Gene Thin Elk in all his work: running workshops, giving presentations and facilitating group sessions. I had developed a reading list and arranged an advisor to supervise a course focusing on psychology, healing and Lakota culture. I expected to read from my list of texts and write journal entries and essays while I was in South Dakota.

I didn't expect what happened.

You want me to do what?

I will never forget the day Gene and I met. I had arrived early in the day and called his home. His wife, now my "adopted" mother Diane, answered the phone only to inform me that he was out of town and to call again later. Somewhat nervous and alone in a strange town, I passed the thunderstorms of the day in my truck, parked somewhere on a gravel road near a nature park.

Towards the end of the day I returned to town, hoping desperately that Gene would have returned by then. Diane informed me that he had returned, and told me to go

to his office in the business area of the small town of Vermillion. We met there for the first time. He was wearing a Chicago Bulls sweater, black jeans, and cowboy boots. I don't remember the first words exchanged, but I do remember that he was busy doing things and didn't look at me much, or make much of an effort to spend time with me after his brief warm welcome. He just continued with his business.

His office was a room in what used to be an old antique store - or at least that is what the old sign said over the door. The place was cluttered with papers, books, fabric, feathers, Native art, a bag or two of dried plants, pouches of tobacco, and audio tapes of traditional pow wow music, ceremonial songs, the Rolling Stones and some country music. I can still smell the tobacco in the room, and the smoky scent of other plants that were then unfamiliar. The other thing I remember about our exchange is that we seemed to laugh a lot, and were quickly making jokes about the day. Though I had no real expectations, he was not what I expected. Still, I could not have been more instantly comfortable or at ease in his presence.

Shortly after our meeting at his office, he asked me to follow him home to the trailer where he lived with his wife and five of his children. When we entered the house, there was an unbelievably terrible smell. Awful! His wife Diane and the children were in a panic, Gene also reacted to the horrid stench and remarked, "oh, no, it's worse!" - a remark which brought me no comfort.

Again I was ignored, and my meeting with the family was somewhat complicated by the commotion. Gene disappeared and I waited outside. Diane settled the children down. Sometime passed and I assumed the situation was resolved, or was being resolved and that Gene was engaged in more serious and perhaps mystical matters on my behalf.

Fulfilling my fantasy, Gene appeared again, this time very somber. I will never forget what he said to me that day.

"Jonathan, you have come a long way to learn from me. To learn about my ways and my culture."

He began to walk with me around the trailer.

"Our people have always been strong; our men have always been warriors. If you want to learn our ways, then you must understand that. You must do things as a warrior."

We had reached one side of the trailer where his teenage son sat waiting on the ground. I was at once excited and nervous with anticipation. I noticed a hole in the side of the trailer towards the ground where a panel had been pulled out. I wondered what he was about to share with me. What ceremony might I be invited to, what would come next on this unpredictable day? Gene continued gravely,

"Among our people our warriors had many tasks to prove themselves, and to learn the true meaning of our ways. Now, you remember that smell in our trailer? Well, an old possum has died under there and it's rotting. It is your job to go in there and pull him out *with your teeth*." He looked at me intensely, and waited for my response.

With that, my jaw dropped, my eyes leaped from my head, and Gene and his son just about fell over laughing. Ever since that day our relationship has always been an adventure, always centering on the serious matters of ceremony and healing, and yet, somehow, always a circus of laughter and fun. For years I was not certain if our relationship was based more on humor or spirituality. In time, I saw that it was always both.

### **Never Alone**

In the first month I spent with Gene as an "intern," academic objectivity and design fell away. I relinquished my books and called south to Arizona to inform my advisor that there would be no way that I would or could depersonalize what I was experiencing by writing a paper about it - much less submit it for grading. During that month Gene and I quickly developed a close relationship. By the time I was to leave I had been deeply affected by my participation in ceremonies. I had become like a part of the Thin Elk family and the day I left was very difficult for me.

I still remember today, how the youngest children of Gene and Diane, who were maybe two and three years of age, sat on my lap and climbed all over me making it even harder to get up when I was preparing to go. Neither Gene nor Diane helped me by removing the children. Rather, they seemed to enjoy watching me mature before their eyes as I struggled to reconcile my feelings of love and belonging with the realities of life at home and the need to return. I have come to see that Love is not about hanging on to people or things. Hanging on and holding are two very different things. In time I have learned that to love and be loved is never to be alone, regardless of where you are or who you are with.

### **Ceremony**

I returned later that summer for a healing ceremony that I requested to help me with a musculo-skeletal problem I had in my feet and legs that made running or walking long distances painful. It was a condition that no Western doctor was able to remedy. Physiotherapy did little, as did exercises. The only offer of help came from a specialist,

supposedly the best in Winnipeg, Manitoba, who offered to "break" and surgically reconstruct my feet to assist in their realignment. I sought other options.

Returning for the ceremony and the commitments involved - the Sacred Feasts, the *Wih'peya* and the many *Inipis* in preparation - was a tremendous experience. The thought of being physically "healed" by a Spirit Calling ceremony challenged everything I knew and grew up believing. As open minded as my parents were, and as much as I had been open to on my spiritual journey, this was an entirely different level of open mindedness that I faced.

The ceremony was done by a *Yuwipi* man in Pine Ridge. I suppose one might call the ceremony a *Lowanpi*, since the *Yuwipi* man was not tied up.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps another one of the more incredible experiences in my life, it is sufficient to say that through this ceremony and a root tea and lotion I was given to apply afterwards, I was physically healed. The details of the procedure remain secondary to the philosophy of spirituality and healing that lay behind the healing. The active ingredients in the tea and lotion played only a small role in the largely Spirit-aided "treatment." In terms of Lakota education, this was a serious 'crash course' in following traditional ritual rules and preparations, and it felt like the passing or failing grade was my own health.

That experience of healing led to further ceremonial commitments like a Sacred Feast and *Wih'peya* the following year. In fact, my experience of healing in the *Lowanpi* has led to a lifelong commitment to the Spiritual World. When it was suggested that I *Hanblecha* the following year to give thanks for the healing that had been done, it was

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<sup>9</sup> These ceremonies are not discussed in this paper out of respect for the privacy, sacredness, and diversity of detail involved in Lakota Spirit Calling ceremonies. For a discussion of the *Yuwipi* and *Lowanpi* ceremonies see Appendix A, as well as excellent descriptions in Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer. Keeney Yuwipi. Lewis Medicine Man. Powers Yuwipi.

clear to me that I was not doing it simply out of respect for culture, to make Gene proud, or even to show the degree of my gratitude. For me, I experienced the *Hanblecha* commitment the following year as a very real, reciprocal and necessary way of showing my respect and gratitude to the Spiritual Beings that had allowed for my healing to occur and continue.

### Family

Since those days, one summer has led to another. Each year the Thin Elks and I have grown closer. Each year I returned to participate in ceremonies, to *Hanblecha*, to visit and stay with the Thin Elks who were ever becoming more and more like my own family. It was perhaps the second or third year of visits when the feelings of family-like relationship had really solidified into a true family relationship. It then became common for me to talk about Gene as my father, and the family and much of the community came to refer to me as his son. Additionally, my own independent relationship with each immediate family member was such that the terms, mom, grandma, brother and sister were very real for me. Over the years I have spent many special times with each family member.

For example, there was the time when one of Gene's sons and I drove out west to Eagle Butte to help tend fire for a *Wiwangwacipi*. We ended up being the main, and often only fire keepers and slept few precious hours in the back of my truck over those four days. Between the *Inipis* of the hot summer days and the torrential rainstorms we fought at night, the two of us emerged with a relationship and many stories that I think neither of us will forget. Events like this, being a part of everyday family life, and sharing in the sacred times of ceremony continually reaffirmed our relationship as family until it has

become a permanent part of my life. On a few occasions now, my blood family has come to meet and visit my Lakota family. Now our families are one.

I was never sure if my visits to Wase Wakpa were more to see the family and people I love and enjoy being with, or if they were to participate in ceremonies and to feed my spiritual life. In time, I have come to see these things as inseparable. Especially as the son of a Lakota spiritual leader, ceremony is about family, and family is about spirituality. Some of my visits are more about family, and some are more about ceremony, but they are never separate. The power and centrality of relationship and family is something I have seen in Indigenous cultures wherever I have traveled: in Aboriginal Australia, with *Maori* people in New Zealand, African people in Tanzania or with healers in the Amazon jungle of Peru.

*Mitakuye oyasin*: relationship, is where the world begins and ends.

### Experiences of Lakota Healing

While details of Lakota ceremony and healing practices are not central to this study, the philosophy that forms the focus of this thesis in Chapter Five has emerged through a content analysis of my experiences of Lakota ceremony and healing. While descriptions, measures and inventories of Lakota healing practices are not addressed in this work (with the exception of Appendix A and B), *experiences* of Lakota healing practices are central to the formation of the presented understanding. As such, it is important to briefly review the types of ceremonies I have experienced to further account for my analysis, knowledge, and conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> All the major ceremonies mentioned in this section are well described throughout the literature. For overviews and descriptions of Lakota ceremonies like the *Inipi*, *Wiwangwacipi*, *Hanblecha* and *Yuwipi*, see Brown Sacred Pipe. Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer. Erdoes and Lame Deer Gift. Feraca Wakinyan. Hawk Wing. Lewis Medicine Men. Lyon and Black Elk Black Elk. Powers Oglala. Walker Sun Dance.

During the summer months Gene is extremely busy with ceremonial responsibilities to his people. As one who puts people "out" to *Hanblecha*, and the primary *Inipi* leader of the community, it seems that every single day of the summer is consumed with ritual responsibilities. No matter what day I arrive, announced or unannounced, there is invariably an *Inipi* that night. Additionally, the little time Gene has left between preparing for the *Wiwangwacipi* of which he is Sun Dance Chief, running *Inipi* ceremonies and preparing people for *Hanblecha*, his life is filled with other types of spiritual work. There is a wide range of healing needs and daily responsibilities a community can generate. Birthday blessings, naming ceremonies, the occasional wedding, releasing Spirits (what Gene and I call "Ghost Busting"), counseling, funerals, The Wiping of Tears (grieving ceremonies), and providing healing *Inipi* ceremonies and medicines for people who are ill, the family of people who are ill, and those facing difficult times, are only some examples.

When I am in Vermillion, as Gene's son and a person independently committed to spiritual service and healing, I participate and often assist in his work. In helping to set up *Inipis* or to prepare people who are Fasting, I have learned a great deal. As well, I have my own commitments that I make and fulfill on an annual basis. I have participated in *Hanblecha* four times now and will likely continue throughout the years to come.

In addition to the experiences of healing and ceremony that I have had with Gene, I have had many experiences with other community members which have also taught me a great deal about Lakota life and history. As further complements, I have attended Dakota and Lakota ceremonies in Canada in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Throughout these times and places in South Dakota and elsewhere, I have participated in or attended

*Chanunpa Ceremonies; Inipi Ceremonies, Wiwangwacipi, Hanblecha; Wiping of the Tears; Funerals, Wakes, Memorials; Giveaways; Sacred Feasts; Yuwipi Ceremonies; Lowanpi Ceremonies; and countless moments of counsel and prayer.*

### **The Seventh Year: Let's Call It "Fieldwork"**

The primary differences between my summer of fieldwork and previous summers was the intensity with which I assisted and learned about ceremony and healing, and the amount of time I spent in South Dakota. In the summer of 1999, I made more trips and spent a great deal more time than previous summers in South Dakota. During each trip Gene made a conscious effort to include me in as much of his work as possible - more than usual. I made a total of five trips to Vermillion in the summer of 1999, two of which were longer than normal visits of the past.

#### **May**

In May I went for a short, four day trip to discuss the project and have a brief visit with my family, the Thin Elks, knowing that future visits would be very busy with less time for socializing. During that trip I spent less time with Gene than normal and made an effort to spend time with family and friends. It was during that trip I had intended to speak with Gene about the nature of our "work" (my thesis) and to have him sign the ethics forms I had drafted. Gene had little interest in either intention and seemed to trust that things would be better left to unfold on their own. There is often a sense with Gene that too much planning and too many questions are counter to the traditional education process.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Beck, et al. 47-62 ; Deloria, E. Waterlily 25, 36, 50.

June

The second trip was the first of my longer more intensive trips. Lasting three weeks in length, the trip centered around my commitment to *Hanblecha*. Reviewing short notes I made of some of my experiences, I recall how my time was spent. Just under one week preceded my *Hanblecha*, and then close to two weeks followed.

The only time Gene and I discussed "my project" was one day while we were travelling together to another community. We had been driving in silence when Gene said, "Write down fourteen questions you would like answered for your project." I was startled. "Fourteen things you would like to know. Think about them and write them down."

I was excited by this; I thought, for a moment, he might actually let me conduct interviews. I thought he might actually make this as easy as Western research: questions, answers, transcripts and data. I was wrong.

I don't know what he was thinking, but we never discussed those questions again. I think maybe once or twice later that day he asked, "Did you write those questions yet?" I think he may have intended to discuss some of them, but the time never came. Knowing not to ask too much or to force issues, I just waited, and waited.

The interesting thing is that somehow, almost a year later, I feel that I have answers to all the questions I wrote. Is that a coincidence? It certainly was not by virtue of my own seeking or investigations, since most of the answers were dependent on third party knowledge and experience - most of which is not in the literature. Some may suggest that by having me write down my questions, they were somehow recorded in a collective field of consciousness which were then answered in time by Spirits, or a higher

level of reality. Though such an idea may sound implausible, there is ample scientific evidence to validate the rationale behind such theories.<sup>12</sup> Further, it has been demonstrated in repeatable studies that such techniques, similar to prayer, psychic ability and communication with Spirit beings, do in fact work in a measurable way.<sup>13</sup>

Aside from the two days preparing physically for *Hanblecha* (gathering necessary ceremonial items) and the four days it consumed (being "put up" on a Friday and "brought down" on a Monday),<sup>14</sup> my time was spent mostly in the community of Vermillion, following Gene, day and night in his routine work. Experiences included a wide variety of work. Family activities were naturally integrated into my experience, but these sorts of activities were minimal this trip, due to the high demand that Gene was under in his community work. Since I went almost everywhere with him, there was little time for recreational activities or much family time for either of us.

Ceremonial and healing related experiences included maintaining the Wase Wakpa ceremonial grounds; starting fires for the *Inipi*, collecting wood for the *Inipi*, attending *Inipi* Ceremonies;<sup>15</sup> attending community events where Gene was asked to offer prayers; exorcising Spirits from homes and institutions; helping people to hold Feasts, counseling sessions; and prayer for the sick. These were among the more common

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<sup>12</sup> Targ and Katra provide an excellent discussion and review of the literature.

<sup>13</sup> Dossey Rediscovering, Healing. Targ and Katra.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix A for a brief description of *Hanblecha*.

<sup>15</sup> *Inipi* ceremonies are held for a variety of reasons. Many during this visit described were preparatory for other ceremonies, and yet many were for the healing of physical, mental, emotional and circumstantial problems of community members. During that particular visit I would estimate that I attended at least eleven *Inipi* ceremonies. A total of five - four before and one after - were necessary to the *Hanblecha* I completed. During summer months *Inipi* ceremonies occur with great frequency. I seem to recall one week where we must have had one almost every night. See Appendix A for more.

activities. Some of these occurred with prior planning, but most of these experiences occurred as the communities' needs demanded - spontaneous and without reprieve.

I recall one night, after running *Inipi* two previous nights in a row until late and then working all day each of the three days, Gene was happy to finally get into bed before midnight for a much needed rest. It must have been midnight, only minutes after Gene had gone to lay down, when a local university student dorm called requesting help in a residence where several people, staff and students, had seen *Wanagi*. Gene, as always, responded immediately and we went to perform a ceremony to release the Spirits and purify the building. Naturally, many of the students were awake and scared. Some counseling and attention was warranted.

After addressing the needs of the staff, students, rooms and floor that were experiencing the problems, we then went outside to smudge the perimeter of the entire building. I will never forget that night as we both looked up into the sky and saw a strange flash of light heading deeper into the distant sky, like a shooting star somehow retreating into space. A moment after Gene said casually, "Did you see that? They're going home."

Much like that night, the whole time I was visiting was busy. One thing was always waiting on the heels of another. Every day was full, and Gene's healing work took on many forms. We traveled to a distant Sioux community where Gene helped as a liaison with a statewide bank to set up an on-reserve Savings and Loan. Through creating financial connections and acting as a facilitator, Gene is a critical part of the healing of that community by improving their opportunities for investments, loans, and business development in a region of poverty and high unemployment. Much of Gene's healing

work of the physical, emotional, mental, and psychological problems of individuals takes place through prayer in the *Inipi* and in ceremonial settings. I have learned, however, that some of the most powerful healing work happens in communities, outside of ceremonies, when people are empowered to help themselves.

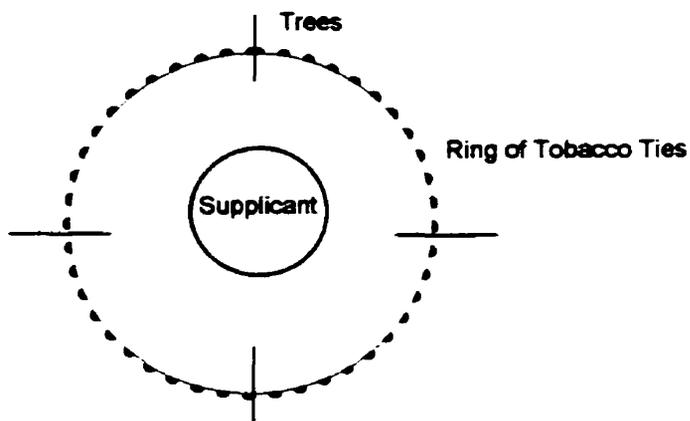
That was my seventh summer in Vermillion and my fourth time Fasting. Facing my *Hanblecha* that summer was one of the hardest things I have ever done. The summer previous I was unable to *Hanblecha* since I had just returned from Tanzania and was recovering from malaria. The Western medications were extremely strong and had numerous negative side effects. We decided it was best if I stayed out of the *Inipi* and not *Hanblecha* until I was done my four week treatment of mefloquine and primaquine. The fall came and I was unable to return to Fast. I was disturbed by this and upset. At the same time, to some degree, I was relieved. The summer previous I had Fasted for three nights, from Thursday to Sunday. During the days of that Fast the heat rose to over 90°F everyday, the hottest day reaching over 100°F (40°C). I remember being told this by people when I returned, though it was not difficult for me to guess when I was out there.

During that *Hanblecha* I stayed, without shelter, in a circle approximately eight feet in diameter. The circle was marked in the four directions by poles made from the branches of four different trees, and was surrounded by small tobacco ties.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For more see Appendix A. as well as Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer. Powers Yuwipi.

**Figure 3. The Sacred Circle of the Hanblecha**



This description provides only a basic idea of what the *Hanblecha* experience includes. The entire arrangement and ceremony is complex and may vary depending upon the supplicant, their community traditions, or the teachings of the Spiritual leader who oversees the Fast. It is dangerous, physically and spiritually, to attempt to imitate or recreate ceremonies like the *Hanblecha* outside of a Lakota/Indigenous community context and without the guidance of an experienced spiritual leader.

Equipped with only a pair of shorts, a blanket, mosquito repellent and sunscreen, I remained in that circle from the time I was put out, until the time I was brought back. The circle was in a wide gully between two hills. There was not a tree near enough to cast even a moment of shade. The hills seemed to hold the heat and sheltered me from any breeze. For me, those days of prayer and meditation were some of the most difficult days of my life. The intense heat was more than I could bear. Mornings were hot shortly after the sun rose. I felt as if I would lose my mind in the relentless weather. Though I survived unharmed, and did learn and benefit in many ways from the ceremony, I was also deeply fearful of my next *Hanblecha*.

This past summer, during my fieldwork, I prepared for my Fast with diligence and confidence. I was asked to help a first time Faster to prepare for his ceremony, and to help him find all the items he would need. We were each to begin our Fast on the same day. I was honoured to help this man, and had some help myself from a *kola* in the community in gathering the sage, stones and other items I would need. Despite my preparations, I was unable to control my anxiety. I was more fearful of the impending experience than I have ever been of anything in my life. I recall feeling dizzy and nauseated with worry the day before. Yet, I would never back out of a spiritual commitment.<sup>17</sup>

The ceremony went well for me. There were times of intense heat and a night in which there was a torrential down pour, high winds and a thunderstorm. The following morning was bitterly cold, but I was able to remain focused on my prayers most of the time. I did experience times of doubt and, at one point, had the desire to leave my circle early and go home. As well, the thirst was difficult at times. Nevertheless, I completed my ceremony as promised. Beyond the physical description of the weather, I found that my spiritual experience was profound in many ways and taught and showed me things that relate to much I have learned and encountered since. Some of the questions I had written down at the beginning of my visit were answered for me in that experience. Despite the power of many of the immediate experiences within the *hochoka*, my Sacred Circle, much of its meaning still unfolds today.

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<sup>17</sup> According to the Lakota traditions that are followed in Wase Wakpa, leaving the Fasting circle early is not a normal option and is considered both the breaking of a spiritual commitment and dangerous to the health of family and friends. It is said that "a person who comes back too soon will have a hard year."

## July

July, like June, was a three week trip and also focused very heavily on Gene's work and summer ceremonies. Like the first major visit, family affairs and responsibilities were a part of the experience, but most of the time was spent preparing Fasters, and preparing for *Wiwangwacipi*. A similar range of ceremonies and healing work was accomplished during this visit. Significantly different from the previous visit was the focus on *Wiwangwacipi*. Though I had attended two others, this was the first time I had attended the Sun Dance that Gene and his community participate in.

The Sun Dance grounds are somewhat isolated. Far removed from the country highway of Pine Ridge, near the home of the *Wicaša Wakan* who co-directs the *Wiwangwacipi*, the grounds are situated among the pine trees, rolling hills and the ancient sandstone walls, that are hallmarks of the *Paha Sapa* (Black Hills). The *Wapiye* is Gene's cousin, and the land where the *Wiwangwacipi* is held in *Woptuh'a*'s home territory. Gene explained that *Woptuh'a*, Horn Chips, was a close mutual relation of both himself and his cousin, the *Wapiye*. This particular *Wiwangwacipi* was originally started about sixteen years ago. During the first years it was held in highly secret locations for privacy and to avoid media attention in order to maintain the anonymity of certain participants who were involved in the Native American rights movement.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Different Sioux people have differing beliefs about what is appropriate to discuss in public forums about the Sun Dance. Most agree that photographs, videos, audio recordings of the Sun Dance and any form of commercialization is sacrilegious - even dangerous to all those involved. While some might suggest that such an attitude is superstitious or an unfounded belief, it is my understanding that these attitudes are based on the lived experiences of people and the expressed wishes of the *Tunkashilas* (Spirits) involved. I have decided not to discuss any of the details of the Sun Dance I attended out of respect for the communities and Spirits involved. There are many published accounts which may be consulted for description, discussion and detail: see Amiotte Sun Dance, Brown Sacred Pipe, Feraca, Wakinyan, Jorgenson, Walker Sun Dancer. There are a great many more texts that deal with the Sun Dance, however, the references I have provided are sufficient and I am not interested in encouraging the documentation of such a ceremony, and so have limited my references intentionally.

Gene and I left Vermillion together a few days before the Sun Dance started so that we could stop in a few communities, meet up with relatives, and prepare a few final items for the ceremony. Five days comprised the Sun Dance, including "Tree Day," when the Sacred Tree is captured and brought to the Sacred Grounds, and the four following days of ceremony Fasting, dancing, praying, offering pipes and piercing. The events of the Sun Dance are concentrated in five days, but the actual ceremony includes fourteen days from preparation to conclusion.

Gene teaches that Sun Dance is something that lasts all year: it is a way of life and how people live in preparation for those sacred days. I have often heard Gene say, "Now the ritual part of the ceremony is over, you have really just begun; now, is the important part, for the rest of the year you must walk your prayers." That is the true nature of ceremony: it is how we live the devotion, compassion and sincerity that we offer in our moments of prayer.

Throughout the duration of the Sun Dance, I worked as a "helper" and was involved in almost all the different areas of help that were needed. There is a great deal of work that goes into the Sun Dance: before, during and after. On the first day of the dancing, there were nearly fifty people who had pledged to dance and fast all four days. On the final day over one hundred dancers, both men and women of all ages danced in the Sacred Circle. The sheer numbers, the necessary size of the arbor, and the great number of supporters from local and distant communities, all generate an incredible amount of work and planning.

During the Sun Dance, people may work as security; some in the outdoor kitchen where the "supporters" eat; some maintain the fires, rocks and water needed for the *Inipis*

that are run daily; some help smudge the "arbor," the Sacred Circle and ceremonial events; some help the singers and *Eyapaha*, some have to go to the country to gather cedar for smudging; and there are many, many other little jobs that fall in between these. In my experience, I served foremost as Gene's assistant, and helped him with whatever help he needed. Whatever he asked me to do, I did. By the end of the five days I had been involved in virtually every single aspect of work that was involved, including many of the activities on "Tree Day." The only things I was excluded from were the things that happened within the dancers' Sacred Circle in the middle of the arbor.

Since my work was not confined to one aspect of the Sun Dance and since I had to keep pace with Gene when I wasn't occupied with a job, I slept very little each night. Though the dancing and main ceremonies of the day ended just after sun down, most of my days concluded around midnight or later and then began again before sunrise - between four and five in the morning. There was never a moment of rest. From helping smudge and preparing the arbor before sun up; to fetching supplies from the nearest town; cedar from the forest groves; to helping as security and meeting the special needs of both the supporters and Sun Dancers; there was rarely a time to pause.

The days were unusually hot and often reached 100°F and over. On one day it was 110°F. Many of the Dancers, who were not allowed food or water those four days, faced an extremely difficult challenge, and suffered immensely. I recall one day in particular when most of the Dancers required additional support and healing in the *Inipi* Lodges that were set up behind the arbor. From mid-morning till late in the day, the Fire Keepers and I helped Gene and the *Wapiye* to "doctor" the people who needed help. For me, the severe heat and lack of time to eat, or rest made the daily work even more challenging. The

times that I had when I wasn't active, was inevitably spent near the arbor, praying and supporting the Dancers, some of whom were my own brothers and sisters.

Early one morning, singers were needed to help on the drum until the drum group from the previous day returned. I was invited to join and, though my drumming wasn't always in time, I found that many of the songs had already become familiar to me. By watching Gene in his responsibilities and helping in so many aspects of the ceremony, I felt that I had learned a tremendous amount - more than I could ever find in a book, or recount in a paper. Those days seemed as full as a year of living.

For all the labour involved, the heat and exhaustion, I never had a moment of regret or displeasure. There was an energy present and a sense of the sacred that made all the work an offering. Following and working with Gene was both an honour and an incredible opportunity. For each of the sixteen previous years of this Sun Dance, Gene had been a co-organizer, facilitator, Sun Dance Chief, and was among the Dancers as a Sun Dance leader. This past summer was the first time he did not dance, and solely focused his energy on overseeing the ceremony. Gene's decision not to dance that year was obviously a difficult one. Due to some health issues and the advice of medical doctors, many in his family, and community advised him to help in other ways. Though he hardly slept, ate, or rested, running *Inipi* ceremonies and organizing events throughout, I recall times when I watched him as he looked out at the dancers: his children, relatives, and friends. In his eyes it showed how he longed to be with them, dancing among them, close to the Sacred Tree, deep in prayer. The pulse of this ceremony is in his blood.

During that entire visit Gene and I only once spoke of my thesis work. It too is a moment I will never forget. It happened during the Sun Dance. We had left the Sun

Dance area and had made a rushed trip into town, which was not close and involved first enduring the rough dirt roads that cut through the hills to the highway. We came back with the supplies needed and were slow crossing over a rise from which you could look down upon the entire Sun Dance arbor. Beneath the clear blue sky there was the arbor: the circle of shade made by trees and branches. Under it were all the supporters, some standing, some sitting, where they remained all day. The sound of the drum filled the valley and the singers' voices rose in chorus up to the sky. The dancers, red skirts, and other colors, moved rhythmically to the prayer songs, and the majestic Sacred Tree stood tall and radiant with coloured flags in the center of it all.

We paused to absorb the enormity of the beautiful scene. Hundreds of people were gathered together as they have done for centuries, all of one mind, one heart; everyone praying for healing. They prayed for physical health, and many would be granted it. They prayed for help in the struggles of life: emotional problems, addictions, the overcoming of violence, grief, mental illness. They prayed for spiritual guidance, for direction and the affirmation of faith. They prayed for family, friends, and each other. They prayed for the health of the Lakota nation, and they prayed for all the world - that every sentient being might find help, health and harmony. They prayed and were heard. We were a part of it.

Gene turned to me and said:

I have given you an experience. You have seen and felt these things. I have let you follow me around and your experience is what I have given you for this project. Now that you understand some of these things it is your job to go back and interpret them for others. You have your own experience you can speak from. You have to find the language to explain it for the people who want to understand.

## October

The October trip lasted four days, from Thursday until Sunday. This trip centered on an annual workshop and gathering called the Red Road Gathering. Sponsored by the University of South Dakota, and a number of community families, businesses and organizations, this free conference is an educational and therapeutic gathering that focuses on Lakota approaches to wellness and healing. Originally, the Red Road Gathering was developed by Gene to educate and experientially train counseling and health care students to work with Indigenous people. Since then, the Red Road has received tremendous attention and attendance over the years from a wide range of people who come to develop personally and professionally. This year approximately four hundred people attended.

Incorporating traditional Lakota culture in every aspect of the workshop, *Inipi* ceremonies, community feasts, a traditional drum group, Giveaways, sharing circles, and teachings on Lakota philosophies of health and wellness are central to every gathering. Each year Gene is the key speaker and ceremonial leader. Additionally, each gathering has a theme, such as violence or grief, and features panels of Indigenous speakers who, through professional work and personal experience, have become experts on the topic. This year's subject was violence and speakers addressed domestic violence, suicide, and racism-related institutional violence, among other topics as primary issues of concern facing Indigenous people today.

This was the third Red Road Gathering I have attended. Though I participated in the workshops, this year I also attended as staff. An aspect of the Red Road gathering is to emphasize the holistic nature of health and the many avenues people may use to pursue

mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health. Gene and the organizing committee had wanted alternative health practitioners to become involved so that the people who attend might be able to experience alternatives to Western and Lakota healing. Emphasizing the empowerment of people to seek health in meaningful ways, Gene teaches that all healing systems should be viewed as complementary. In response to this, I organized a group of nine Canadian alternative healers to attend and provide treatments and workshops. The group included a number of energy healers, a Tai Massage therapist, and a meditation and Tai Chi instructor. As one of the healers and the representative of the healers in attendance (which included two other healers from South Dakota) I was extremely involved with the gathering and some of its organizational aspects.

This trip deepened my knowledge of Gene's healing philosophies and provided what turned out to be a profound opportunity to observe a microcosm of his holistic healing philosophy. I observed and experienced the power of the gathering in terms of its overall, integrated power - not just in its component parts. Though there were healing *Inipi* ceremonies, healers, sharing circles and lectures, no event could be singled out as the main healing event or factor. Everything that occurred was essential to engaging each participant on all levels of human experience; this included the socializing that went on between people, the communal meals, the memorial songs and the hoop dancer who came to perform and teach the children. Engaged on every level, whatever aspect of a person that needed healing seemed to be magnified by their entire experience, and not just by that which targeted their condition. Everyone who attended - from abuse survivors, to people with cancer, people in recovery, to psychologists and medical doctors - left with positive responses and an experience of healing in some meaningful way.

## November

The November trip was a five day trip and centered around a workshop in which a psychologist from California came to work with a small group of counselors and health care professionals who have been involved with Gene's work over the years. Largely based on an exchange of Lakota and Western psychological skills, with an emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of experience and communication, the four day workshop consisted of *Inipi* ceremonies at night and lectures and group work during the day. The group consisted of only eight people and allowed for a great depth of exchange and dialogue between Lakota and Western models of wellness.

## Reflections

In many ways, I have felt the year of fieldwork was much like any other. The notion of an impending thesis and the need for data was often far from my thoughts. Gene and I always had a relationship that was based on learning. I was his son and, as such, his student. I trusted in Gene and our relationship and knew that hoping or forcing anything would be counterproductive. I knew that the project idea/intention had been planted like a seed in the conversations Gene and I first had on the subject. I trusted that whatever he wanted me to learn, I would learn. In time I learned that he did not have much of an agenda: he trusted in the Creator and *Tunkashilas* (Spirits) to determine what I would learn. And so it was.

In retrospect, the year of fieldwork was far more intense and different than any other. My visits that summer were more rich than ever before. I believe this was due to the convergence of a number of currents: time, my own intent, the thesis project, and

providence. The fieldwork occurred during my seventh year in South Dakota. I felt that the fact it was my seventh year was in itself a significant thing. A transformation occurred in which I felt more profoundly and naturally a part of my family and community in Vermillion than ever before. I felt that I was given more responsibilities than before, and I felt that my purpose in the community and culture had become innate. Though it was the summer I sought most directly to understand and articulate what Lakota spirituality and healing was about, it was also the summer I felt the least curious about learning anything specifically Lakota. My presence was about something that transcends culture or intellectual curiosity.

That summer, my own private spiritual path had lead me to a profound need to reconcile my relationship with the Spirit World. For years I had been learning things about Spirits and the Spirit World. I had counseled people whose lives where affected by Spirits. I knew people who saw and interacted with Spirits. I had even learned about the Spirit World through my studies of Indigenous tradition and shamanism around the world. In many ways I felt that I was surrounded by unseen influences and relationships with people who knew them as a regular part of life. Nevertheless, I felt that much of my knowledge and experience still resided at an intellectual level. Though I had experiences that convinced me of the objective truth of the Spirit/ual realm of reality, I still felt a lack of faith when dealing with such things personally. During those fieldwork visits, I prayed often to better understand the Spirit World.

I never shared my interest in the Spirit World openly with Gene, though I had included questions about it in my list made at the beginning of the summer. I was afraid that it would be inappropriate or disrespectful to ask about such things directly. I suspect

I was right, though I still do not know. Instead, I kept the questions to myself, in my prayers. What struck me as profound and impossible to explain, was how events seemed to be addressing my questions directly, as if a curriculum was set out before me. Even Gene's responses to the events that unfolded were remarkably focused towards me and my learning process. The shock and surprise that I felt at these events and teachings emerged from my lack of understanding. Today, I look back with an ability to see and understand the perfect orchestration of events. Today, such synchronicity does not surprise me; rather, like day and night, I expect it.

Throughout the years I have visited Gene I have been involved in many events and ceremonies, however, never before last summer had I encountered such a concentration of Spirit related events in such a short space of time. It seemed that a few people had come to Gene for help with *Wanagi*, Spirits, that were dwelling around their homes. I participated in the Sweats that were conducted to help and listened to the instructions given: how to assist the Spirits to leave, how to protect and cleanse the home. As I sat in the dark of the *Inipi*, I felt as if the instructions were for me. I felt as if questions were being answered. I recall sitting, listening in amazement, as my unspoken questions were addressed.

As mentioned previously, there was also an occasion when Gene had been asked to come to the aid of a university dorm where numerous students and staff had seen, and even physically felt the presence of Spirits. I went with Gene that night to help: I watched as Gene prepared the Medicines he left, I prayed for the Spirits as he sang healing songs to assist in his work, and I listened to the fright and concerns of the students and staff

who had been affected. I moved through the scenes as if guided into a lived experience of more answers to the questions I had that were slowly subsiding.

Between these events and the natural awareness of Spirits that ceremonies always include, I felt my awareness changing. I remember driving back from Sweat one night, alone in my truck. As I raced along the familiar dirt roads I sensed a presence. It was not of a Spirit, which I had felt before. It was of a world of Beings. It was as if a thousand eyes watched, a thousand ears listened. It scared me. I slowed down, sensing that an accident might just provide the final opportunity for me to cross over completely, as if they were waiting, always waiting for those who were new to arrive.

Strange and new feelings, insights and experiences continued throughout the summer. My dreams began to change. I had been visited by Spirits in dreams before, my father and certain animals, but never with great frequency or predictability. It seemed that I was exploring Spiritual realms on a regular basis. I often awoke with the sense that my dreams were more often than not of a spiritual nature. After I left South Dakota, between trips and in the fall, the dreams continued with more intensity. More often than ever before, I dreamed of ceremonies and seeing Gene and Lakota communities.

Just prior to my thesis writing process I made a trip to Peru where I was a volunteer on a medical relief team called The Rainforest Health Project. The health care team involved Western health practitioners, non-medical volunteers and Indigenous healers setting up day clinics for remote villages on the headwaters of the Amazon River. I became closely involved with two of the healers we worked with and felt as if my education from the Spirit World was continuing. It seemed clear to me that Spirits transcend culture and geography; spiritual realities are beyond time and space. It also

appears clear, simultaneously, that certain cultures and people have special relationships with certain Spirits. A tremendous amount of what goes on in the unseen world interacts and transforms much the way human communities move across the face of this Earth. So much of what I learned with Gene flowed right into my experiences with the Indigenous healers in Peru. The dreams increased in intensity. I dreamed of the jungle while in Canada; I dreamed of Lakota ceremony while in Peru. As I approached the time I began writing my nights were consistently full of activities I could scarcely remember by morning. I had the palpable sense that "something" was going on, and that I often woke up tired as if I had been busy during the night.

The most defining moment of my education of the Spirit World during my fieldwork occurred during my *Hanblecha*. The many strange and Spirit related events I had been experiencing lead me to believe that I might make a direct contact with Spiritual Beings during my Fast. I thought that I might actually "see" them, while wide awake, in broad daylight. I was afraid, but earnest, and tried to remain calm as I prepared myself for what I expected to be a terrifying experience. I was not expecting a horrid figure, or any harmful Being, but was afraid of the unknown. I was afraid to see undeniably, that which my innermost voice of reason still denies.

Though the experiences of those days On the Hill were full of stories and wonderful events that taught and challenged me, they may be summarized in the lesson that transformed the way I understand Lakota healing and the interplay between spirituality, healing and holism. In a sense, it all became clear in a moment. I was carefully studying a Deer that had come to graze near me across a small ravine, on the side of an adjacent hill. It had been there for some time, unafraid of me. I was certain this

was a Visitor, and I sat making sense of his purpose. Suddenly, I realized - visually, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, intuitively - I *was* seeing the Spirit World. I had not recognized it because it looked just like the "ordinary world." It was clear, that though the Spirit world may contain many fantastic and magical realms and Beings beyond the imagination, it is also present, and foundational to the reality that we see everyday.

I have heard it said "all things have a Spirit" - and saw that all things *are* Spirits. This was a distinct thought from knowing that "God is in all things" or that "God is the Spirit that is all things."<sup>19</sup> This was a recognition that at a certain level between course physical reality and the unified Spirit that is God/Creator/Ultimate reality, is a realm of distinct Spirit/energy forms. These Spirits, or energy patterns, have a lower level of intensity, or vibration, and it is that level that people are able to see and interact with on a daily level. It is as if all things are in their essence Spirit, and yet wear physical forms for a time until their energy is transformed into another Spirit form. In that moment On the Hill, I was able to see the soul of things: trees, grasses, the Deer, Birds, the Sky, the Sun.

In this way it became clear to me that if all things exist on a spiritual level, then it is only natural that the spiritual nature of things must be treated in any form of medicine. I could "see" how ignoring the spiritual nature of people, or medicines themselves, in healing was to ignore an ever present aspect of reality: it is to go against a natural law. When we pray with our medicines, or healing efforts, we move into greater harmony with the objects or philosophies that we engage to help others. Healing and spirituality were unified in that moment. The Spirit nature of all things and their unification in God, a divine ever present all pervasive energy, necessitates the movement towards holism in all

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<sup>19</sup> Gene often refers to this mystical vision as being able to see "all things as multiple expressions of the same."

things. Just as all things are united, eternally and externally, so too must those relationships be affirmed and brought into harmony in Lakota healing.

From my intention to learn about the Spirit World, Gene's awareness of our project and intensification of my experiential process, and my own intentional focus on being receptive and contemplating the nature of what I was receiving, a unique education emerged. I learned of many things that summer, the Spirit World was only one; in truth, there can be no separation of what "things" were learned. Holistic in nature, such an education maybe more accurately referred to as personal development. My mental, emotional, spiritual and physical self was involved in the process of learning, as such it cannot be said that "I gained something;" rather it must be said "I was changed, and I have never been the same again."



## Chapter 5: Lakota Healing

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### Introduction

Throughout my years of experience with Indigenous people, I have increasingly found myself in positions where I am working with and for Indigenous healers. Though rarely in paid professional settings, my ability as an academic, in research and writing, has been called upon several times now, so that I might help to communicate the importance and value of Indigenous healing and healers. This thesis, and this chapter in particular, represents my own initiative to communicate what I have come to understand about Indigenous healing so that Indigenous communities and healers might experience more support, appreciation and cooperation than they have in the past. I feel that the person who is able to understand the principles in this chapter (more than reading the details of any ceremony, or a New Age book on "how to be a shaman") will be able to begin to develop a meaningful and respectful relationship to Indigenous healers and healing. Those people who have never been exposed to Indigenous healing may choose to apply these principles in their life. Those who do, will experience an improvement in health - mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. But first, they must be willing to consider something new - they must be willing to let go of some of the ways they presently view the world and themselves.

It is possible to identify a great range of texts and authors that scientifically study and document the efficacy and some of the mechanisms involved in spiritual and holistic healing.<sup>1</sup> However, the greatest barriers to the understanding and support of Indigenous healing does not lie in scientific evidence. Recently, in a discussion about the

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<sup>1</sup> Dacher, Dossey Reinventing; Murphy; Pargament; Pert; Scotton et al.; Tart.

scientifically verifiable efficacy of traditional Indigenous healing, a medical doctor said to me, "if that stuff really worked, don't you think that we'd all be doing it now?" I suggested to this person that they at least consult the literature that documents the evidence regarding the efficacy of spiritual ceremonies and holistic therapies. The person replied, "I hardly think it would be worth my time since I know this stuff doesn't work."

Some people are not open to considering the empirical evidence that supports traditional healing, or alternative views of the world and healing. For these people, much of this chapter will sound like a lot of "hand holding" and "nonsense." Certainly, not all of these philosophies will seem compatible with their notions of "modern medicine." However, for those, medical and otherwise, who are interested in understanding why Indigenous healing works and what its operating principles are, it may be best to approach this material with an open mind. A doubting reader may try to consider the contents of this chapter as if they were true: as if they were ontological facts. For most Indigenous people these things are not only believed to be true, but they are known, experientially and historically, to be true.

In a manner that reflects the original nature of scientific inquiry, I have personally observed, and experienced the impact of traditional Indigenous healing on myself, and in the lives of hundreds of people. I have reviewed the literature to identify the scientific evidence behind spiritual healing, and I have read the spiritual literature of many Indigenous nations. I have extensively reviewed the literature on the spiritual beliefs, ceremonies and rituals of the Lakota. But all of that literature can never replace experience. In the pursuit of health, healing, and spiritual growth in my own life, I have opened myself fully to the healing traditions of cultures vastly different from my own. I

have been blessed with a Lakota family and have followed the instructions of my *Até*, my Lakota father and teacher. I have moved from a place of doubt and skepticism to a place of knowing and wholeness. I attribute much of the physical health and psycho-spiritual health in my life to my experiences of Lakota healing.

This chapter identifies and describes sixteen<sup>2</sup> *wo'opa* (principles and assumptions) that I have identified as being essential to my understanding of Lakota Sioux healing. Through personal experience, observation, study, and comparison with other models of healing, I have isolated these foundational principles as being among the most important to recognize as those that form the operating precepts, contexts, and natural laws from which Lakota healing emerges. When these *wo'opa* are considered, all aspects of Lakota healing and culture become more intellectually and experientially accessible to non-Lakota people. This understanding also may be used in the study of other Indigenous traditions, offering a model for comparison and dialogue.

### An Important Perspective

A simple list or inventory of Lakota healing principles cannot be expected to replace years of experience, or impart any level of expertise. It can, however, create an introductory level of understanding and respect. As explored in Chapter Six, insight into the nature of Lakota healing and the logic that lies behind its efficacy and intent is vital to the future support and maintenance of Lakota and Indigenous healing, by both non-

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<sup>2</sup> In keeping with an Indigenous approach to research this paper has followed traditional Lakota sacred numerology. Just as seven chapters are in keeping with the Lakota sacred number seven (see Power *Oglala* 164-65, 170-173, 179, 188) sixteen is also a sacred number as both a multiple of the sacred number four and the sacred number some Lakota associate with the manifest nature of *Wakan'tanka* (see DeMallie *Grandfather*, Erdoes and Lame Deer *Gift*; Powers *Sacred*; Schwarz, Walker *Belief*).

**Indigenous and Indigenous people. Operating by fundamentally spiritual and holistic principles, the Lakota tradition offers a system of healing that is distinct from and complementary to the biomedical model of the West. Lakota healing is essential to the culture and health of Lakota people, and offers a holistic model that stands to benefit the healing traditions of the world.**

## Wichozani Wo'opa: 16 Natural Principles of Health

It is important to preface this section by stating that this list is neither exhaustive, nor a complete formula for understanding Lakota healing. These principles reflect only my own experience, which is based largely on the teachings and work of Lakota spiritual leader, Gene Thin Elk. Further, these general principles of epistemology and ontology are articulated in a manner that facilitates cross-cultural understanding. The use of personal voice, stories, the words of spiritual leaders and spiritual language is intended to reflect an Indigenous perspective. Nevertheless, this is *not* an attempt to solely reflect a Lakota style of explanation or instruction. As a holistic system, Lakota healing is not reducible to elements, but functions as an integrated process of living. This examination is merely a tool for a learning process.



## 1. Ta'ku Wakan: The Role of the Spiritual World in Healing

**We have to know and understand those things  
that we still do not see with our eyes,  
but feel with our heart:  
Spiritual Beings, the Universe.<sup>3</sup>**

The first and perhaps the most distinct aspect of Lakota healing that distinguishes it from the other holistic healing systems of the world<sup>4</sup> is its explicit recognition of and relationship to the Spirit World. While other holistic healing traditions also recognize Spirit Beings and purely spiritual levels of reality, the *Lakol wicho'han* (Lakota Way of Being) emerges from the overt relationship between human beings and non-human, spiritual beings.

God put Three Powers into the world for us to use. We need them all. We Indians know all three. It took us a million years to find them.

There is the material power, the spiritual power, and the supernatural power. The material power is the goodness of this Earth. The spiritual power is the goodness of human beings. The supernatural power is the goodness of God, the Great Spirit.

The Three Powers are all separate. They're not connected.

It's the job of human beings to make that connection.

We connect the Three Powers with our prayers, with our ceremonies, with our

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<sup>3</sup> Thin Elk Natural/Unnatural.

<sup>4</sup> Yoga, Ayurved and Chinese Medicine are good examples; see Ballentine, Tiwari.

deeds... Every prayer holds up the world. Our ceremony, our Sun Dance, keeps the Universe in harmony by connecting the Three Powers.<sup>5</sup>

Without an openness to the existence of Spirit Beings and the Spiritual Power of the natural world - such as the Sun, the Earth, the Waters - the true power and beauty of Lakota healing cannot be understood. The relationship between the mind and body is powerful, but Spirits are not only symbols and archetypes. Spirits are independent, distinct, sentient Beings that interact with the material world and effect change.

If a child is raised from the time it can understand, being told there is no such things as ghosts, then that child has learned not to see the whole reality. If a child is never told that, it will see a very different world.<sup>6</sup>

Much of Lakota healing is about acknowledging this reality and, through reciprocal relationships and ceremony, securing the help and intervention of Spirit Beings, especially God, for the purpose of healing.

I recall an *Inipi* two years ago. My father had just been diagnosed with lung and brain cancer. The cancer was advanced by the time of diagnosis and the prognosis did not include much time for my dad - a few months, maybe more, if lucky. I traveled to Vermillion and the Wase Wakpa community for a regular visit to see my Lakota family carrying the additional weight of my concern for my dad's health. One day, I gave my *Atë* Gene tobacco and asked if we could pray for my dad in the *Inipi*. I wasn't looking for a cure; I wasn't hoping to cheat death. It was soon after the diagnosis, and all I could think to pray for was peace of mind - for my dad and for my mom and the horrendous path that

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<sup>5</sup> Arden 25.

<sup>6</sup> Madonna (Blue Horse) Beard, in St. Peirre and Long Soldier 95.

lay before us. My dad was an unusually healthy man all his life and even at sixty-six, the time of his diagnosis, he was fit, had a full head of hair without a single gray hair and looked ten years younger. I could not imagine, nor bear the thought of what turmoil and confusion he must have been facing inside.

That night, before the *Inipi* I was asked to fill a *Chamunpa*. I hadn't done this before or perhaps only once before, and after some instruction, performed my duty with intense concentration. I was nervous holding the *Chamunpa*. Gene has always taught me how sacred the *Chamunpa* is to the Lakota: one of the most sacred things that has ever been given to them from the Spirit World, through *Pte San Win*, White Buffalo Calf woman.<sup>7</sup> Mathew King, Lakota Spiritual Leader, said "The [*Chamunpa*] is...our holy power. It's God's power. The Pipe mediates between human beings and God. To receive the Pipe, to receive God's gift, you've got to be pure in your heart, mind, body and soul. And never forget that, after the prayers are over, you've got to live that life - a life with God. That's the hardest part."<sup>8</sup> Gene had always said the same things; he cautioned me about the power of the *Chamunpa*. "The *Chamunpa* allows us to communicate directly with the Spirit World and God," Gene would say, "whatever is in your heart when you pray with that Pipe will come true."<sup>9</sup>

So, the Pipe was filled and the *Inipi* prepared, and we went into the Lodge for our ceremony. In the third round, the Pipe I had loaded was passed to me. I watched everything with great intent and intensity that night. The time had come to smoke the Pipe so I could offer my prayers again. When we went to light the Pipe, the tobacco was

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<sup>7</sup> For more this, the story can be found in Powers, M. and Dooling and Jordan-Smith.

<sup>8</sup> Arden 57.

gone. Gene turned to the people in the lodge and announced, "there is no tobacco in there." I panicked; I knew I had filled it properly, and finished by plugging the bowl with sage to prevent such a thing from happening. Even if the bowl had tipped, there is no way the tobacco could have all spilled out from that deep red stone bowl.

"That's good, son." Gene said gently, "it means They have already taken your tobacco; They have already heard your prayers. Sometimes, when prayers are very strong, you don't even have to smoke the Pipe; They just come and take the tobacco out like that." I was confused, but trusted. There had been no one to empty the Pipe when we were in the lodge, and animals had never come and stolen the tobacco out before. There was no way for an animal to remove it all.

Later in that *Inipi*, while the door was still closed, Gene spoke about the tobacco being taken and my prayers for my dad. He ended by saying, "the *Tunkashilas* know that it is hard for us human beings to have faith and to trust in these things. They know that we always need proof. So, they are going to make that happen for you. Something will happen for you or your dad that will let you know that this prayer has been answered, that these ways are true." I had only experienced such a statement once before, and it had come true. Since then I have heard such a thing once again; and, again, it came true.

The following morning after the *Inipi* and the event with the Pipe, I called home to my parents to tell them I had been thinking of them and to ask how things were. I will never forget how my mom initiated the conversation with great exasperation: "Jonathan, *what* were you doing last night?" I was shocked that she had even presented the opportunity for me to talk about the event with *Chamunpa*. "Why?" I returned.

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<sup>9</sup> Thin Elk "Personal Communication" Summer 1999.

"Last night, dad woke me up in the middle of the night. He said that you were in the room, and asked me if I could see you. Of course I couldn't and reminded him that you were in South Dakota and would not have come home early - he must have been dreaming. He sat up, wide awake and said, I still feel it; it is just like he is here in the room."

She went on to tell me how the feeling lasted until he grew tired again. My mom explained how they talked about it the next morning. My dad had never had such an experience before, and said that, though it was strange, it was not a bad feeling, that he was comforted. Interestingly, shortly after this event I had prayed to my dad's deceased dad, my grandfather, and asked him to visit my dad and comfort him. Similarly, the following day my dad ~~saw~~ his own father standing in our kitchen, while he was eating breakfast. I was living in Regina, six hours away, when I made this prayer and had told no one.

What makes these stories truly amazing is that these things happened prior to any of my dad's drug treatment or chemotherapy. There could be no suggestion that these were side effects and coincidental hallucinations. Furthermore, my dad, who was very different from my mother, was an extreme practical rationalist. A business man and pharmacist all his professional life, my dad never believed in ghosts or Spirits and had little regard for religion or spirituality. Though my dad firmly believed that there was no such thing as ghosts and that spirituality was largely psychological, he - not me - was the one who on several occasions was visually "visited" by Spirits from the Spirit World. In every case he remarked how "comforting" the visits were.

The truth of Spirit Beings, and Spirit aspects of creation, such as in animals, plants, and clouds, has been a difficult thing for me to understand over the years. It is a lesson that has been slowly, deeply learned and earned. Now that I have come to truly accept and regularly experience this level of reality, I am also aware that my education regarding Spirits, is only just beginning. In the discussion of Lakota healing, Spirit Beings must be recognized as critical factors in virtually all experiences of healing. Their existence and participation in Lakota healing is beyond question.

## 2. Life is a Spiritual Journey

In my experience, most Lakota healers view life as a Spiritual Journey. Thin Elk, like many Lakota and non-Lakota spiritual leaders, teaches "that people are *not* human beings on a spiritual journey, but spiritual beings on a human journey."<sup>10</sup> Humans, not only *have* souls, but *are* Spirits.<sup>11</sup> In my own life I have changed from believing that "I" have a soul, to knowing that "I" *am* a soul, and *have* a body. Regardless of how my body ages or suffers or looks, it will never be equivalent to "me." "I" am the one who "feels" sick; but it is only my body that *is* sick. Even in the case of mental disorders, patients can often identify an "inner voice" or "witness" that feels helpless watching the chaos of the mind - a separate level of existence. We can look one way and feel another; we can be examined and measured but not known. We are not our bodies, the "I" that is aware, is a Spirit, a soul. The human life experience is a journey of the Spirit.

Learning to recognize the life process as a journey is a vital aspect of Lakota healing. By recognizing that humans are Spirits, and that life is a journey, holism emerges naturally. Healing becomes an ongoing, natural process: to be expected, and for our betterment. The soul takes on a specific life for the purpose of maturation: to learn to overcome, accept, change and thrive in whatever environment it exists. When talking about birth and the life journey, Gene comments that each "Spirit entering the earth plane at this time has a very special purpose... the Spirit has chosen us, to come into this earth with... We, are only the people who are helping in the transition from one plane of

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<sup>10</sup> Thin Elk "Personal Communication." Summer 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Scientific studies in the nature of human conscious indicate that awareness and consciousness cannot be reduced to the activity of the brain. Furthermore, there are documented cases of awareness during periods of brain inactivity or temporary brain death. See Dossy Rediscovering; Targ and Katra; Tart.

existence to another..."<sup>12</sup> "We have to prepare ourselves, our Spirit, and live in a spiritual manner, realize that we are visitors here, take care of Mother [Earth] as we progress on, and move on,"<sup>13</sup> "this whole universe is moving as it should... the reason why we came to this Earth is called 'growth.' All things change. The law of the universe: all things change and will be for growth."<sup>14</sup>

Through the understanding of life as a journey, all experiences become integrated in a spiritual framework. Poor health or disease represents a divergence from the path of balance and right relationship.<sup>15</sup> Life is not a degenerative physical process, but a developmental spiritual process. The state of the body is largely for the education and containment of the soul. Illness and suffering are recognized as indicators, mental and physical expressions of a life out of balance.

For years now I have learned to view my life as the journey of a soul. When I become ill, I reflect on the possible life lessons that may be involved. Sometimes an accident is an accident, or a flu is just a flu. But, most often I find valuable lessons that lead to my better holistic health, and physical prevention. Often a cold or flu indicates that I am overworking or perhaps experiencing undue stress due to my relationship to people and responsibilities. As I have learned from Gene and Lakota healing ways, the solution to the flu is not simply bed rest, fluids and vitamin C. Rather, it is an opportunity

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<sup>12</sup> Thin Elk Tree of Life.

<sup>13</sup> Thin Elk Habilitation.

<sup>14</sup> Thin Elk Seventh Direction.

<sup>15</sup> The understanding that life is a journey and that sickness represents an imbalance or straying from the "good path" is common among Indigenous people. See Beck et al., Mehl-Madrona, and Morrisseau for more.

to re-evaluate my priorities, and to consider how to adjust my lifestyle so that I am happy and do not become susceptible to viruses through a depressed immune system.

Any illness may be viewed this way. A person may ask him/herself, what does this teach me? What do I need to learn to live a better life overall? What does the spiritual world want to teach me as a soul on earth? Am I being asked to "slow down?" Am I being asked to value my family and friends more? Am I being asked to value myself more? Are my priorities in balance? Ultimately, asking these questions and pursuing their answers leads not only to the remedy of physical disease, but to better prevention, an enhanced ability to cope, and to happiness - a deeper enjoyment of life. To recognize life as a spiritual journey is to begin a life long, holistic process of healing and wellness.

Our people realize, above all things, we are spiritual beings. We are spiritual beings. We are only here for a journey. We don't live on this earth. We're here only for a journey and we're here to take care of this "earth" here that we live in - the body, and the Earth around us. We are caretakers of this physical body that provides for our Spirit, and this Earth that provides for us."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Thin Elk Natural/Unnatural.

### 3. Holism: An Integrated Approach

Holism has been widely misunderstood in Western medical contexts and the modern "alternative medicine" movement.<sup>17</sup> Lakota healing epitomizes the true nature of holism as it is actualized in regards to healing. Lakota healing is holistic in the treatment of all aspects of the individual and community, which include mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects.<sup>18</sup> Holism is not just the recognition of the diversity of parts involved in human health, but in their *interrelationship*.<sup>19</sup> Lakota healing treats all the aspects of the individual in all manners of treatment, and in all forms of healing philosophy and procedure. There is no Lakota technique or prescription, correctly applied, that doesn't affect all aspects of the human being.

Practitioners, holistically, do not isolate their work as professional medical practitioners in Western cultures do. The Lakota healer, whatever type, strives to embody his or her role as healer. Most Lakota healers are "on call" twenty-four hours of the day for their entire life. This is expected by the community and understood by the healer. Further, Lakota healers may use the entire range of human abilities in their work. Regardless of their orientation, Lakota healers employ their own gifts of creativity, intellect, physical manipulation, psychic abilities, artistry, entertainment, compassion, technical skill and intuition.

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<sup>17</sup> Dacher presents a good discussion of this in "The Whole Healing System."

<sup>18</sup> Meyer and Ramirez discuss holism and Lakota culture.

<sup>19</sup> This is the most significant aspect of holism that is frequently overlooked in biomedical use. Holism does not mean treating all aspects of a person (mental, emotional, physical and spiritual) if those aspects are treated separately and without regard for their interdependence. Providing a chaplain, Rabbi or Elder for a person's spiritual needs, a psychologist for their mental and emotional needs and a doctor and nursing staff primarily for their physical needs, is not holistic. It is merely an expanded reductionistic Western model. Holism is not about more parts - but the relationship between parts. Holism implies the understanding that all parts affect one another and are each essential to whole health. In a holistic model a medical doctor

The manner in which healers and patients learn is also holistic. Just as described in Chapter Two and Four, education of all kinds occurs throughout life in all aspects of life. Vocational skills, traditional culture, and healing abilities, for example, are all learned through both direct and indirect teaching. The pursuit of health is also holistic. Even if a person's disease or condition is isolated to one aspect of their body or life, all aspects of the self are understood to be affected. Every aspect of the self stands to play a role in the recovery from any disease, wound, or hurt of any kind. Lakota etiologies of disease are often spiritual, which conclude in physical symptoms. Lakota practitioners naturally must address all aspects of the disease from the physical symptoms to the spiritual source.

Unlike the biomedical therapies common to Western culture, it is difficult to define the healing practices of the Lakota as separate or distinct from other areas of Lakota life and culture. Among the Lakota, the term "medicine" does not exist as an isolated category of thought or practice.<sup>20</sup> While there are categories of healers and healing focused practices, healing does not always fall under a single, exclusive category of knowledge or human association as in the Western biomedical model.

For many Lakota, healing is an intrinsic element of their worldview, community ceremonial life and the natural life process of each individual. A simple inventory of healing practices, healing ceremonies and medical equipment does not elucidate anything

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would be equally as interested in the work of the spiritual leader as she or he would be in the work of the psychologist or lab technician. Today, this is rarely the case.

<sup>20</sup> Mails Spirits 38. explores the Lakota relationship to the English term "medicine" which has come to be used an English gloss for Lakota terms meaning "sacred" and "mysterious." I find it interesting that a word which most accurately translates as sacred or holy, has been commonly understood to mean medicine: I think this cross-cultural error is a telling sign of the interrelationship between healing and spirituality in Lakota culture.

meaningful about the Lakota people and their approach to healing. Healing is a way of life and not a series of isolated practices.<sup>21</sup> Most Lakota people understand their healing holistically: in interrelated terms of worldview, practitioner characteristics, spiritual relationship, processes, and, least significantly, techniques and practices. Healing may occur based on personal prevention, prayer or treatment; through work with healers; or through community ceremony. Also, healing may involve the medical treatment of different cultures: Western, Indigenous, Eastern, and so on. Most importantly, spirituality is the foundation of each level in which healing may be pursued, and each healing result has an origin in spirituality and the Spirit World.

As discussed in Chapter Four, at the conclusion of my fieldwork year I found that once I was able to recognize the inherent spirit that is unique in each and all things, their interconnection became obvious. In addition to possessing the omnipotent Spirit of the Creator/God, all things emerge from their own spiritual form. Knowing this, it became deeply evident how the healing of any Being must include its Spirit, since its Spirit is fundamental and ever present. The healing process must be spiritual, since each tool and philosophy of health we possess is ultimately spiritual in origin and contains a spiritual aspect. In this recognition of Spirit in the healing process, healer, tools, and the person to be healed, a holistic vision becomes intrinsic. All things are interrelated in Spirit and so must be treated as such in form.

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21 Deloria God is Red. Red Earth: Looks for Buffalo Hand: Mails, Fools Crow.

#### 4. On'aspeyapi: Balance

The word balance, or harmony, in Lakota healing refers to the *relationship* between elements. Balance refers to a holistic state in which the elements that comprise a whole are existing in a manner that brings comfort, peace and stability.<sup>22</sup> These qualities are the hallmarks of health in any element of health: mental, emotional, physical or spiritual. While each person is always composed of these four elements, the relationship between them may be more or less in balance. As well, within each area of life there are component parts in relationship.<sup>23</sup> Increased balance within and between each area brings an increased balance in the overall health of a person. For example, physical fitness is seen as important to mental acuity and emotional peace. The relief of stress and ease of mobility leads to a fuller experience of life. Conversely, those who are physically disabled or ill, may seek greater health in their spiritual and mental experience of life to create a balance. The depression or disappointment that often accompanies illness or disability can be combated with a strong sense of self-worth and a good relationship to God and spiritual powers.

The state of balance is never final or fixed. Balance is a process, a way of managing life and the demands of the four elements of self. This is why Thin Elk, and many Lakota leaders, use the term "walk in balance." It means to live in a way that seeks harmony, through good relationship with all Beings and the different areas of a person's life. It refers to a process and movement.

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<sup>22</sup> Quinn, J. "Becoming an Instrument for Healing." Spirit in Healing Conference. The Institute of Noetic Sciences. Boca Raton, Florida. 1996.

<sup>23</sup> For example emotional well-being involves a person's satisfaction with their culture, work and self-image, as well as their relationship to their family, friends, romantic partner, work colleagues and so on. Emotional well being is often seen as one 'part,' but it clearly contains many dimensions that exist in dynamic relationship.

The search for balance in life is holistic and exists on all levels of Creation. Balance should be sought in the self, within each human relationship, within families, within communities, between nations, and with the Natural and Spiritual Worlds. A life of true balance strives for harmony on all these levels, and centers on a balanced relationship with *Wakan'tanka*, God. Balance is the direction and evidence of healing; this is the cornerstone of Lakota health.

Through seasonal ceremony and specific healing rites, Lakota spiritual tradition seeks to bring people in harmony with the experiences of their lives and the people and things in the environment around them. Many Lakota healers act as intercessors, communicating with God and the Spiritual World to bring balance, through good relationship, to all sentient beings.<sup>24</sup> The central focus on balance in all Lakota ceremony, and the centrality of balance in health, makes Lakota healing and spirituality inseparable.

During the Sun Dance of my fieldwork I encountered a number of Sun Dance participants and supporters who were of poor physical health. Some of these people, however, were not "unhealthy." They seem to have achieved a balance between the many aspects of their life. Whether a diabetic or somehow physically impaired, I saw how a person could have a good understanding of and relationship to a physical illness. These people were happy, confident, lead meaningful lives, and seemed to be vibrant and enjoyed physical health in the many ways that were not affected by their "problems." To me, these people exemplify how health is about balance between and within the aspects of self - it is not an idealized illness free physical state.

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<sup>24</sup> This principle and the self-awareness of it is discussed by a variety of authors and Lakota spiritual leaders including Catches and Catches: Erdoes, Lame Deer, Irwin, Looks for Buffalo Hand; Mails Fools Crow, Wisdom.

### 5. Lakota Etiology of Disease

Disease and ill health, however conceived or experienced, can be the result of physical, mental, emotional or spiritual causes.<sup>25</sup> The holistic, interdependent nature of the four primary human aspects is such that an imbalance in relationship may result in any variety of pathologies. The interrelationship of all beings also creates the possibility of transferred illness, where an individual experiences physical or psychological and emotional sickness because of a community or environmental disorder/imbalance. Intergenerational trauma may also be the source of illness or poor health.<sup>26</sup>

Through my work and involvement with Gene, I have come to see the etiology of disease as always multivalent. I have observed in my own life how emotional and mental stress results in physical symptoms: acne, poor sleeping patterns, loss of appetite, and muscle tension are all examples of common physical symptoms with no localized physical origin. I have observed how physical illness or traumas often result in emotional and mental hyper-reactivity, stress, and existential angst. Working as a spiritual care chaplain intern in a major hospital in Winnipeg and Regina, Canada, I have observed on many occasions the spiritual crises that ensue from physical trauma. For example, when facing chronic illness, surgery, amputation, paralysis, and even complications due to aging, many people become deeply introspective and spiritually questioning. Some wonder if they have done something to "deserve" their illness, others fear death and the

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<sup>25</sup> Hultkrantz has focused on the religious etiology that dominates most Plains cultures. While this emphasis does reflect the uniqueness of Lakota tradition it is not holistic because it ignores the fact that most Lakota acknowledge an interplay between all aspects of life: spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical.

<sup>26</sup> Duran, B., E. Duran and M. Yellow Horse Brave Heart. "Native Americans and the Trauma of History." Ed. Russell Thornton Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects. Madison, WI.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

uncertain spiritual realities they may face. Others lose confidence in themselves, and their religious support systems. In many cases I attended, people's psycho-spiritual problems were equally as debilitating as their physical problems. Additionally, depression, a lack of energy, motivation and the desire to rehabilitate or cooperate with treatment regimes were severe complicating factors in the potential efficacy of even the most sophisticated Western medical treatments. These are only some examples of the interplay between the many aspects of the human being.

I have also learned how spiritual illnesses often result in physical and psychological pathologies. In the literature, a wide range of "soul wounds" have been described; among them, soul intrusion, loss of vitality, spiritual possession and the results of spiritual/religious transgressions or conflicts with Spirit Beings are described.<sup>27</sup> Gene and I have rarely talked about spiritual illnesses, though I have seen them treated and listened to many stories about people whose illnesses have originated in soul-level traumas or events.<sup>28</sup>

I recall a situation with a young Cree man who had been diagnosed as a severe schizophrenic by Western medical doctors.<sup>29</sup> Institutionalization and a pharmaceutical regime was proposed. The parents were afraid of their child's behavior and yet, being from a small community, did not want to lose him to a distant and foreign institution. In desperation, these people took their son to several psychologists and psychiatrists, hoping

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<sup>27</sup> Kalweit Medicine Men. Walsh.

<sup>28</sup> Grof, S. The Cosmic Game: Explorations of the Frontiers of Human Consciousness. New York: State University of New York Press, 1998. The Holotropic Mind. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Though extremely controversial in psychiatric communities, a number of psychiatrists have observed and documented the success of traditional Indigenous healers in the treatment and cure of clinically diagnosed schizophrenics: see Grof, Mehl-Madrona, Modi.

for a different opinion and alternatives to hospitalization. After several admissions to urban and rural hospitals, the medical diagnosis was repeatedly confirmed.

In a final attempt to find help for their son, local healers became involved. During one Sweat Lodge ceremony this young man suddenly stopped his aberrant behavior and interrupted by singing a traditional Lakota song that one Cree Elder recognized as being from the Lakota *Wiwangwachipi*. Having never traveled beyond his community, and having an extremely limited social and personal life within his community, there had been no way for this boy to be exposed to Lakota culture in great depth - much less the *Wiwangwachipi*. The healers understood that this boy had been living a tormented life as a Cree who was born with the soul or Spirit Guardians of a Lakota. Perhaps it was Lakota Spirits who wanted him to return to his tradition that tormented him. Once the Spirit/soul dynamics of the boy were understood, the boy was taken to a Lakota *Wiwangwachipi* where Lakota healers recognized him as a gifted person. Finally, as a young teenager, this boy was able to follow the lifestyle that he had been tormented to live without.

In a short time, this boy was transformed. No longer was his thinking or behavior considered aberrant. Perhaps the only difference in this man today, is that he has been adopted by a Lakota healer and remains an outstanding community member and well respected Sun Dance leader.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Medical doctor. Lewis Mehl-Madrona supports this story with accounts of similar cases in which he has observed the success of Lakota healers in the treatment of schizophrenia. 150.

## 6. Healing Versus Curing

During the past two years of research and fieldwork on this project, it has become clear to me that the Lakota approach to treatment is radically different from the allopathic, symptom focused approach of Western medicine.<sup>31</sup> In the Lakota spiritual, holistic model of health, the removal of symptoms, or "curing" is not as important as "healing." Thin Elk, like most Lakota healers, distinguishes between healing and curing. For many Lakota healers and spiritual leaders, curing models of medicine are those that target the removal of symptoms, and not necessarily the causes. The traditional Western medical model is based on a curing system with a materialistic view of the body and treatment.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, health, for the Lakota, is not the absence of physical problems or abnormalities. Health is understood as a state of harmony or balance in the relationships between the aspects of self and cosmos. Health is a process. As such, Lakota healing focuses on bringing the many aspects of a person in to balance, and maximizing wellness in each area. In my experience of Lakota healing, physical wellness is not necessarily central to healing. While physical health is important, it is not always valued over happiness, and spiritual and mental wellness.

Over time, I have come to learn how a person who may not be *cured* of a disease, may in fact be *healed*. For example, during my fieldwork I knew of two different individuals with cancer who sought assistance from traditional Lakota healers. One individual undertook a *Yurwipi* ceremony, the use of traditional Lakota pharmaceuticals,

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<sup>31</sup> Long and Fox.

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that many branches of medicine, such as nursing, palliative care, and psychiatry, have demonstrated a trend towards becoming more holistic and innovative in the provision and conceptualization of care. The traditional biomedical model is evolving into a matrix of broadening services and approaches, though still fundamentally based on a materialistic scientific paradigm.

prayer and a commitment to a traditional spiritually based life-style, known as the *Chanku Luta*, or Red Road. This person experienced a spontaneous remission and went on to live many years cancer free. Another individual, with a similar case and degree of cancer pursued similar means of healing. This second person, who was initially terrified and deeply angered by his condition, came to find inner peace and an acceptance of his situation. The second person did not survive the cancer but did experience a deep healing of personal issues and came to be extremely close with his loved ones and community prior to death. Though no cure occurred, this person died content with his life and relationships: many would say he was healed. For Thin Elk, and Lakota healers, a cure may not always be possible, but healing is. When speaking on the nature of human relationships and the life journey, Gene said:

We have many people in which the body is physically continuing to deteriorate, yet the psyche, the spirit, is healing... there may be a time for that spirit to move on and let the body return to where it was brought from. In healing, we talk about healing all areas: healing the spirit, healing the mind, healing the body, and healing the emotions. In doing this we recognize that there are times, when total healing comes together, we may need to discard this body and to move on. Many people don't recognize that, so they don't see it, and become disillusioned thinking that we are here to hold on to this body forever; that we are here to live forever.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Thin Elk Native American Psychology.

## 7. Spiritual Medicine

It has long been documented in the literature that Lakota medicine targets spiritual illness and psychosomatic pathologies.<sup>34</sup> It is evident, however, through my research and years of ceremony with Gene, that the spiritual nature of Lakota treatments and healing procedures are far more complex than what is represented in the literature.

In my experience, it is true that Lakota healers treat soul and spiritually related problems with spiritual/religious ceremonies such as the *Yuwipi* or *Inipi* ceremony. It is clear to me through Gene's work as a counselor and addictions program developer that Lakota healing practices and procedures deal extremely well with the emotional-psychological problems people face.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, a wide range of Lakota spiritual ceremonies are used to treat physical problems as well. As illustrated throughout this section, Lakota healing practices, such as the *Yuwipi*, *Inipi*, and Eagle Medicine, are holistic in approach and so treat a variety of health problems. I, for example, had a health problem that was diagnosed by Western doctors as primarily physical. Though no manipulation occurred in the Spirit Calling ceremony that healed me, I have experienced a lasting correction in my anatomy.

I have come to identify two classes of medicine in Lakota healing, both of which are spiritual. The first, is nature-based and the second is ceremony. Nature-based procedures largely involve herbal medicines and are used much like the pharmaceutical treatments of Western medicine. Additionally, minerals and animal parts and by-products

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<sup>34</sup> Hultkrantz Shamanic; Kemnitzer "Structure."

<sup>35</sup> Abrogast.

are also used.<sup>36</sup> Largely focusing on symptoms, nature-based remedies are often self-administered for minor ailments, and prescribed and prepared by *Pejuta Wichasa* (Plant Medicine People) for conditions that are more serious. In the nature-based repertoire of Lakota healers, particularly those who specialize in this class of healing, teas, ointments, poultices, lotions, oil, smudges, physical manipulation, and a variety of other forms of treatment are used.<sup>37</sup> This style of medicine is not the same as Western treatment due to the holistic context in which it is delivered, and the spiritual qualities that are understood in physical remedies. Each medicine has a Spirit and a spiritual nature. When picking and preparing Medicines one must be respectful in behavior and thought and leave an offering of tobacco. I remember going to pick a medicine with Gene during our fieldwork summer. "Take your tobacco and talk to them" he said. "Explain why you need this, thank them. Explain it is to help The People. Let them know that you appreciate what they are making possible for us. And that you will pray for the health of their nation."<sup>38</sup>

Not only do all Lakota medicines, plant and otherwise, have Spirits, but prescription is also spiritual. Many healers use ceremony and the assistance of Spirits to diagnose the illnesses of people. In such ceremonies, Spirits often describe the exact form of treatment needed and the manner in which to prepare and locate it.<sup>39</sup> Thus, regardless of the nature of the problem or the manner of treatment, both are seen to have spiritual aspects, element and contexts. All Lakota medicine is spiritual in some way. Rarely is

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<sup>36</sup> For descriptions see Lewis Medicine men: Mails Mystic Warriors.

<sup>37</sup> Vogel.

<sup>38</sup> Thin Elk "Personal Communication."

<sup>39</sup> This is extremely common in the literature on shamanism: see Eliade; Hultkrantz Shamanic; Kalweit Dreamtime. Shaman: Larsen.

any remedy provided without the complement of a ceremony of some kind, such as a Pipe ceremony, an *Inipi* or prayer.

For the purpose of this discussion, the second category of Lakota medicine I have termed "ceremonial." In this broad category all treatments and procedures that predominantly derive their efficacy from Spirits and God, through ritual and prayer with little aid of physical medicines, are included. This includes all Lakota community ceremonies to some degree since all feature healing as an element of their process. Most investigations of Lakota healing commonly focus on the Spirit Calling ceremonies like the *Yuwipi* and *Lowanpi*.

When I first started studying with Gene and attending Lakota ceremonies I believed that the effects of ceremony medicine were largely psycho-somatic. I believed in the power of the mind to effect change in the body and did not find it hard to believe that through symbols, altered states, the power of suggestion, and personal belief, people could be healed of a wide variety of diseases. In time I took this concept more seriously and investigated the extent to which the mind can interact with human physiology and material world. I was able to identify a great body of literature which supported the mind-body healing connection. Studies on the efficacy of prayer, belief, and meditation accounted for much of the ceremonies and healing I have seen.<sup>40</sup>

Over time, however, witnessing unexplainable events, hearing countless stories of inexplicable cures, and meeting the people who have experienced those cures has expanded my understanding. As a sincere student of Lakota healing, I considered the

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<sup>40</sup> The efficacy of prayer in particular has been extremely well documented in the scientific literature as having the power to effect a physical response. Dossey Healing Words provides an excellent overview of the subject.

evidence that continued to overwhelm me. My understanding changed during my fieldwork visits when I began to feel the presence of Spirits.

Group sightings of Spirits, community verified unexplainable cures and events, and my own experiences have effectively proved the existence of non-human, supernatural, intelligent beings to me. Experiences of Spirit "visits" in dreams have added to my understanding of the power and reality of a Spirit World. Upon accepting this, the ability to understand the power of such Beings to heal naturally followed.

### 8. *Okah'nih'pichaṣni: Mystery*

Mystery is an accepted and expected element of Lakota ontology and epistemology. It is understood that not all things can be known or understood. Knowledge is understood to be temporally limited and eternally changing due to both the infinite and process nature of reality and the interplay between Spiritual Beings and the human experience. Particularly associated with sacred and spiritual things, mystery emerges from the awesome power and incomprehensible magnitude of *Wakan'tanka* and the *Wakan*. The term *wakan*, is simultaneously understood to mean both "sacred" and "mysterious."<sup>41</sup>

In my experience of Lakota life and healing work, mystery is an accepted element. Remedies are not understood empirically and are recognized as being beyond deconstruction in application and effect. The holistic healing process is beyond rational reduction and the accounting of all factors. Natural cycles, the will and intent of Spirit Beings, and the unique qualities and psycho-spiritual fortitude of each patient are among the many uncontrollable factors involved in each person's healing process. Lakota healers and patients are generally comfortable not knowing all the reasons for the outcomes of ceremonies and treatments.

There is an implicit trust that whatever occurs, happens for a reason. The ongoing interrelationship between *Wakan'tanka*, the Spirit Beings, and a supernatural, higher order of cause and effect, dominate the healing process of each person. There is an implicit understanding that, as Thin Elk stated, "the universe is unfolding as it should" and that "we are to find meaning within it, for growth and healing."

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<sup>41</sup> DeMallie and Lavenda: Powers Oglala: Sacred Language.

The power of mystery has always been central to the teaching style of Gene. I have learned, over time, that his skillful ability to avoid answering my direct questions about spiritual matters and healing is as much about teaching me about mystery, as it was about patience, respect or anything else. Mystery is not only accepted in healing, but welcomed. It is a tool and a force. In healing, mystery creates the space for the uncontrollable and the unpredictable to exist and operate. By incorporating an acceptance of mystery into all healing practices and ceremonies, Lakota healers align themselves with a trust for the wisdom of the body and the natural processes of the Earth. Being in control and responsible for all outcomes is never possible, and Lakota healers make this reality a blessing instead of a curse.

The morning of my *Hanblecha* during the summer of fieldwork I was in a deep state of panic. Conditioned by my difficult experience the previous *Hanblecha*, described in chapter four, I was afraid, panic stricken, that I would have to face such a situation again. Feeling helpless to control my future, bound by a commitment and without the resources to cope, I confronted Gene. I remember that we were in his home. We had just come back from an early morning *Inipi*. I was afraid to admit my fear, and yet did not know what to do. I stopped Gene in the kitchen and nervously explained my turmoil. I had never been so scared to do anything in my life. Trying to mask my inner sense of desperation, I asked him what I could do: what would happen, what should I expect? I told him I had never felt such panic before.

His response was, "good," and he walked away to put his Sweat shorts in the laundry.

I understand now that in order to be open to the unexpected, more sincere in prayer, and more connected with feelings and intuition, the mind's desire for control and the guidance of a plan or preconceived notions must be overcome. I have never yet been in a situation where Gene's thrust into mystery has ever led me to anything but great reward. Where people seek control and mastery the world tends towards reduction, and the predictable. In my personal life and work as a minister and counselor I am learning to work with mystery. I have observed that miracles happen in the space where mystery is allowed. Mystery is where creation and healing occur.

### 9. Respect for Individuality: Diversity and Pluralism in Healing

Respect for individuality is evident in nearly all levels of Lakota life. The diversity and complexity of the spiritual world profoundly shape Lakota healing. The Spiritual World is complex and diverse, much like the human world of creativity and difference, and the great bio-diversity that is natural to the Earth. People have different relationships with and experience an infinite variety of Spiritual Beings. As such, spiritual belief and healing practice is highly individual in meaning and interpretation. Though ritual and ceremony operate within a conservation model of orthopraxis (right action), "orthodoxy" is not found among the Lakota. Each person is free to have his or her own personal relationship to theology, spirituality and Spirit relationships.<sup>42</sup> This level of diversity translates into an accepted diversity and pluralistic attitude concerning Lakota healers and patients.

An excellent example of individuality in Lakota healing can be viewed in the diversity among Lakota healers. Diversity is expected among healers in terms of specializations and techniques. More definitive than categories of healing practice, there are many types of healers among the Lakota *wapi'yekiya* (Lakota medical practitioners).<sup>43</sup> Unlike other aspects of health and healing, Lakota *wapi'yekiya* fit models of classification and specialization similar to those found in the Western medical system.<sup>44</sup> Terms and categories like pharmacist/chemist, physical therapist, psychiatrist, surgeon, internist,

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<sup>42</sup> Rice Great Spirit.

<sup>43</sup> St. Pierre and Long Soldier.

<sup>44</sup> Mails Spirits; Waldram et al.

psychologist, chaplain and even highly specialized fields like nephrology and neurology all find reasonable correlates in the Lakota system.<sup>45</sup>

Lakota healers can be categorized on two levels: 1. in terms of their physiological and disease specializations; and/or, 2. in terms of the source and nature of their healing practices. It is difficult to rely on the literature to provide a detailed discussion of the disease and system specific specializations of the Lakota. This is an area of study that has been lacking historically. On the other hand, for the purpose of discussion, approach based categorizations are possible. Though not exhaustive, it is possible to identify six main categories of healers based on their practices, personalities and the means by which they attain and use those practices:<sup>46</sup>

1. *Wicasa Wakan*: The Holy Ones
2. *Pejuta Wicasa*: Medicine People
3. *Wapiye*: Shamans
4. *Wakan Kaga*: Sacred Performers
5. *Wichahmunga*: Wizards and Witches
6. *Winkte*

Of these six groups, the first three listed are the most common today, whereas the last three categories, *Wakan Kaga*, *Wichahmunga* and *Winkte*, have decreased in use, endorsement and prevalence since historical records.<sup>47</sup> In my own experience, I have never attended a ceremony by a *Wakan Kaga* or *Wichahmunga* to my knowledge. The other four categories I have experienced and studied in some detail. Appendix B provides further discussion of these categories of healers.

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<sup>45</sup> Stead, R. "Traditional Lakota Religion in Modern Life." *Sioux Indian Religion*. Eds. DeMallie, R. and Parks, D. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press. 1987. 211-216.

<sup>46</sup> This section draws heavily from Powers' work, *Sacred Language* 164-195.

<sup>47</sup> Wissler, in "Societies," recorded the presence and widespread acceptance of these types of healers and societies. Few Lakota texts in the last fifty years pay much or any attention to these categories of healer. For more see Powers *Oglala*.

The respect for individuality is also reflected in the way patients are treated in a highly individualized manner. Healing procedures and ceremonies are patient-centered and recognize that healing practices and prescriptions cannot be formulaic. The nature of each person's Soul/Spirit, life history and biology are understood to be unique. For many Lakota healers, like Thin Elk, "biography becomes biology." There is an appreciation for the subtle levels of difference between the psychology and physiology of each person. Much like traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic healing systems, the Lakota recognize that different metabolisms, body types, personalities and relationships to the Spiritual World, warrant differing doses or degrees of pharmaceutical and procedural treatments.<sup>48</sup> In many cases entirely different medicines and approaches may be required to treat the same disease in different people. The Lakota healing model operates on a process based understanding of the world, in which human individuality and spiritual factors may influence changes in health and culture in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

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<sup>48</sup> Ballentine and Tiwari.

## 10. Mitakuye Oyasin: The Healing Power of Relationship

I think the first words I ever learned in Lakota were, "*mitakuye oyasin*"<sup>49</sup> I learned this at the first Sweat Lodge I ever attended which was in North Dakota in the winter of 1989. I was taught these words and told to say it when I finished praying in the *Inipi*. I was also to say it when I entered and when I left the Lodge, as well as after I had smoked the *Chamunpa*. Though I did not remember these words exactly, when I first met Gene and participated in ceremonies with him, the phrase came back quickly to me. It seemed like a simple term, I was originally told it meant "all my relations" or "we are all related." In time, however, I have come to understand the phrase *mitakuye oyasin* as a profound prayer and philosophy of life. In my years of relationship with Gene, I have come to see endless layers to the meaning and wisdom of this prayer.<sup>50</sup>

*Mitakuye oyasin* is a prayer that we always say at the end of all the prayers that we have, and is a prayer within itself. What that means is a unification of the universe.

It is the acknowledgment of the oneness of everything in the universe.<sup>51</sup>

*Mitakuye oyasin* affirms that all of creation is *interrelated* and *interdependent*.

In keeping with the principles of balance and holism, it is understood that no part of this universe can be changed in isolation. No person exists in isolation. All things exist in reciprocal relationship: the health of one person affects the health of a community; the health of a forest affects all the animals within it. Every pattern in nature bears some impact on the lives of human beings. Our thoughts affect our bodies; our emotions shape

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<sup>49</sup> Pronounced: mee-talk-oh-ya-sin.

<sup>50</sup> A number of Lakota authors have also identified this term's centrality, sacredness, and complexity: Erdoes and Lame Deer *Gift: Looks for Buffalo Hand*; Ross, A. *Mitakuye Oyasin: We are all related*. Denver: Bear, 1989.; Thin Elk *Native American Psychology*.

<sup>51</sup> Thin Elk *Native American Psychology*.

our spirituality. Interrelationship exists on all levels of creation. Through relationship all things exist and continue to exist. Though foreign to many Western schools of thought, the interrelated nature of all things is common to the philosophy of many of the world's religious traditions. Further, many Western disciplines such as biology and quantum physics similarly identify the interactive and interconnected nature of even the most disparate elements of our universe.<sup>52</sup>

Through my experiences with Gene I have come to learn that recognizing the interrelationship of all things is not enough to create health or healing. It is the active on going process of fostering relationships and maintaining them that is a source of healing. Good relationships in life bring balance and health. Proper health includes and depends on the acknowledging and fulfilling of relationship to all beings: human, animal, supernatural.

Making relationships goes beyond the biological family. When the Thin Elk family and I became *related* (family), the external languages of family and the accompanying behaviors served to affirm and inform an emotional/spiritual non-social reality. The customs of family relationship recognize and demonstrate the love, trust and mutual acceptance that exists beyond description. Behaving as family is a recognition of a spiritual truth.

In a similar way, I have seen and experienced that Spirit Beings should also be related to as family.<sup>53</sup> The common Lakota term for Spirits is *Tunkashila* - which means grandfather. The Earth is referred to as *Ina*, or *Unchi*, meaning mother, or grandmother.

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<sup>52</sup> Sheldrake: Peat; Wolf.

<sup>53</sup> DeMallie has made a strong case for this and argues that term for prayer, *wachekiya*, refers to the process of making relatives. See DeMallie Grandfather, DeMallie and Lavenda.

The Creator, God, *Wakan'tanka*, is also referred to as *Tunkashila*. However, these are not metaphors, or solely symbolic terms. These supernatural Beings become relatives when they are treated as such. We may enter into relationship with them and the exchange becomes reciprocal, just as in human family.

Just after my fieldwork in 1999, I attended a ceremony in Canada in which Spirit Beings were present and spoke. I was attending with a friend and we both heard and understood at the same time, the very same things. Though this ceremony was not run by a Lakota spiritual leader, I feel that the message we received reflects what Gene has shown me over the years. The Spirits present said, and I repeat this with deep respect and honouring:

We [Spirits] need you [people] to help us. There are things we can no longer do, ways that we cannot help. You have to help us, if there is to be healing.... There are things we still long for, things we miss - the taste of a piece of fruit, the ability to appreciate a beautiful lake through human eyes and senses. The world is a beautiful place and sometimes we miss it. You need to live, for us... When you help and respect us, we will help you in return.

The words felt true and followed such common sense: just as family members and friends rely on each other in the human and animal world, so to may we help and be helped by Spirit/ual Beings. I have never second guessed the interdependent relationship between people and Spirit Beings since that day.

The healing nature of relationships takes on many forms. I have learned in my own life and through the time I have spent with Gene how service and charity give so much in return. Giving is necessary to healing. Honouring family and friends is essential

to inner knowing and inner peace. By caring for our family and friends, we in turn will be cared for when in need ourselves. I have seen how Gene gives ceaselessly in every way to his community. By asking for nothing in return and placing his faith in the power of relationship, he and his family are provided for in return.

Relationship is not only a manner of securing resources or mutual care. The act itself, the state of being in good relationship, is healing.<sup>54</sup> A central aspect of the Lakota healers' ability to heal, lies in the healers' ability to make good and loving relationships with the people who come to them for help. Gene treats every person who comes to him for help with love and good humor. There is no such thing as "professional distance." If a person needs a place to stay or cannot afford to help much in the preparation of ceremony, Gene will offer all he has to help.

Health comes by examining personal relationships. When people try to find balance and happiness in each relationship, health will follow. Resentment, poor communication, aggression, and disrespect are aspects of unhealthy relationships that people live with every day. Respect must exist in all relationships, even with those who trouble us. When a person heals their relationships, they are happier, more free from stress, full of more energy and are physically more resilient.

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<sup>54</sup> Dacher. Quinn.

## 11. *Changlešhka Wakan*: Natural Process

*Changleška Wakan* means "Sacred Circle" and is the foundation of Gene's teachings. The Sacred Circle can be understood on many levels and is not reducible to any single series of definitions or explanations. It is possible, however, to explore the meaning behind the Sacred Circle, or Circle of Life, as it relates to Lakota healing. Gene comments about the Sacred Circle, which he also refers to as the Circle of Life:

..the basis for all our teachings, for everything that we stand for as Native American people [is] the Circle, the Circle of Life... In that Circle of Life are the teachings of all our people and in that Circle of Life there are many dimensions, and many, many variances...In this, the Circle is a continuance, the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning...<sup>55</sup>

The Sacred Circle, the Circle of life, is the pattern of all Creation. At the very center is the force of the original sacred power that moves out into the universe through the natural world and the spiritual world. By working with the cycles of nature and the gifts of the natural and spiritual world, healing will often emerge naturally. Like Gene, many Lakota today accept both Western and traditional Lakota forms of medical treatment. As a holistic system, the Lakota approach to healing easily incorporates a variety of treatment approaches. Despite this general openness, Lakota healing emphasizes the use of naturally occurring medicines over those that are synthesized. For example, both Tylenol and White Willow bark contain acetaminophen and may be used

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<sup>55</sup> See Thin Elk Native American Psychology and Seventh Direction.

similarly. However, Lakota healing acknowledges that the sacred power that is present in the naturally occurring world offers additional benefits for a patient.<sup>56</sup>

Spending time in natural settings, working with naturally occurring medicines and developing spiritual relationships with the natural world are all manners of Lakota healing and treatment. Human intervention is not always perceived as necessary, even in physical illness or mental disorders. *Unchi Maka*, the Earth, is one of the most powerful healing forces. I recall one time when Gene was working with people in an *Inipi* ceremony during one of my fieldwork visits. He said:

You don't need to handle all your suffering and problems on your own. Give them to the Earth, your Mother. Offer her tobacco and ask her to take them from you. The Earth will care for you and will take your hurt and pain and will digest it, dissolving disease or your sorrow in her body: the soil, the rivers, and the roots of the trees... You are never alone on this Earth. She is the mother of all.

The Earth is a healer, a medicine, and a loving mother. These terms are not symbolic, but experientially real.

Natural elements and cycles in the Sacred Circle also include the passage of time, cycles of life, the distinct wisdom and healing gifts of the four directions and the spiritual world. Seasonal rituals, like the *Wiwangwachipi*, life stage rituals like *Ishna Ta Awi Cha Lowan* (the Woman's Coming of Age ceremony),<sup>57</sup> and ceremonies that address universal life issues like grieving the loss of the deceased, all serve to maintain balance in the life of individuals and communities. These cyclical life experiences unite all people in

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<sup>56</sup> Other medical systems like homeopathy also support this notion: see Ballentine.

<sup>57</sup> For a description see Brown *Sacred Pipe* 116-126.

common. When celebrated and sanctified they facilitate healthy coping and community integration and cooperation.

## 12. Dreams and Visions: The Reality of Spiritual Interface

"We live by visions. We live by dreams..."<sup>58</sup>

Visions and dreams are central to Lakota tradition and healing.<sup>59</sup> The experience of non-physical, Spiritual Beings and the information gained through human interactions with such beings and forces are valid and vital in Lakota life. Thin Elk comments, "Dreams are teaching tools, just like any major university or educational system. The viability of dreams - it teaches us things at night when we are asleep, things to come, things that we need to work on."<sup>60</sup>

Visions and dreams refer to experiences in which Spiritual Beings and realities communicate directly with human beings. The most common form of vision or dream discussed in the literature refers to when Spiritual Beings and realities interact with people visually and through everyday senses. Visions may occur spontaneously and commonly during *Hanblecha*. Visions and dreams may occur while awake or asleep and may involve the "dreamer" travelling to Spiritual Realms, in which Spiritual Beings are contacted and communicated with. It has been my experience and understanding that in some instances visions or sacred dreams may take on a less experientially "normal" quality. In some instances, powerful experiences of intuition, clairvoyance, clairaudience, or clairsentience may also be considered visions.

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<sup>58</sup> Arden 8.

<sup>59</sup> Benedict: Irwin; Lame Deer Gift; Powers Oglala.

<sup>60</sup> Seventh Direction.

Sometimes when I'm mentally fatigued, I see psychedelic images. I see a tree jumping over another tree. Was that a vision? No! You're tired... You haven't slept for three days, so your brain is playing tricks on you. A vision is hard to explain. You receive it consciously, when you are wide awake. You see it in front of you, like turning on the TV... all of a sudden, you see yourself doing something specific, or you see an eagle fly... These are visions, and they come to you while you're conscious, or at least half awake. There are also images or scenes you see while you are semiconscious or asleep. These are dreams rather than visions, but they are also important. But both must *come to you, not out of you*.<sup>61</sup>

Visions and sacred dreams are often confused with Western, self-generated, concepts of dreaming and imagination. For the Lakota, the terms vision and dream, refer to a moment of interaction between an individual or group and Spirit/ual Beings and levels of reality.

In healing, visions and dreams play a variety of crucial roles. Visions, in many cases, are inherently transformative and healing for the dreamer. In some cases, sacred dreams may provide the healing necessary. Lakota texts and community members widely attest to the powerful effects of interactions with Spirits in the forms of visions. In most cases, spiritual insight and self-understanding are a result of visions; in other cases, physical transformation and the reduction of symptoms and even the cure of diseases occurs additionally.

In the work of healers, visions are an essential tool in both diagnosis and treatment. Through vision experiences healers may be explicitly told by Spiritual Beings the nature of a patient's disease and the exact remedy required. Similarly, in the overall

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<sup>61</sup> Erdoes and Lame Deer Gift.

education and training of Lakota healers, *Hanblecha* and vision experiences are central to the acquisition of power and knowledge.

Visions and Vision Quests are of utmost importance to our people and to me personally. Through dreams and visions, we receive power and the gift of "seeing ahead," of getting glimpses of the future. A young man's first Vision Quest [*Hanblecha*] often determines what kind of life he will lead. Visions are not imaginings; they are messages from the Supernaturals. True visions have a reality distinct from what the white man usually calls "reality." A [person] who never had a vision is impoverished, indeed.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Erdoes and Lame Deer Gift.

### 13. The Patient as Healer:

**We have regenerating powers within. If we take in the right nutrients within us to sustain ourselves, if we have the right exercise, if we have the right amount of sleep. When we do all of these things here, our body has the ability to regenerate and re-heal itself.<sup>63</sup>**

In Lakota medicine and healing, the patient is not a passive recipient of care as is common in Western medicine. Undergoing procedures or following pharmaceutical prescriptions are small aspects of the Lakota healing process. Each patient must work to experience healing in his or her life; this involves fulfilling a number of responsibilities.

A powerful philosophy of prevention that I have come to understand through my work with Gene, is the recognition that people are "co-creators" of their life experience. Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, is all subject to the belief, values, attitudes and behaviors of each person.<sup>64</sup> The primary capacity each person has to heal himself or herself, lies in their ability to choose healthy lifestyles.

In specific instances of healing ceremonies or procedures, patients are first responsible for their healing in the mere act of choosing to remedy their disease. In my experience, Lakota healers do not approach people to pursue treatment; counsel is not given without formal request for help. Each individual is respected for being capable of choosing her or his own life path. Healers respect each individual's right to choose any manner of life style - healthy or not. The act of seeking help is seen as a critical first step in the healing process. When healing is readily offered, obliged, or thrust upon people,

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<sup>63</sup> Thin Elk Four Therapy Targets Within.

they are often not holistically prepared or invested in the outcome. Healing is done *with* patients, not for them.

The act of choosing healing or seeking help is also seen as operationalizing the potential for spiritual aid. Attitudes and the appropriate behavior are essential to healing and may, in some cases, provide the primary source of remedy. There are seven important healing attitudes and associated behaviors that I have observed in all of Thin Elk's healing work: 1. co-creation, 2. investment/sacrifice, 3. faith, 4. gratitude, 5. forgiveness, 6. humility/respect, 7. joy/humor. Each attitude moves a person in the direction of holistic healing - patient and practitioner.

*1. Co-creation:* Every person co-creates her/his reality and health in holistic dialogue with the material and spiritual worlds. We are neither total victims, nor rulers of our lives, but participants with God and the world around us.

*2. Investment/sacrifice:* For healing to occur we must sincerely invest ourselves in the healing process and pursuit of health. It is not possible to gain without giving. To experience healing we must be willing to make sacrifices and, to some degree, suffer through the changes that are necessary to bring healing. Suffering in ceremonial settings is a manner of showing commitment, devotion and investment in our prayers and petitions for help from God and the Spiritual World. Through personal sacrifice and commitment we are also able to help God and the Spirit World in the healing of others.

*3. Faith:* Faith is a key to the door that closes between the Spiritual World and the physical world people experience; faith creates a potential for healing that defies physical laws. Faith is not a matter of changing perception through belief. Faith is not about a simple matter of comforting the mind and placating the heart. Faith is a tool for healing.

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<sup>64</sup> Thin Elk Natural/Unnatural.

In my experience, it seems that **Spiritual Beings generally require a faith in God and the Spiritual World in order for them to intervene in our lives. Over the years, I have heard countless stories of healing that were, to most non-Indigenous people, miracles. These are not solely anecdotes and community fables. The power of faith is something that can be witnessed and experienced in the participation of Lakota ceremony. I, myself, have seen and experienced the power of faith in physical and psychiatric healing that defies Western logic and medicine.**

At the beginning of my relationship with Gene, I sponsored a *Yuwipi* for the healing of a musculo-skeletal problem I had in my feet and legs. Though I hoped that the healer would correct my problem, I had serious doubts about the possibility of Spirit Beings to effect change in the physical world. My doubts plagued me right until the very moment of ceremony. As the room was prepared and I sat in the seat designated, my mind was racing as I struggled to come to terms with the likely lack of effect I would face.

Suddenly, one of the *Yuwipi* man's helpers crouched in front of me and looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Tonight you have to pray for your healing, and have no doubts. Everyone in this room must be of one mind, no doubts, or someone could get hurt. Even if you are not sure about this, even if you don't believe, as long as the ceremony is going on, pray and - if you have to - just pretend you have faith. We have to be of one mind, there can be no doubt or someone might get badly hurt."

I did as told, and - beyond belief, beyond placebo or the power of the mind - my physical, structural problem was healed. I have never been the same since. That, to me, speaks to the power of faith to open the door to the unbelievable.

**4. *Gratitude:* Gratitude is another attitude that facilitates the healing process.**

Through gratitude we maintain our relationship to the Creator, the Spirit World and Creation. In gratitude we acknowledge our interdependence on others for health, and our respect for the unique gifts and sacred nature of all things. Through the ceremonies I have attended and after healing ceremonies in particular, I have learned that prayers and a feeling of gratitude is natural and essential. Through my experience with Gene and his regular emphasis on the importance of gratitude, I have concluded that spiritual aid in healing is more likely to occur for individuals that maintain an attitude of gratitude.

In the absence of need or knowledge of what to pray for, I have always been advised to give thanks for all I have in life. Working with Gene, I have learned to assert my attitude of gratitude when life is most difficult. When I am frustrated with events in life, when my health is poor, or when those who are close to me are suffering, I still give thanks for the goodness that remains in my life, no matter how small. This seems to open a connection to the Spirit World and my own spiritual resources so that I might return to a place of balance and health.

**5. *Forgiveness:* Forgiveness frees the soul/spirit and is central to maintaining good relationships in life. When we hold anger, hurt or resentment towards others, we suffer ourselves. It is not possible to receive the fullness of healing while we are unable to forgive. Forgiving is a vital act of compassion that heals the self and others. Just as we would have others forgive us for the things we have done, knowing that we have made mistakes, we must offer the same forgiveness to others. Part of forgiveness is understanding that people are always doing the best they can with what they know and understand. Forgiveness does not mean excusing responsibility or that we are not entitled**

to feel hurt or anger. These things are normal and healthy. But to forgive is to let go of the energy that is bound up in a hurt or painful experience.

I have learned that in order to heal people need their energy and attention to be moving toward good things and good feelings. When people hang on to anger and hurt, or refuse to forgive another, they are the ones who are punished; rarely does the other suffer as the one who holds on to anger. We must forgive to free ourselves.

*6. Humility and Respect:* In respecting all people and all things we must practice humility, and accept that we are not better or worse than any other. Each person walks her or his own path. Each journey is filled with different challenges and we all face and deal with them differently. An attitude of respect and humility maintains a balance in our relationships. We see our needs as equal in importance to those of others. Through humility and respect we acknowledge that we are not solely in control of our lives, but dependent on others, and the Spirit World for help. An attitude of respect and humility recognizes the right of all things to exist in harmony. By respecting all beings and conducting oneself with humility, balance is brought to a person's life.

*7. Joy/Humor.* The most distinct qualities of my relationship with Gene have always been joy and humor. The ability to have fun and appreciate life and the people around us is a powerful gift. Regardless of the stress, illness or trauma faced, humor and joy always bring a feeling of wellness. During my fieldwork I heard Gene remark to visitors of the community:

Don't be shocked by our joking around. A lot of people expect Indian people to always be serious, especially in ceremonies. But as long as you remember respect first, there will always be times for humor and laughter. Even in our ceremonies -

we must be silent, or concentrate on our prayers or songs; but there are also breaks when we are able to joke around... Our people have suffered for hundreds of years now because of other nations, but look around: we still laugh and enjoy ourselves. Wherever you find Lakota people, you will find laughter. It keeps us together... It has helped us to survive. Laughter is one of our most precious medicines.<sup>65</sup>

Not only are joy and humor healing, but they are also an indicator of wellness and balance in life. Celebratory humor, a love for life and the enjoyment of everyday life are important measures of a person's holistic health. Naturally, offensive and degrading humor is not a health indicator, but a coping mechanism.

As I considered these things during my November visit during the year of fieldwork, a number of my understandings merged. I realized the spiritual nature of things and could see how each thing has a Spirit/Soul. I was also very familiar with Gene's teachings about the power of attitude, thoughts, feelings, and the importance of a person's individual commitment to healing. Though I had heard it before, as I listened to Gene in conversation with a visiting psychologist, I felt I was able to understand a new aspect and depth in what he was saying. When he spoke of the importance of attitude and commitment I felt as if I could actually see how a person's Spirit/Soul is transformed through the intentional choice to receive healing or to adopt certain attitudes of healing. It is as if a change at a subtle soul level heightens the capacity of the body and mind to heal. Through intention, lifestyle, and trust in a person's own regenerative power, the track is laid for the natural process of healing to occur - with or without external healing intervention.

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<sup>65</sup> Thin Elk "Personnel Communication" Summer 1999.

#### 14. *Sloic'iya* - The Seventh Direction: Prevention and Healing Through Understanding the Self

The condition of that seventh direction is going to dictate how we live with all other directions and the people, places, and things within those direction... this is a very sacred direction and the reason why we say it's sacred is because at the very center of that sacred direction is what we call the *Wakan* or Sacred.<sup>66</sup>

Distinct in the healing work and education of Gene Thin Elk is his emphasis on *sloic'iya* ("knowing all of yourself")<sup>67</sup> and the importance of the seventh direction. Most Lakota spiritual teachers and texts address six directions: the four cardinal directions and the direction of the Sky and Earth. The seventh direction, the Center, is often implicitly recognized, but not always articulated. Black Elk referred to this when he spoke of his "Great Vision:"

I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world... But anywhere is the center of the world.

In The Sacred Pipe, Black Elk discusses the significance of the six directions and the center of the Circle, the seventh direction, as taught to him by his own teachers:

[My teacher] took up a stick, pointed it to the six directions, and then, bringing it down, he made a small circle at the center; and this we understand to be the home of *Wakan-Tanka*... we see that everything leads into, or returns to, the center, and

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<sup>66</sup> Thin Elk Seventh.

<sup>67</sup> Young Bear 106.

this center which is here, but which we know is really everywhere, is *Wakan-Tanka*.<sup>68</sup>

In the sacred ceremonies of the Lakota it is in this place, the center, the seventh direction, that the participants stand or focus their attention. For example, the Sun Dance is oriented around the Sacred Tree in the center of the ceremonial grounds; the Faster stands in the center of the *Hanblecha* circle; the participants in an *Inipi* face the center of the circular lodge, towards the pit of heated Stones/Grandfathers.

Thin Elk teaches how to stand in the center of these ceremonies is to simultaneously look within oneself and to the omnipresent Creator, God, *Wakan'tanka*.<sup>69</sup> In this mystical relationship between the inner-self and the divine Creator is the ultimate empowerment of all people, not in ego, but in Spirit: "In the sacred seventh direction, it is very important for us to realize that it's an empowerment process. It lives within us. It empowers us to know how to live on this earth and it shows us where the power lies... Everything that we are seeking already lives inside us."<sup>70</sup>

The seventh direction, the inner-self, the Spirit/soul at the core of the mind, heart and body contains the essence of our true personal strength, volition and uniqueness.

Spiritual leader Matthew King said:

Every person has to find his or her own power, because each of us possesses a certain power. Search yourself for that power, know how to reach inside yourself, and then use that power in harmony with God...<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> 89-90.

<sup>69</sup> This belief is also held in other cultural traditions around the world. See Walsh and Vaughn 112-113.

<sup>70</sup> Seventh Direction.

<sup>71</sup> Arden 63.

Our relationship to the seventh direction determines how we relate to all the other directions in the universe. No matter what influences us, no matter what the external world confronts us with, we have the power, in the seventh direction, to recognize that we are a Spirit, and are not the sum total of experiences we have had. We are not purely the product of what has been done to us. "We can change at any given moment, no matter what we have said, done, or was done to us, or what was said to us in our lives."<sup>72</sup>

Once we begin to understand our own inner nature, our spiritual nature, it then becomes possible to know the Creator, *Wakan'tanka*, through all of creation. The seventh direction is the Spirit and point of inherent connection between each person and all of Creation.<sup>73</sup> When a person explores the teachings of the seventh direction through self-knowledge, introspection, discovering their spiritual nature, and understanding their self as a Spirit, connected implicitly to God, each principle discussed within this section naturally becomes evident and relevant.

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<sup>72</sup> Thin Elk Seventh Direction.

<sup>73</sup> This concept is similar to the Hindu concept of Atman, which is understood as simultaneously distinct from and united with Brahman - the eternal divine origin of all things. See Walsh and Vaughn; Tiwari.

## 15. Chante Iŕta: Healing Through Feeling

In my review of the Lakota literature, I have found historical correlates to all of the principles that I have learned throughout my experiences with Gene. The philosophies and healing approaches that are featured in his workshops and educational video series are also supported by the literature. What I have found to be unique about Gene is the way in which he is able to apply his traditional knowledge of culture and healing to contemporary issues. Further, Gene's ability to instruct and employ the wisdom of his tradition in a manner that is creative, spiritual and accessible to a wide range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in need of healing today is also rare.

The holism of Lakota healing is such that many of the principles in this chapter overlap in description, application and meaning. In some cases, a principle is distinct due to the very specific way it is talked about. The concept of "Healing through Feeling" developed by Gene is one such principle.<sup>74</sup> Though I have discussed the importance of the emotional aspect of a person's life in healing, Gene has articulated a very specific manner of understanding feelings and the emotional-self, which deserves specific treatment.

In my understanding of Lakota healing, the Heart, or emotional self, is essential to all aspects of healing work and experiencing healing. Gene has always taught me that "emotions are the language of the Spirit." In many societies, people have come to fear and feel shame around the open expression of emotion; but Gene affirms, "tears are medicine; we may cry tears of joy or tears of pain, but it is all healing." In my own

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<sup>74</sup> Though "Healing Through Feeling" does not appear in the literature, many Lakota healers have discussed the critical importance of the "heart," love and feelings in healing; see Black Elk in *Brown Sacred Pipe*; Catches and Catches; Erdoes and Lame Deer *Gift*; Fool Crow *Wisdom*; Looks for Buffalo Hand.

healing of personal issues with Gene I have learned how often it is possible to talk about problems and concerns without *feeling* what they mean. In the feeling/experience of those ideas, thoughts, memories and issues, healing occurs. To talk about them, to intellectualize is important, but not enough.

What we have to do is be able to have our people take a look at their emotional life, identify feelings, and be able to understand feelings. They have to understand that feelings are facts... They dictate the way our being is interpreting the events around us.<sup>75</sup>

Until I learned to recognize my emotional *reaction* to things, I was often unaware of how my feelings were in fact shaping my relationships, work, and other interactions that I thought were largely intellectual. For example, emotional resistance toward a teacher may lead to poor performance in a student; resentment towards an employer can lead to poor work habits or results in an employee; and the concealment of feelings in relationships can lead to confusion, miscommunication and hurt feelings. Though we have come to minimize the role of feelings in Western societies like Canada and the United States, feelings remain integral to every life experience - our recreation, relationships, and even the most intellectual work or study.

Expressing our feelings is healing for ourselves in our personal lives and the environments we live in. Most people think that stress is caused by our thoughts, how we relate to people and things. Generally, thoughts do not cause any reaction in the body - it is our feeling associated with, or our reaction to those thoughts, such as anxiety, fear,

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<sup>75</sup> Thin Elk Habilitation.

anger, frustration, panic, or any number of emotional reactions that lead to physiological change.<sup>76</sup>

To overcome the power of emotion, we need to learn to work with it and express it. In order to *act* with wisdom and balance, it is important to learn how not to *react*. I have found that Gene's teaching of Healing through Feeling, is a life long process. Healing through Feeling is about people learning to be aware of their feelings and finding the language and the courage to express those feelings in a meaningful and respectful way to others. Gene talks about working with people who have trouble expressing their feelings:

They can feel it, but they can't describe it or they can't identify the feelings. They can't categorize it or they can't describe it to the point where they can transfer that information to someone else. As a result they store those feelings.<sup>77</sup>

Gene points out how most people relate poorly to their emotional selves. In particular, he discusses how, through residential schooling, most Indigenous people have been taught to be stoic and ashamed of emotional expression. The denial of the Heart, and of the expression of feelings, has now passed from generation to generation. Today people remain estranged from their emotional selves. Learning to identify and express emotions must be an aspect of all holistic healing.

The Heart also has an important role in the work of any healer. Gene demonstrates and teaches how the most effective relationship between a healer and her/his patient is rooted in emotional connection and honesty. The healing work must

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<sup>76</sup> Goleman, D. Emotion Intelligence. New York: Bantam Books. 1995.; Pert.

<sup>77</sup> Habilitation.

come from a place of *woshila*, compassion, and must continue in a relationship of love and respect.

...whether we are a counselor or whatever we are, working with our people, is to recognize that the person coming to us... needs help, [that person] that is coming to us is our brother and our sister. When they hurt, we hurt. In a non-Indian way, a lot of times what they say is that you should empathize, you show no emotion, you separate yourself from that person, you observe them and then you give them feedback. That's a non-Indian way of dealing with things.

The Lakota way, the Native American way, is to recognize that we are all related, we have a relationship with that person spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, even physically - by being there together, by going through a ritual, going through a Ceremony together for a healing. So, we recognize that. If that person is hurting and they cry, we can feel that pain. We can feel it, and [it is] for us [as healers] to be able to feel that pain and not take that pain on. For us to feel that hurt and not take that hurt on. But to be able to take that very same hurt and provide resources, to provide prayers, to provide knowledge, provide compassion, *woshila*, and take that same pain with this hurt, this pain, with this compassion, these things, and return it back to that person and empower them to start a healing process.

Empower them to recognize that they have now someone who cares for them.<sup>78</sup>

As discussed in the section on the philosophy of *mitakuye oyasin*, each person we serve is a relative: we are all related and share the same capacity for feelings and suffering. To

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<sup>78</sup> Thin Elk Native American Psychology.

engage people with an open heart is to begin meaningful relationship. No matter what work or situation people are involved in, as physical therapists, mechanics, or surgeons, if they can learn to recognize their emotional experiences and express them, they will find that their healing work is more effective and healing will emerge in their own life.

When I worked in a hospital I once heard a surgeon say, "I can't get emotionally involved with my patients; it would be too hard on me if things didn't work out, or I might feel too much pressure during the operation." While these things may be true, the repeated sublimation or repression of naturally occurring reactions is not healthy on a long term basis. Healing through feeling suggests that, over time, such a person will be better off if they simply share their feelings with colleagues or family: that sometimes they are afraid, sometimes they feel inadequate, sometimes they feel helpless. Such a process would invite healing through feeling.

The final vital role of the Heart is as an evaluative tool. I have learned from Gene that "emotional awareness" is essential to "an evaluation of Self." Feelings are "the evaluation mechanism of the other three areas of our life [the mental, physical and spiritual.]" To know if we are in balance, to evaluate our life journey, to evaluate our relationships, we must see with our *chante išta*, the eye of the heart.<sup>79</sup> All the teachings in this chapter intersect in the eye of the heart. Our ability to experience respect, humility, faith, gratitude, forgiveness, joy, and humor and the truth of co-creation and the seventh direction all originate within the Heart.

In a powerful lecture I have seen Gene deliver a number of times on the Natural Process of life, he teaches how our lives, and each action we make, must proceed from a

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<sup>79</sup> Black Elk uses this term in Sacred Pipe.

spiritual place, through prayer and meditation; on to an intellectual place, where we conceptualize and plan; to a physical realm of action in the world; and finally to our hearts, where we evaluate each step we take on our life journey. It is possible to become aware of our feelings, to understand them, and thus gain control of our lives: to become co-creators of our reality. Matthew King commented:

Yes, you're God's child too. You are good. You are sacred. Respect yourself. Love the goodness in yourself./ Then, put that goodness into the world. / That's everybody's Instructions./ God made you so you feel good when you do right. Watch when you feel good and follow that good feeling. The good feeling comes from God.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Arden 12.13.

## 16. *Wakantanka*: The Existence of God

The last principle to be discussed is the existence of God, *Wakan'tanka*, which is the foundation of all sixteen aspects of Lakota healing discussed in this chapter.

*Wakan'tanka*, is commonly referred to in English as God, the Creator, the Great Spirit, or the Great Mystery. Spiritual leader Matthew King said:

You can call Wakan-Tanka by any name you like. In English I call Him God or the Great Spirit.

He's the Great Mystery, the Great Mysterious. That's what Wakan-Tanka really means - the Great Mysterious.

You can't define Him. He's not actually a "He" or a "She," a "Him" or a "Her." We have to use those kinds of words because you can't just say "It." God's never an "It."

So call Wakan-Tanka whatever you like.

Just be sure to call Him.

He wants to talk to you.<sup>81</sup>

All healing incorporates prayer and depends on the harmony and cooperation of human, Spirit and Natural forces - all of which originate in the omnipotent power, and sacred energy of *Wakan'tanka*.<sup>82</sup> Expressive of Lakota pluralism, there can be no single articulation of the meaning of *Wakan'tanka* or a Sioux theology. In community experience and a review of the literature, many understandings of *Wakan'tanka* can be found. Some Lakota understand *Wakan'tanka* much in the same way Judeo-Christian

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<sup>81</sup> Arden 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Wakan'tanka*, the most widely accepted and debated Sioux term for a supreme being, is possibly "the most important religious concept among the Sioux." Brown *Sacred Pipe*. xvii.

tradition conceives of a personal God, others see *Wakan'tanka* as a divine energy that is the source and guide of all things, while others have complex theologies that integrate the relationships of numerous Spirit Beings and spiritual forces (for more see Appendix C).

What is essential, and simple, in my experience, is that God, however conceived, is at the very core of Lakota healing. As a pervasive force in creation, all things, by definition, contain a sacred element. By addressing the spiritual, or sacred element of *any* aspect of treatment, an additional level of healing power is accessed: the power of the sacred. Through prayer and relationship with the Spirit World, the power of God is invoked. Pete Catches comments: "It's remarkable how close God can work with you if you are earnest about it, honest with yourself. It's remarkable, hard to explain."<sup>83</sup>

Each distinct aspect of Creation and the Spirit World - the Earth, the Sun, and many Spirit Beings - are all expressions of *Wakan'tanka*, God. *Wakan'tanka* is simultaneously within and beyond all things. Gene teaches that through the sacred element of all things, and the origin of all in *Wakan'tanka*, "The entire universe is inter-related. The entire universe is a multiple expression of the same."<sup>84</sup> John Lame Deer affirmed this when he said, "The spirit [of God] is everywhere. Sometimes it shows itself through an animal, a bird or some trees and hills. Sometimes it speaks from the Badlands, a stone, or even from the water."<sup>85</sup>

Despite the critical role of Spirit Beings in healing, most Lakota healers whose narratives have been published acknowledge that their power ultimately comes from

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<sup>83</sup> Pete Catches in Zimmerly, D. "On Being an Ascetic: Personal Document of a Sioux Medicine Man." *Pine Ridge Research Bulletin* 10 (1969): 51.

<sup>84</sup> Native American Psychology.

<sup>85</sup> Erdoes and Lame Deer 2.

God.<sup>86</sup> In most cases, these healers, like Gene, pray directly to *Wakan'tanka*, God, for help in healing.

In all the years I have attended ceremonies with Gene, he has always welcomed people of all cultural backgrounds. "We may have different names for God, or different ways of worshipping; but in the end, it's all the same Sacred Power, " he would say. Gene always welcomes people to pray in their own language regardless of the ceremony. "When you go into that *Inipi*, or when that *Chamunpa* comes to you - pray. Pray to God, the Creator, *Wakan'tanka*, we say. But, for you maybe it's Jesus or Allah, or something else. Whatever it is you understand as God, that is good, pray to that." I feel that I have been taught that the deepest reservoir of power and the single most important focus of prayer is always God.

I remember asking Gene about this late one night at *Wiwangwacipi* in the fieldwork summer. It had been a long day, but I was feeling good and still full of energy and joy reflecting on the good work of the day. We were heading back to where our pick-up trucks were parked, each to sleep in the back of his own. A question came to mind that I had been thinking about a lot the previous visit.

I remembered learning years ago that the most important prayers were those of gratitude and those for others. I had heard it said so many times, in so many places: "pray for your relatives. Pray for others and you will be helped." I never forgot this and always approached ceremonies that way. But, I noticed that Gene often told people coming to the *Inipi* for the first time or for healing to pray for themselves; it seemed that he rarely said the other - about praying for everyone else first.

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<sup>86</sup> See works on Nicolas Black Elk, Wallace Black Elk, Pete Catches, Leonard Crow Dog, Frank Fools Crow, Archie Lame Deer, and John Lame Deer.

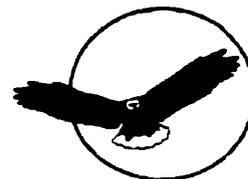
"You know, " I tried to ask casually, as each of us stood beside our trucks moving shovels, cases, ropes and bags to make way for a place to lay down, "whenever I am in Sweat, I always pray for my family, relations, and The People; I remember the young and the sick and old. I don't always pray for myself. I guess I thought that is what I was taught once: that you should always pray for others first. But, I noticed that you always tell people to pray for themselves first and foremost. And now I wonder if I am doing something wrong; yet, it feels wrong to put myself first. Or am I confused?"

We had both finished our preparations and paused to look up at the stars. I remember how *Harwi* was slowly pouring her light into the night sky as she rose. The stars lit up the sky wherever they were beyond the spreading moonlight. I didn't really expect an answer from Gene; he often didn't answer questions that were so direct and metaphysical.

This time he did: "How do you expect to pray for others if you don't first have a good relationship with God? How do you help other people before you are well yourself? A lot of people don't pray until they come to ceremony - maybe once a week, or once a month; for some people here [at Sun Dance] it might even be once a year. It's important that they make that connection to Creator first; then they can pray for their relations, their community. You have to work on your relationship with the Creator first. You have to start that healing for yourself first."

"Talk to God," he said, "make that connection. It all begins there."

Gene paused, and, as if everything he was saying was as obvious as the moon and stars above, he concluded, "how else do you expect to really help anyone?"



## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Possibilities

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Over the years as I have come to experience and understand Lakota healing with increasing depth, a capacity and tendency to draw practical socially relevant conclusions has naturally emerged. I do not believe that it is possible to truly be touched by the spirit of a community or culture, and not be deeply moved to care for the welfare of its people. In understanding the history and present sociology of the Lakota, and other Indigenous people, I have come to believe that traditional healing is vital to the preservation of Indigenous culture and the future health and independence of Indigenous nations.

Having worked in hospital settings and become familiar with many of the procedures and philosophies of Western medicine, it is clear to me that Indigenous healing ways have a tremendous amount to offer the biomedical model. As an Interfaith minister, and an investigator of popular trends in spirituality and health, it is evident that millions of Canadians, Americans, and Western people around the world are strongly attracted to alternative forms of medicine and healing.<sup>1</sup> It is evident that improved cross-cultural understanding and education about Indigenous spirituality and healing is profoundly important to the health and wellbeing of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

### Comparing Philosophies

In this study, the distinct nature of Lakota healing has been highlighted. Additionally, it has been discussed and demonstrated how standard Western models of

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<sup>1</sup> Ballentine; Dossey Reinventing; Dacher. Gordon.

research and academic writing are often not appropriate to the study of Indigenous healing and spirituality. The style and philosophies within this paper contribute to the theoretical dialogue between Western and Indigenous systems of knowledge and healing. More significantly, this paper offers a level of insight that the reader may operationalize, or actualize, in their own life and work. Individuals working with/for Indigenous people in academic and health care professions may consider the possibility of expanding Western models to include some or all of the points featured.

A number of Western health care practitioners are identifying the need for an expanded model of healing.<sup>2</sup> Few of these critics suggest that the biomedical model is problematic, or incompetent. On the contrary, these medical professionals such as Elliot Dacher, Larry Dossey, Janet Quinn, Andrew Weil, Mona Lisa Schultz, and Lewis Mehl-Madrona, all celebrate the biomedical model as the most sophisticated system of symptom driven, science based treatment. As a materialist "sick/cure" model of care, the biomedical system is likely the best the world has ever known. However, when the biomedical model is evaluated as an overall healing system and a promoter of holistic wellness, these authors, and others, indicate that evidence strongly suggests that the Western medical system is incomplete, and could be enhanced by the holistic models of other cultures. Given the capacity of holistic healing systems to increase the efficacy of treatment and to meet the individual needs of health care clients,<sup>3</sup> Indigenous models of healing may prove essential to the future of modern medicine. The Lakota/Indigenous approach to healing may serve as a model for change for the Western biomedical model.

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<sup>2</sup> Ballentine: Dossey Reinventing; Dacher, Gordon, Shealy, Schulz.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

Over the last few decades, there has been a move towards identifying new tools and philosophies of care that might be incorporated into the Western medical model. Consumers have addressed this problem by supplementing their health care with the independent pursuit of alternative or complementary therapies.<sup>4</sup> In particular, Indigenous people often participate in both Western and Indigenous systems of care, with little exchange between the two. Of the medical professionals that are featured in the literature calling for a revised medical approach, most have also experienced and incorporated non-Western modalities of health and healing into their personal life and professional practice. Presently drawing heavily from the systems and practices of Eastern cultures, alternative treatments and lifestyles have come to include acupuncture, reflexology, Reiki, therapeutic touch, Chinese herbalism, various schools of yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, and prayer.<sup>5</sup>

What is often lacking, though intended, in the recent popular utilization of complementary medicines is the philosophy of holism. Many people still practice a sick/cure, treatment oriented philosophy of health, revised with the integration of new tools and treatments. They use herbs instead of pharmaceuticals, and "energy healers" instead of medical doctors or physiotherapists. Holism, however, is not about the rejection of any model/method of care, nor is it treatment or procedure dependent. There is a clear distinction to be made between the tools of a medical model and the philosophy of a healing system. Holistic healing, as demonstrated in the Lakota model, is about recognizing the proper relationship between an infinite variety of care/medicine and how

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

they may work together in the unified experience of a person's life. Holistic medicine is a process, a way of life. This necessary lesson is embodied in many of the Lakota principles discussed, such as balance and understanding life as journey.<sup>6</sup>

It is self-evident that not all Western medical practitioners will be open to philosophies of health such as those outlined in this paper. Nevertheless, for those who aspire to deliver a more holistic quality of care and Indigenous-centered care, these principles and the distinctions outlined in Chapter Five and Appendix D will be critical to employ.

Many of the differences between Lakota healing and the biomedical model are extreme. However, an examination of the philosophical differences reveals that biomedical practices and procedures are not necessarily at odds with Lakota/Indigenous holistic/spiritual healing. Many Lakota/Indigenous people use both models of medicine. Though they may be philosophically grounded in an Indigenous paradigm of healing, for most, there is no major conflict seeking Western medical help within that framework. It is common for Indigenous people to conceptualize some diseases/disorders as "White Man's" and thus recognize that Western medicine may be best suited to their treatment. Lakota/Indigenous medicine is inclusive of many medical models, because its foundation is based on a dynamic philosophy and cosmology and not a sense of procedural, formulaic, materialism. Most Western practitioners could employ Lakota/Indigenous principles, personally and professionally, without compromising their primary biomedical skills or procedures. The adoption of a holistic healing philosophy would be welcomed and desired by most clients, and, in the case of Indigenous clients, such changes would be vital.

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix D for a comparison chart of Lakota and biomedical values and healing philosophies.

Naturally, sixteen principles do not constitute a holistic approach or an Indigenous approach to healing in themselves. Traditional Indigenous methods of healing, like traditional Indigenous methods of study and academics, are embodied, and only exist as such. The sixteen principles outlined in Chapter Five and the qualities highlighted in Appendix D are lived in an integrated way, as a whole process. This process appears uniquely in each person's life. Gene, like many Lakota today, refers to this traditional life process of health and holistic balance as the *Chanku Luta*, the Red Road.<sup>7</sup> Though it is conceived and experienced differently in each person and culture, Gene affirms that the Red Road is for all people.

During the past summer of fieldwork, I brought a group of alternative healing practitioners to a Lakota healing workshop that Gene has been central to organizing and running on an annual basis. I recall when one of them spoke to Gene about their experience at the gathering.

"I have learned so much here, about the Lakota philosophy of wellness and how to achieve that; and about Sweats - I had never been to one before. When I go back home and continue my work with people as a healer, or as an instructor in healing practices, am I allowed to talk about these things? Or are they private, and just for Lakota or Native people?" Gene replied:

These ways are for all people. They are gifts from the Creator; they don't belong to me, or to the Lakota people alone. Healing and spirituality belong to all people.

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<sup>7</sup> Abrogast. Brown Sacred Pipe; DeMallie Grandfather, Looks for Buffalo Hand: Ross, A.C.

What you have to remember is to speak as yourself, through your experience. You can never teach Lakota ways, because you aren't Lakota: it's not your experience.<sup>8</sup>

But, you can talk about an experience you've had, or what it meant to you. Or maybe you will look to your own heritage, maybe it's Christian, or Gaelic, or Jewish. If you take the time to look at your own traditions, you will find the same teachings in there. You can use those and speak for your own people...

We have had lots of people from all over this world come here to learn over the years: from Canada, Europe, Asia - we even had a Tibetan monk visit once. Each of them takes something special away, something that they found here. But they all see it with their own eyes, they still understand it in their own way. When you go home, you don't have to speak for Lakota people, or tell people what we believe.

You just speak for yourself: What did you experience? What do you believe?"<sup>9</sup>

### **Western Medical Education and Indigenous Healing Ways**

Presently, most non-Indigenous people have only fragmented and partial understandings of Indigenous medicine. Caught between the extremes of ethnocentric rejection and the profiteering glorification of Indigenous healing traditions, many Indigenous leaders have come to recognize that "a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing." In the study and instruction of Indigenous traditions and the delivery of health

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<sup>8</sup> This thesis work has been based on this principle and asserts that this study is primarily a reflection of an understanding that is personal and not universal, or representative of Lakota people in general. It is my sense, however, that the cautionary approach most Indigenous spiritual leaders and healers take towards researchers lies partly in their awareness of how the personal accounts of non-Indigenous individuals may potentially represent Indigenous people. Though Gene instructed me to speak for myself, it is clear that if he did not respect my interpretations and understandings of Lakota tradition, he would not have participated in this project.

<sup>9</sup> Thin Elk. "Personnel Communication" Summer 1999.

care to Indigenous people, incomplete and unrepresentative understandings of Indigenous culture can do as much harm as good.

Programs for health care professionals may develop a range of educational options with Indigenous communities to create more cross-cultural education and awareness. Medical school curriculums and those of other health care practitioners, could involve cross-cultural units. These units would have the dual purpose of exposing students to the unique needs, history and culture of a segment of their patient population, as well as alternative perspectives on health, healing and health care delivery. In addition to some exposure to the literature and in class presentations by cultural experts and traditional healers, experiential components would be essential. Cultural experts and Healers should be consulted and approached, following traditional protocol, for assistance in developing community-based educational and ceremonial experiences.<sup>10</sup> Participation in a Sweat Lodge, assisting in the gathering of medicines and spending time in Indigenous communities would all provide important contributions to Western medical practitioner's education.

A single afternoon lecture or experience cannot be considered adequate time devoted to understanding traditional healing or Indigenous issues. As demonstrated in this paper, years of experience provide only an introductory understanding of Indigenous healing. Recognizing the limited amount of time available for the tremendous amount of material needed to be covered in medical programs, a sincere commitment to education on Indigenous healing ways must find a way to accord appropriate time. In addition to mandatory community-based experiences developed with Indigenous healers for

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<sup>10</sup> Ellerby, J.

students, medical elective time could also be spent working with and learning from traditional healers. Communities with active traditional healers, or traditional healer's clinics could be consulted as sites for accredited medical electives and nursing practicums. This would allow for students to further explore non-Western healing modalities while affirming the equal merit of traditional healing systems within an institutional framework.<sup>11</sup>

If non-Indigenous people can understand Indigenous healing in some basic manner, then it will become more likely that non-Indigenous organizations and governments will accept and support the importance of Indigenous healing and health initiatives in a manner that *reflects and respects* Indigenous culture and tradition. Conditional support of Indigenous programs that suit Western standards of "acceptable" programming or practices is unacceptable, given the impossibility of actualizing the full spiritual, holistic nature of healing within a biomedical or institutional model. Indigenous people will reclaim health and wellness when they are supported to act independently or cooperatively based on community based needs and philosophies.

### **Western Scholarship and Indigenous Ways: Co-operation and Respect**

If non-Indigenous people are to understand Indigenous healing, then there must be a change in the nature, manner and quality of the research that is being conducted. The literature to date is deficient and must be addressed,<sup>12</sup> as well as the colonial context in

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<sup>11</sup> See RCAP Path to Healing for further commentary and recommendations.

<sup>12</sup> Churchill. Deloria Red Earth; Mihesuah; Thornton.

which it has emerged.<sup>13</sup> These changes in scholarship and understanding can begin immediately with leadership, direction, and cooperation from Indigenous scholars, healers, and spiritual leaders.

Much in the way Western medicine stands to benefit from Indigenous influence, both in terms of its capacity to care for Indigenous people and to better meet the holistic healing needs of all people, so to does Western scholarship stand to gain from the influence of Indigenous research epistemologies and methods. Indigenous approaches to research primarily stand to enhance fields of Indigenous studies. Utilizing the process of relationship and full community immersion may assure a significant level of productivity and respect in research involving Indigenous people and communities. Indigenous processes of learning seem to simultaneously ensure an intimate *experience* in education/research, while intrinsically imbuing the student/researcher with the respect necessary to prevent the exploitation of Indigenous knowledge.

Beyond fields of Indigenous studies, Indigenous approaches to learning and research may contribute to Western academics as a whole. Indigenous approaches complement and affirm many disciplines such as transcultural psychiatry, transpersonal psychology, parapsychology, and religious studies. Additionally, many research methodologies and methods may find the potential for mutual support and evidence. Hermeneutics, phenomenology, case study method, narrative inquiry, self-narrative inquiry and experiential models of education are examples of broadly used Western

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<sup>13</sup> Axtell, J. *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Frideres, J. *Native People in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts*. Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1983. Miller, J. R., ed. *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White relations in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

methods and methodologies which can be strengthened through dialogue with centuries old Indigenous traditions.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Future of Indigenous Health and Healing**

The health status of Indigenous people around the world remains disturbingly poor. Rates of malnutrition, communicable diseases and infant mortality are universally higher than national averages.<sup>15</sup> Due to the impact of colonizing nations and chronic poverty, Indigenous people are internationally over-represented among the world's most poor and unhealthy people:

Indigenous peoples are over-represented among the world's poor. This does not mean only that they have low incomes. Poverty is multi-dimensional and like others in poverty, indigenous peoples are less likely to live in safe or adequate housing, more likely to be denied access to safe water and sanitation, more likely to be malnourished, and more likely to lack access to appropriate, affordable, and culturally-sensitive health services.<sup>16</sup>

Even in countries that enjoy the highest levels of economic prosperity, democracy, and health care, Indigenous people continue to suffer.<sup>17</sup> Canadian and American statistics

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<sup>14</sup> Spiegekeberg, H. Doing Phenomenology: Essays On and In Phenomenology. Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975. Stewart, D., and A. Mickunas. Exploring Phenomenology: A Guide to its Field and its Literature. Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 1974. Widdershoven, G. A. M. "The Story of Life: Hermeneutic Perspectives on the Relationship Between Narrative and Life History." The Narrative Study of Lives. Eds. Josselson and A. Lieblich. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993. 1-20.

<sup>15</sup> Bruntland: Young Native American. Long and Fox.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Young Native American.

show that Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in health care and correctional institutions wherever they are a resident population.<sup>18</sup>

In a growing number of Indigenous communities, people are looking towards traditional spirituality and healing as a source of personal and community health and wellness. Traditional Indigenous healers work ceaselessly to meet the overwhelming needs of Indigenous people, and largely without the support of non-Indigenous organizations or government. While non-Indigenous support for traditional healing is not necessary to validate or maintain its effects in Indigenous communities, it is clear that financial and philosophical support would greatly strengthen the role of traditional holistic/spiritual healing in the future of Indigenous nations.

In future efforts to improve the holistic health of Indigenous people, more complete and authentic cross-cultural understanding and education will be critical. As such, the quality of the resources and studies available will become all the more significant. Indigenous spirituality and healing has been a subject of non-Indigenous study for over one hundred years now and there is no sign of abatement. Much of this study is academic and rarely, with the exception of some work in community medicine,<sup>19</sup> and exceptions in other fields,<sup>20</sup> has the study of Indigenous healing traditions served the healers and self-defined health needs of Indigenous people.

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<sup>18</sup> Department of Health Services. Indian Health Service: Trends in Indian Health 1990. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, 1990. Long and Fox. Galloway, J.M., B. W. Goldberg, and J. S. Alpert. Primary Care of Native American Patients: Diagnosis, Therapy and Epidemiology. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999. Office of Technology Assessments. Indian Health Care. Washington, DC: Congress of the United States, 1986.

<sup>19</sup> Kaufert; Kaufert and Koolage; Kaufert et al.; O'Neil "Fourth World"; "Referrals"; "Aboriginal Health Policy; Waldram; Waldram et al.

<sup>20</sup> O'Meare and West.

The understanding of Indigenous healing traditions *as Indigenous people would choose to have it understood*, is essential to recognizing the incredible sophistication, beauty, and contribution that they stand to make to the medical models of non-Indigenous people. Furthermore, Indigenous healing systems, like the spiritual, holistic healing ways of the Lakota, are vital to the health of Indigenous people and culture. This paper has sought to affirm these positions by presenting a unique understanding of the nature of Lakota healing.



## Chapter 7: Return to the Seventh Direction

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In the message that is going out to the world from this moment, I ask *Wakan Tanka* to bless those people that receive it, and learn something from it, that maybe even one word from it will cure people of the problems they have.

*Pete S. Catches, Oglala Sioux<sup>1</sup>*

Healing is a subject that touches each of us, everyday. We all have family and friends who struggle with sickness or turmoil in life. Each of us struggles to find health, happiness, meaning, and balance in our lives. We all have further to go to fulfill our true potential in mind, body, heart and spirit.

In keeping with the creative design and Indigenous influence in this paper, this seventh chapter is, in fact, un-written. This is the point at which my experience, and my written words, become your own experience. This is an invitation to explore healing in your own life. Just as I cannot speak for Thin Elk, no matter how much he shows, tells or teaches me; each reader will have a unique experience of this material. What is your experience?

Some people will feel like they are "coming home" to ideas and beliefs they have always held. Some people will be uncomfortable with the style and concepts used, rejecting them as foreign before even considering them with their heart and spirit. Yet, nothing is ever read solely with the mind. We are whole people in all we do; try as we may to deny that. Let each aspect of your Self reflect on these ideas and stories; notice how the Eye of the Heart reads and understands differently than the eyes of the body, or mind.

Written between prayers, and at a time when attending regular *Inipi* ceremonies, I believe this paper, from its inception, was guided by a spiritual reality. Just as I have discussed the purposeful nature of all life experiences on the *Chanku Luta*, this was written for a reason beyond my own knowledge. Therefore, the fact that this has ended up in your hands - that you have read this - has happened for a reason. What is it? What are you being asked to look at in your life? What inside you wants to answer the call to healing? The seventh chapter is wordless, written by you, and never ends. It is the possibility and the opportunity to *return to the seventh direction*.

The seventh direction lives within us. It empowers us to know how to live on this earth... The seventh direction is going to dictate how we live with all the other directions, and the people, places and things within those other directions... Everything that we are seeking already lives inside us... [Its] an empowerment process. If we look inside, all other things in this life will make sense to us. All other things won't be as hard as we make them...

We must first balance this before anything - anything we attempt in life. We can have the greatest government, the greatest funding, the greatest job - anything. But, it won't bring our people back to a point of health and wellness and productivity if we don't look inside of ourselves first. We have to change ourselves individually and then all things will come back in a good way.

- *Gene Thin Elk*

Wo'pila Mitakuyapi, Thank you my relatives.  
Mitakuye Oyasin, We Are All Related.

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<sup>1</sup> Catches and Catches 23.

### A Brief Description of Common Lakota Ceremonies

Among the Sioux there were, historically, seven central community ceremonial rites:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Chamunpa*: The Sacred Pipe Ceremony
2. *Inipi*: The Sweat Lodge
3. *Hanblecha*: The Vision Quest
4. *Wiwangwacipi*: The Sun Dance
5. *Hunkapi*: The Making of Relatives
6. The Keeping of the Soul
7. *Ishna Ta Awi Cha Lowan*: Preparing a Girl for Womanhood

These ceremonies occur during different stages of human life, and seasonal change.

Though different in nature, the common focus among all of them was the health and healing of individuals and the community. Proper, regular involvement in the essential community ceremonies was, and still is, seen as fundamental to Lakota healing.<sup>2</sup>

The prohibition of Sioux ceremonies and gatherings during the 1800s and 1900s resulted in the loss of cultural continuity, knowledge and reduced the importance and frequency of some of these ceremonies.<sup>3</sup> Today, these ceremonies are practiced in varying degrees depending on the region and the community. The most common of these community ceremonies today are the *Chamupa* (Pipe Ceremony), *Inipi*, (Sweat Lodge), the *Hanblecha* (Vision Quest) and the *Wiwangwacipi* (Sun Dance).<sup>4</sup> Each of these four

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<sup>1</sup> Brown Sacred Pipe; Looks for Buffalo Hand; Powers, Oglala.

<sup>2</sup> Bucko; Duran and Duran; Lewis Medicine Men; Lyon and Black Elk.

<sup>3</sup> Deloria Custer; Erdoes and Crow Dog; Feraca Wakinyan; Lewis Medicine Men; Pettipas; Waldram, et al.

<sup>4</sup> Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer; Powers Oglala, 86-103, 129, 155; Lewis Medicine Men; St. Pierre and Long Soldier 27, 28, 45.

ceremonies are used to bring psychological, physical, spiritual and emotional healing to individuals and communities.<sup>5</sup>

### Chanunpa: The Sacred Pipe Ceremony

Any use of the Lakota Sacred Pipe is considered both a ceremony and a healing event. One of the most sacred and central objects of the Lakota, the *Chanunpa* embodies everything holy and is intrinsic as a component to virtually every major ceremony, especially the seven sacred rites.<sup>6</sup> The *Chanunpa* is a powerful intercessor and serves to connect human beings to Spiritual Beings and realities in a way otherwise only common to visions. Maintaining and bringing about health and healing are fundamental to the use and function of the *Chanunpa*, "...when you have that *Chanunpa* [Sacred Pipe], you have to be humble and sincere. You ask for *health* and *help*. These are the two key words that the *Chanunpa* carries."<sup>7</sup>

### Inipi: The Sweat Lodge Ceremony

The *Inipi*, which translated means "to make live" or "to make the soul strong," is also a ceremony unto itself and a component element of other ceremonies like the *Yuwipi*, the Sun Dance and the *Hanblecha*.<sup>8</sup> The *Inipi* is used in preparation for other ceremonies and events, for specific "doctoring" or healing treatments, and commonly as a regular

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<sup>5</sup> See Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer; Erdoes and Lame Deer Gift; Lewis Medicine Men; Looks For Buffalo Hand; Lyon and Black Elk; Mails Fools Crow.

<sup>6</sup> Brown Sacred Pipe; Lyon and Black Elk 52; Powers Oglala 164.

<sup>7</sup> Lyons and Black Elk 54.

<sup>8</sup> Bucko; Walker Lakota Belief 83.

preventative health care practice. The *Inipi* "strengthens the life [vitality] and purifies the body;"<sup>9</sup> "*Inipi* makes clean everything inside the body... to put out of [a person's] body all that makes him [or her] tired, or all that causes disease, or all that causes him [or her] to think wrong."<sup>10</sup>

### Hanblecha: The Vision Quest Ceremony

*Hanblecha* is not known for its capacity to bring about immediate physical healing.<sup>11</sup> Mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, however, are remedied and maintained through this rite.<sup>12</sup> *Hanblecha* plays a variety of roles in healing among the Lakota. For healers and spiritual leaders, *Hanblecha* is a fundamental means by which they acquire, develop and expand their healing gifts and abilities.<sup>13</sup> Among the non-ritual specialists, the "lay" community, *Hanblecha* also serves many purposes, such as to help in the understanding of a spontaneous vision experience; to prepare for another ceremony like the Sun Dance or *Yuwipi*; to gain insight into personal issues and vocation; or to entreat Spirit/ual forces for healing. Black Elk notes that *Hanblecha* is an important experiential conduit that "give[s] strength and health to our nation."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* 79.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* 83, 84.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed exploration of Vision Quest see Dugan, K. M. *The Vision Quest of the Plains Indians*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985. Irwin, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> See Lewis *Medicine Men: Powers Oglala*.

<sup>13</sup> Erdoes and Lame Deer *Lame Deer*; Erdoes and Lame Deer *Gift*; Powers *Oglala*; Walker *Lakota Belief*.

<sup>14</sup> Brown *Sacred Pipe* 44.

### **Wiwangwacipi: The Sun Dance Ceremony**

Finally, the Sun Dance is known as the great annual Lakota ceremony of renewal, thanksgiving and healing.<sup>15</sup> This summer ceremony incorporates all the various rituals describe in this section. Since communal health and individual health are inextricably interrelated, this community ceremony is vital to the health of Lakota communities and individuals. Most Sun Dance participants pledge to dance without food or water for one to four days. The dancing and ceremonies occur within a Sacred Circle, surrounded by a shaded arbor; in the center stands a sacred tree, which is brought from afar and erected for the ceremony.

Dancers pledge to dance and fast with the intention of invoking healing in their lives and the lives of those they love.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, within the Sun Dance, there is often one or more specific rounds devoted to the direct healing of people attending. Lakota people attest to the incredible power of the Sun Dance to heal diseases and conditions untreatable by Western medicine. Cancer, paralysis, psychiatric disorders, and emotional traumas are only a few examples of some of the illnesses and conditions that may be healed during a Sun Dance.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Amiotte "Sun Dance;" Brown Sacred Pipe; Holler. Mails Fools Crow, Wisdom, Spirits.

<sup>16</sup> Mails Sundancing.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis Medicine Men; Mails Sundancing; Walker Sun Dance.

### A Brief Overview of Six Basic Classes of Lakota Healers

The following overview is developed from the literature and reflects a combination of academic and Lakota classification. Though these categories are developed from Lakota tradition and the ethnographic literature, it is important to note that in the communities that I have visited there are clear differentiations in the title given to different individual healers, however, they do not necessarily correspond to the categories in the literature. *Wicasa Wakan* is the more common term for those who are herein classed as *Pejuta Wicaša* and *Wapiye*. As well, most healers have knowledge and skill outside their specific class or title. Spiritual leaders, herbalists, and shamans are useful pedagogical terms, but do not reflect the commonalties that exist among the many types of Lakota healers.

#### *Wicaša Wakan*

The *Wicaša Wakan* always composed a small segment of the Lakota population. These men and women are a combination of mystic and healer. Having trained in various healing arts and having been blessed with many healing gifts and abilities, the *Wicaša Wakan*, ideally leads a rigorous life of the highest moral and ethical caliber. These spiritual leaders are generally not fully acknowledged until post-menopausal in age. Though a *Wicaša Wakan* may practice within any of the following categories of healers, counseling, spiritual leadership, metaphysical insight and a model lifestyle set the *Wicaša*

*Wakan* apart.<sup>1</sup> Today the people referred to as *Wicaša Wakan* tend to be a combination of *Wapiye* and *Pejuta Wicaša*; there is less emphasis on an ideal lifestyle as the literature suggests.

*Pejuta Wicaša:*

The *Pejuta Wicaša* are most commonly referred to in English as "Medicine Men and Medicine Women." These terms come from the literal meaning of "*pejuta*" which refers to medicinal plants. *Pejuta Wicaša* receive spiritual guidance and use ceremony just like the other healers of the Lakota, however, they specialize in pharmacological remedies.<sup>2</sup> These healers treat as wide a range of illnesses and conditions as any healer, but specialize in the treatment of day-to-day ailments, like wounds, toothaches, sprains, gastroenteritis and broken bones. Material based treatment, contextualized by ceremony and Spirit/ual interaction is characteristic of the Medicine Person. A wide age range is represented among these healers, though younger adepts are less common. Men and women are equally represented.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent and rare commentary regarding the meaning of being a *Wicaša Wakan* see Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer 144-148.

<sup>2</sup> Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer. Lewis Medicine Men: Powers Oglala. Sacred.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the roles and frequency of Lakota women healers in general see Powers. M.: St. Pierre and Long Soldier.

## *Wapiye*

*Wapiye* is a Lakota term that refers to shamanic healers. While all Lakota shamans and shamanic rituals had commonalities, there was great deal of variety among them. The *Wapiye* were known for their ability to heal primarily through direct interactions with Spirits and travel in the Spirit/ual world. In this type of healing the healer is seen as a conduit or intercessor for spiritual powers and Spirit Beings. *Wapiye* may work in a variety of settings or ceremonies, however, they traditionally focus on *Yuwipi*, *Lowanpi*, and *Inipi* ceremonies. Today most Lakota refer to *Wapiye* as *Wicaša Wakan*. Most *Yuwipi* men I have met are referred to as *Wicaša Wakan* and not as *Wapiye*.

The *Yuwipi* and *Lowanpi* are similar ceremonies, most often held at night in a pitch black room, and involve the presence of loud singing, drumming, and an intricate arrangement of ceremonial items and community supporters. In these ceremonies superhuman feats and unexplainable experiences (such as the entrance of a buffalo into the ceremonial room) often occur while the shaman is in contact with the spiritual world.<sup>4</sup>

Among the main types or classes of *Wapiye* (shamans) were the *Yuwipi*, the bone doctors, and those who had specific powers related to specific Spirit helpers.<sup>5</sup> The ceremonies used by each of these are similar in organization and principle, yet they differ in detail. *Yuwipi* shamans are tied up inside a blanket at the beginning of their ceremony and are released by Spirits during it. These ceremonies frequently involve the physical presence of Spirits evidenced by flashing lights in the blackened room. Bone doctors use

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<sup>4</sup> Erdoes and Crow Dog; Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer; Kemnitzer "Yuwipi." "Structure." "Culture"; Lewis Medicine Men, "Yuwipi."

<sup>5</sup> For more on these three types of shamans see Powers Sacred 181-183.

a hollow bone to suck the illness out of the patient. The ceremonies of Spirit specific shamans would be unique in the sensory experience of the shaman's Spirit guide/helper. These helpers may be animal or human Spirits and would require highly specialized songs and ceremonial equipment.<sup>6</sup> Most *Wapiye* tend to be men and, like other healers, are more commonly older.

### *Wakan Kaga*

The *Wakan Kaga*, are known as sacred performers who perform sacred and superhuman feats based on gifts and abilities given through vision experiences. These people were historically organized into societies, often called "cults" in anthropological literature. Though healing is not the central role of these people or their societies, many have some exceptional abilities to heal. Depending on the society, both men and women can be sacred performers. Some societies, like the Double-Woman Society, are all women, some are mixed gender, and some are for only men. The *Heyoka* Society, Wolf Society and Buffalo Society are examples of societies of sacred performers.<sup>7</sup>

### *Wicahmunga*

*Wicahmunga* are Lakota men and women with spiritual knowledge and power that operate outside the standard Lakota societies that govern people's roles and relationships. Uncommon in recent literature, the English terms for these people are "wizards and witches." Though approached with caution, *Wicahmunga* were powerful

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed descriptions of *Yuwipi* and *Lowanpi* see Erdoes and Lame Deer: Powers *Yuwipi*.

<sup>7</sup> See Dorsey "Siouan;" Lowie "Dance;" Powers *Oglala*; Wissler "Societies."

people and employed a range of abilities and practices to heal and treat the sick. They are consulted based on their individual strengths for a particular illness or condition.

### *Winkte*

The Lakota *Winkte* is a third gender among the Sioux. Male in body, *Winktes* identify themselves in varying degrees as women. Some *Winktes* take on the full dress, deportment and social role of women. Though not commonly referred to as a class of healers, *Winktes* were known to have a variety of unique healing abilities and sacred gifts to cure or ensure health. *Winkte* practices were highly individual. While there is vast evidence for the historical existence of *Winktes*, there is little detailed information in the literature on their healing practices and procedures.<sup>8</sup> Further, due to the impact of colonial and contemporary non-Lakota influence, most Lakota communities have been socialized to reject the *Winkte's* traditional role as an accepted third gender and gifted healer.

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<sup>8</sup> For more on *Winkte* healing abilities and *Winktes* in general see Blackwood, E. "Native American Genders and Sexualities: Beyond Anthropological Models and Misrepresentations." Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality and Spirituality. Eds. J. S., Thomas, W., and S. Lang. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997. 285-294. Callender, C. and L. M. Kochems. "The North American Berdache." Current Anthropology 24:4 (1983): 443-70. Forgey, D. "The Institution of Berdache Among the North American Plains Indian." Journal of Sex Research 11:1 (1975): 1-15. Lang, S. Men as Women, Women as Men: Changing Gender in Native American Cultures. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998. Powers Sacred 188, 189; Rosco, W. Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America. New York: St. Martin's, 1998. Williams, W. L. "Persistence and Change in the Berdache Tradition Among Contemporary Lakota Indians." The Many Faces of Homosexuality: Anthropological Approaches to Homosexual Behavior. Ed. E. Blackwood. New York: Harrington, 1986a. Williams, W. L. The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986b.

## Appendix C

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### A Brief Overview of the Lakota Understanding of *Wakan'tanka*

In the literature a variety of descriptions of *Wakan'tanka* appear. These, seemingly conflicting accounts, demonstrate the multivalent and mysterious nature of the Lakota understanding of *Wakan'tanka*. Over time, a few specific conceptualizations have emerged in the literature as representative of the Lakota understanding of *Wakan'tanka*. James Walker, who lived and studied Sioux theology on Pine Ridge, recorded several Lakota who stated that *Wakan'tanka* was understood by the shamans and holy people as the supreme being and force in creation that takes expression in sixteen specific and distinct manifestations. These sixteen manifestations, as featured below in figure 4 were understood in vertical, horizontal, quadratic, and dyadic relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the Walker texts no similar description of *Wakan'tanka* is recorded. Subsequently, however, *Wakan'tanka* is described in authoritative texts according to the Walker interviews, with no additional supporting field or text based evidence.<sup>2</sup> Walker's material is assumed to be representative of Lakota philosophy. In contrast, most of the Lakota healers and spiritual leaders who have recorded commentary on *Wakan'tanka* have chosen to focus on other explanations or aspects of *Wakanatanka*.<sup>3</sup>

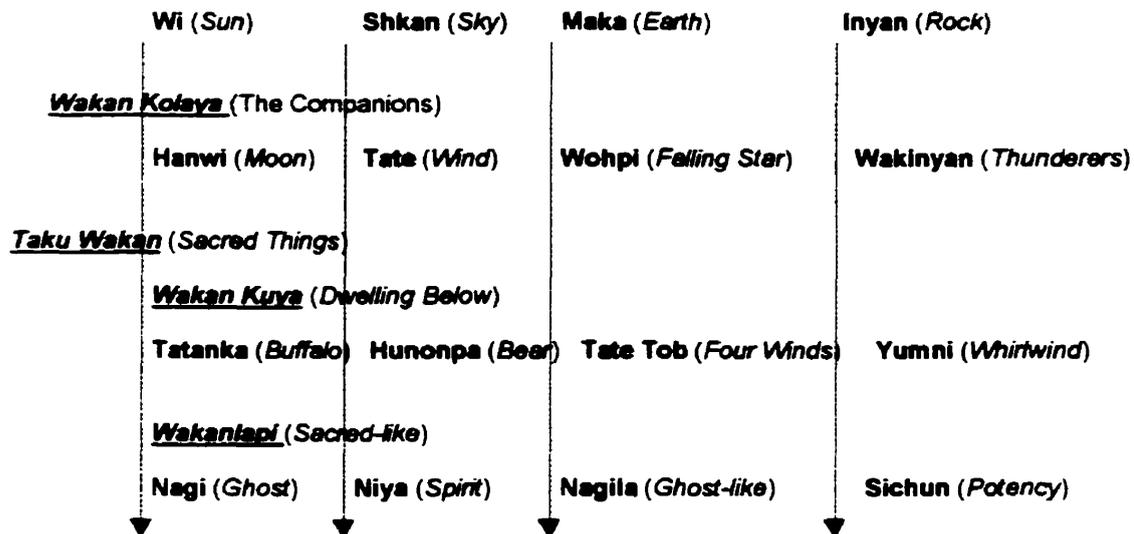
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<sup>1</sup> For further explorations see Grobsmith Lakota; Powers Oglala; Schwarz: Walker Lakota Belief.

<sup>2</sup> Even in recent years some of the most experienced and prominent Sioux scholars have relied almost solely on the texts of Walker in their own work. DeMallie, Jahner and Powers all discuss *Wakan'tanka* with heavy dependence on Walker's model. Foundational scholars like Hassrick show little influence of any source other than Walker in the study of Sioux theology. For other examples of this single source dependency see Dugan and Schwarz.

<sup>3</sup> Catches and Catches; Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer, Mails Fools Crow.

Figure 4.

**WAKANTANKA****Wakan kin (The Sacred)****Wakan Ankatu (The Superior)**

In Black Elk Speaks, and The Sacred Pipe, Nicholas Black Elk affirms monotheistic understandings of *Wakan'tanka*. Black Elk's emphasis of *Wakan'tanka* as singular and personalized as male has been well referenced by Sioux scholars asserting the comparability between the Sioux *Wakan'tanka* and Judeo-Christian concepts of God.<sup>4</sup>

Wakantanka, Grandfather, You are the first and always have been... O Grandfather and father Wakantanka, maker of all that is, who always has been, behold me!... My Grandfather, Wakantanka, You are everything. And my Father, Wakantanka, all things belong to you!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Steinmetz Pipe; Stolzman Pipe and Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Brown Sacred Pipe 33,37,48.

John Lame Deer describes *Wakan'tanka* as both singular and multiple in nature. It is presumed that he maintains both the monotheistic perspective describe by Nicholas Black Elk, and the polytheistic qualities described by Walker and the Lakota men who were recorded by him.

The gods are separate beings, but they are all united in *Wakan'tanka*. It is hard to understand - something like the Holy Trinity. You can't explain it except by going back to the 'circle within circles' idea, the spirit splitting itself up into stones, trees, tiny insects even making them all *wakan* by his ever-presence. And in turn all these myriad of things which make up the universe flowing back to their source, united in the one Grandfather Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

The realization that there is no single answer to "who is the God of the Sioux" is an answer in itself. It has been argued that the concept of *Wakan'tanka* is ancient and central to Sioux theology;<sup>7</sup> it has been argued that *Wakan'tanka* is best understood as the totality of the Spirit World,<sup>8</sup> that *Wakan'tanka* is best understood as sixteen particular manifestations,<sup>9</sup> that *Wakan'tanka* is a single entity,<sup>10</sup> that the term is intentionally ineffable,<sup>11</sup> and even that the concept of *Wakan'tanka* never existed prior to extensive

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<sup>6</sup> Erdoes and Lame Deer Lame Deer 103.

<sup>7</sup> Walker Lakota Belief.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> DeMallie, 1986; Powers, 1975.

<sup>10</sup> Steinmetz..

<sup>11</sup> Meyer, L. and Ramirez, T. "Wakinyan Hotan, The Thunder Beings Call Out: The Inscrutability of Lakota/Dakota Metaphysics." From our Eyes: Learning from Indigenous Peoples. Eds. S. O'Meara and D. West. Garamond Press: Toronto, 1996. 89-105.

European contact.<sup>12</sup> In the literature there is evidence to support each of these positions and there is evidence to refute each of these positions.

Including monotheistic views, polytheistic views, and undefinable metaphysics, there are a wide range of manners in which *Wakan'tanka* is understood. For some Lakota, like Thin Elk, each understanding represents a different aspect of *Wakan'tanka*, and so are never at odds. For others, different theologies may be perceived as contrasting, but never conflicting.

The totality of... life-giving forces was called *Wakan'tanka*... *Wakan'tanka* was the sum of all that was considered mysterious, powerful or sacred... *Wakan'tanka* never had birth and so never could die. The *wakan'tanka* created the universe, but at the same time comprised the universe.<sup>13</sup>

Regardless of the conceptualization, there is a general understanding that *Wakan'tanka*, is the source and divine regulator of the cosmos. As such *Wakan'tanka* is the ultimate source of all healing. The divergence of opinions and beliefs expressed in the literature is not a reflection of poor scholarship, or unrepresentative informants; rather, the wide range of understandings of *Wakan'tanka* expressed in the literature affirms the complex nature of *wakan'tanka* and the highly individual and pluralistic nature of Lakota culture.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Riggs "Theogeny."

<sup>13</sup> DeMallie and Parks 28.

<sup>14</sup> Rice Great Spirit.

## Appendix D

**Lakota and Western Biomedical Philosophies of Medicine and Healing:****A Comparison Chart**

The following chart compares Lakota healing with the biomedical model. Through this chart the role of philosophy in the delivery of care becomes evident. Western practitioners and patients who seek a more holistic experience of medicine and healing may look to this for examples and things to consider; this chart has been developed as a pedagogical tool to aid discussion and interplay between healers and healing systems. It is important to note that this chart divides and categorizes philosophies, attitudes and behaviors to illustrate the extremes of difference between these to systems of healing. Naturally, each system may contain elements of the other depending upon the individual practitioner. The reader is cautioned not to assume these general points as being descriptive of all Lakota and/or Western practitioners.

<b>Category of Comparison</b>	<b>Lakota Healing Philosophy</b>	<b>Western Biomedical Model</b>
<b>Source of healing</b>	<b>From God: through the Spirit World, healer and the patient. Procedures and remedies are secondary.</b>	<b>What the expert/institution provides: knowledge, technology, technique.</b>
<b>Concept of body</b>	<b>Holistic, spiritual: temporary home for the soul.</b>	<b>Materialistic, biochemical.</b>
<b>Authority in healing relationship</b>	<b>In God, Spirit World and patient.</b>	<b>In practitioner as expert, and medical establishment.</b>
<b>Healer's relationship to information</b>	<b>Passive: Received, earned, observed, over time.</b>	<b>Active: gathered, probing, time bound, entitled.</b>
<b>Healer's relationship to patient</b>	<b>Personal, equal, sympathetic, walking with.</b>	<b>Caring, detached, hierarchical, empathetic, leading.</b>

<b>Relationship to diagnosis</b>	<b>Spiritual:</b> through prayer, meditation; assisted by Spirit Beings; passive, allowing events to unfold, also Bio-physical knowledge.	<b>Problem solving, solution oriented, allopathic, assume position of expert, Precedent and evidence based.</b>
<b>Healer's relationship to healing process</b>	<b>Passive:</b> Trust in natural cycles and Spiritual World, allowing things to happen, defined in the moment, accepts mystery, patient driven.	<b>Active highly directive, time driven, cure focus, efficient.</b>
<b>Healing focus</b>	<b>Prevention focus; holistic healing, understanding meaning, address causation, balance, relationships.</b>	<b>Treatment focus; cure, removal of symptoms; prevention and behavioral education when possible (ex: diet, exercise).</b>
<b>Accountability</b>	<b>God, Spirit World and equal interpersonal relationship.</b>	<b>Physician and medical establishment, legalistic.</b>
<b>Ethics and decision making</b>	<b>Individualized, circumstantial, prayer/vision based, involving family and community.</b>	<b>Standardized, legalistic, formula based, autonomy versus family.</b>

## Glossary

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### Pronunciation:

The majority of Lakota definitions and spelling forms have been taken from Buechel and Manhart's Dictionary of Teton Sioux: With Consideration Given to Yankton and Santee Dialects.<sup>1</sup> Divergence from this text is based on the source material which the Lakota terms are associated with in this paper. For example, different authors write *Wakan'tanka* differently. If quoting from a text, the form used in that text is preserved though it may not be consistent with Buechel and Manhardt and the form in this paper.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage a detailed discussion of Lakota syntax and pronunciation. The following basic elements, however, will assist the reader to more adequately read and pronounce.

š is pronounced sh, as in "shape"

c is pronounced ch, as in "chin"

Sometime ch is written in place of c and is pronounced as it reads: for example "chanunpa."

a is pronounced ah, as in "apple"

é is pronounced ay, as in "day"

i is pronounced as ee, as in "cheap" or "sheep"

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<sup>1</sup> Buechel, E. and P. Manhart. A Dictionary - Oie Wowapi Wan of Teton Sioux: With Consideration Given to Yankton and Santee Dialects. Pine Ridge, SD: Red Cloud Indian School. 1983.

### Lakota Terms Used in Text:

*Até:* Lakota term for "father," "dad."

*Chanku Luta:* The Red Road.

*Changleška Wakan:* Sacred Hoop, Sacred Circle.

*Chamunpa:* The Sacred Pipe of the Lakota/Dakota/ Nakota Sioux

*Eyapaha:* announcer, camp crier/herald.

*Giveaway:* A common social and ceremonial custom of giving gifts and feeding family and/or community members. Everyone in attendance receives a gift. Special gifts are sometimes given to community Elders and spiritual leaders as well as guests that have traveled far or who played significant roles in the ceremony associated with the particular Giveaway. A Giveaway is a ceremony in itself, but is also usually a part of a larger ceremony, such as a *Hanblecha*, a Memorial, or a *Wo'pila*.

*Ina:* Mother

*Inipi:* The Sweat Lodge. Literal translations: to make live, to give life.

*Kola:* Friend. Traditionally refers to a very close friend, and a relationship in which each would give their life willingly for the other.

*Hanblecha (Hanbleceya):* Vision Quest. Also referred to as "Fasting," or to go "On The Hill." Literal translations: to cry for a dream.

*Hochoka:* a courtyard, or area surrounded by tents or houses. In ceremonial language, a sacred space, alter, or circle.

*Lakol wicho'han:* The Lakota Way, The Lakota Way of Being.

*Lowanpi:* A Night Sing, or Spirit Calling Ceremony.

*Maka:* Earth

*Mitakuye Oyasin:* All My Relations, or We Are All Related.

*Oceti Šakowin:* The Seven Fire Places, the original self-named title of the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota confederacy.

*On'aspeyapi:* Balance.

*Pilamaya*: Thank you.

*Slolic'iya*: To know oneself, knowing all of your self.

*Smudge/s*: The use of the smoke from sacred plants, like Sage, Cedar, and Sweetgrass, to purify, spiritually cleanse, protect, and heal. Important and commonly use in ceremony and prayer.

*Taku Wakan*: That Which is Sacred.

*Unchi*: Your Grandmother, Grandmother.

*Wacekiya*: Pray, "to pray."

*Wakan*: Sacred, holy, mysterious.

*Wanagi*: Ghost, Spirits that linger on Earth.

*Wapiye*: Healer, Lakota traditional doctor, shaman.

*Wichozani*: Health.

*Wih'peya*: A Giveaway ceremony.

*Wiping of Tears*: A grieving ceremony, most commonly focused on the passing of loved ones.

*Wiwangwacipi*: Sun Dance.

*Wo'opa*: Law, principle or custom.

*Wo'pila*: "Thank you." Meant with deep gratitude; most commonly used in prayer and ceremonial settings. Also the name of a thanksgiving ceremony that usually involves a feast and sometimes a Giveaway.

*Wošila*: Compassion.

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