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NAVAHO SHAMANISTIC PRACTICE AMONG THE JICARILLA APACHE

MORRIS EDWARD OPLER

The military defeat and pacification of our Western Indians, whatever else it may have brought, has made frequent contact possible between members of tribes which were once bitterly hostile. As a result, the way has been opened for accelerated cultural interchanges, and nowhere is this more true than in the realm of ceremonialism. Therefore, if we are to understand all the factors which today govern the development of Indian religion, we shall have to have a record of the activities of the ritualist who performs among alien groups, and we must have some idea of the influence, or modifying quality of his efforts.

This problem has by no means been entirely ignored; the care with which the path of diffusion of the peyote cult is being traced is a case in point. But the interest has largely been limited to the study of revivalistic and compensatory movements. The fact that among many tribes the older religious complex is still strong, vital, and capable of carrying beyond its present borders has often been overlooked. Consequently, I am bringing together in this paper some examples, recorded during the course of field work in 1934-35,¹ of Navaho ceremonial activity among the Jicarilla Apache.

The first ceremony to be presented is one which the patient, a man then about forty years of age, described to me on three different occasions during my year of contact with him. On the last two occasions he presumably had forgotten that he had previously mentioned the occurrence. Each time he added details and emphasized different aspects of the rite. According to his narratives, the Navaho cured by virtue of the power of Snake and interpreted the malady he sought to heal as a combination of ghost, lightning, and wind sicknesses. The first recital is particularly concerned with the ghost sickness phase of the episode.

Once I was sick. This was about eight years ago. I had pains in my stomach all the time. The doctors didn't know what I had. I was getting thin and drawn and had diarrhea all the time. The pain in my side continued. Finally the doctor said I had appendicitis and he wanted to operate on me. But my relatives wouldn't let him. The doctor had done nothing for me but give me pills and aspirin.

So my relatives got a Navaho. He came and looked at me. He told me what was wrong with me, He said, "You

1. Assistance from the University of Chicago, Columbia University, the National Research Council, and the Southwest Society made this research possible.

are sick from three things, from ghost (čen), lightning, and wind. You are dreaming of a certain dead person all the time."

It was the truth. I had been dreaming of a dead relative who came back to bother me. He wouldn't let me alone. One time I went out to the toilet. I had a blanket around me. I didn't notice till I got up again, but there, just a few feet away from me, a coyote had been sitting all the time.² As I got up it moved away. I wasn't scared at the time but I began to get sick after that.

So this Navaho held three ceremonies over me. He used the "groaning stick" [rhombus] in his ceremonies. He held the first ceremony for a day and night. This was against ghosts. The next day and night he held one against thunder [lightning]. The last one he held for a day and night against wind. After the first ceremony the pain was still there. After the second it was still there also. But after the third ceremony I began to get better and soon was well.

The missionaries all said I was going to die. They came when I was sick to pray for me so I would go to Jesus. But this Navaho cured me. This Navaho who cured me died some time ago.

The second version dwells particularly on the origin of the Navaho's ceremony and on his ritual relations with Snake:

Once I was sick. I had appendicitis. A Navaho came here. He performed a ceremony over me. It lasted two days and one night. He sang, prayed, and carried on a ceremony just like a Jicarilla shaman does. He had got his power from a big snake at a mountain called 'inadahas'ai. He held up his hand after he sang, palm upright, and the snake, by the motion there, told him what he wanted to know. He could feel the snake right on his hand. And the sun, moon, and stars came down and talked to him. He knew many things and he used them together.

He told me what had caused my sickness. It was Coyote [ghost] and a number of other things. He told me to be careful not to scare anyone after that ceremony, for if I did that person would die. He told me not to become angry or get in a fight, for the person with whom I fought would surely die. He told me I could scare even snakes and bears and kill them, but that if I did so I should drag them around by the tail four times in a clockwise circle, and they would come to life. But I never did this; I kept away from them. He put other restrictions on me. He told me I couldn't eat anything from the head or the inside of an animal.

I kept all this for a year. Then I didn't like it, for I had children and was afraid that if I did anything against these restrictions it might harm them. So when this man came the next year, I asked him to make a ceremony and take the restrictions off me. But I was very good for that year and got into trouble with no one.

Some of the people called me a witch on account of this ceremony. They said I had learned evil things from this Navaho.

2. The ghosts of the dead become coyotes according to Jicarilla belief.

This Navaho could do anything with a snake. He was once out on the reservation some place. There was a snake as big as a log going around. It made a track like an automobile tire. The Navaho heard a noise like a cow mooing. He looked around. It was nowhere to be seen. He heard the mooing several times. He went to the place. He came to this big snake. It had legs and arms, short ones. He sprinkled pollen on it four times, put some on its tongue and the top of its head and some around it four times. Then he told it, "You'd better keep away. You might scare some one and you might harm the people." Then the snake went away.

A third account relates the steps the shaman took to counteract the sickness from wind and lightning and contains, moreover, details of the minor ceremony by means of which restrictions were later lifted. There is some inconsistency between this statement and the others concerning the length of time the ceremony continued. However, it is plain that the informant conceives of the rite as a series of loosely connected treatments for his various ailments and does not always differentiate clearly between a segment of the ceremony and the whole. Particularly interesting is the ritual relation between wind and reed which is here asserted:

The reeds belong to the wind. When you are sick from wind, when you get dizzy and have a stomach ache and your appetite stops and you don't feel like eating at all, you go to someone who knows Wind. After he has made you well with his ceremony you must never blow into a reed and you should not go out where the reeds are, for you expose yourself to the sickness again if you do.

Once I was sick in that way. I had what the whites call appendicitis. They got a man who knew Wind to cure me. In his ceremony he had a reed and a flute. He just put them down and sang over them. They always sing of the reed in a good way. It was on top of the ceremonial mountain which the people ascended before they came up on this earth. It was one of the things that made the emergence mountain grow.

He sang for me and painted my body. He put sun, moon, the seven stars, and the north star on my chest, back, and legs. He put the thunder design on my legs, the zigzag that stands for the lightning. He painted me the first morning and then sang that night. He didn't do anything during the second day, but sang all night the second night, stopping only when the sun came up. It was a two-day ceremony.

By means of the painting he gave me the strength of the sun, the moon, and the objects that were painted on me. I became as strong as *has'cín*.^{2a} If I saw a snake I could stamp on it and it would die. Then I could drag it around in a clockwise circle four times and it would come to life again. The same with the bear; if I saw one I could stamp and shout and he would die. Then I could drag him around in four clockwise circles and he, too, would come to life. And if someone tried to fight with me, I could strike and kill him. Or even if a white man wouldn't do what I said, I could clap

2a. These are important dieties, personifications of sources of supernatural power.

my hands together and it would kill his heart. In a short time he would die.

But if I did not like this, I could go back to the man who gave me the ceremony and ask him to give me back my own life, I was told. I might do this one or two years later. Then he would send away the power of the sun, the moon, and the others, he told me.

When the ceremony was made for me, I was told never to let anyone walk over my feet. And because of that paint on me, I was told that I would always love the people. I was told never to use a flute, lest I get sick again. He told me I was not to eat the head, tongue, entrails, lungs, heart, or anything from the inside of any animal.

After a while I wanted it back, I wanted my own life back. I didn't want to hurt the people, even accidentally. I had to be very careful always. I was afraid that even if I yelled at a horse or a sheep or some other animal, and some man was standing close, he would get frightened. So I went to this man who had put the ceremony over me and asked him to give me my life back.

He sang over me all night. He cooked all the things I was not supposed to eat. At sunup we went to the east with these things in two shallow baskets. He sang four songs there and we left the baskets at that place. I was not supposed to look back at them as we went. Before this, about midnight, all who were in the tipi listening, ate. I could eat head or anything else by that time. It all came back to me. This ceremony was just for the one night.

The first time, for the wind ceremony, I had to give him a basket full of cornmeal. That was all he required for the ceremonial gift. The second time I didn't have to give him a ceremonial gift, for he had the things he needed already. I just had to give him some money for himself.

The restored patient of this ceremony has evidently been impressed enough by Navaho shamans to continue his use of them. He tells how he hired one to act as diagnostician for a cross-cousin who is badly crippled with arthritis. Incidentally, he reveals that this Navajo is conducting other ceremonial activities among the Jicarilla:

Another Navaho was present at the ceremony [the Jicarilla ceremonial relay race, held September 15] on the fifteenth this year. I know he is good. I paid him some money and took him to see B. I wanted to know whether B. was going to be crippled up like this all his life, whether he will get better, and what will cure him, a Holiness Rite [a major Jicarilla ceremony which has been referred to in the past as the Bear Dance], or what. The Navaho said he could tell. He stood before B. This Navaho has a way so that his hand moves. Some spirit moves it. He was saying something, and, as he did so, his right hand was moved around and made an outline of a bear on the ground before B. Then he spoke and asked, "Is this the one who makes this man sick?" He drew a number of pictures. Then he spoke to B. "You are sick from three things—from lightning, from snake, and from wind. That is why your leg is crippled up this way."

When he said this, B. thought back and remembered that long ago, when he was still well, he had done something against the lightning. He didn't say what it was. Maybe he picked up a piece of wood from a tree that had been struck by lightning.

Then the Navaho asked his power what could cure B., a Holiness Rite or what kind of ceremony. He told B., "You will get well, but not quickly; it will take a long time." See, the Missionary and the doctor say there is no hope for B., but this Navaho says he will get better.

But the Navaho was here only a few days. He is staying just long enough to do a ceremony for Fred G. Fred is sick from thunder. He was just as badly off as B., all crippled up. He couldn't walk for four years. He sat in one place all the time. Then this Navaho cured him. Now he can walk around without trouble. But he is having the ceremony held over him anyway, so he won't get sick again.

B. would like to have the Navaho perform the ceremony over him at the same time. But B's relatives are poor. They haven't anything. B. has nothing. How can he do it?

It is worth noting that the employment of the Navaho for Fred G. ended in a terrible tragedy and his family began again to think of relieving him by a strictly Jicarilla form of religious practice:

Fred G. is in the hospital. He went crazy. He burned his house down. His mother and his wife ran away. One little girl, a relative, was sleeping in a little brush shelter. He set fire to that, and she was burned to death. He kept everyone off with a club while he did this:

He has been sick for some time with rheumatism, like B. I met his wife and she told me all about it. Last September he had a ceremony performed over him by a Navaho. The Navaho put some restrictions on him. He was not supposed to hit a horse with a stick or to eat certain things. But he went ahead and did everything. That's why he got crazy.

His family want to take him out of the hospital now and have a clown ceremony put over him.³

In the course of discussions with an informant about the red-tailed hawk, I learned of another hand-trembling ceremony carried out by a Navaho practitioner on the Jicarilla Reservation. The ceremony was conducted over another Navaho, a youth who had married a Jicarilla woman, and Jicarilla observers were present.

One time I shot a red-tailed hawk. I shot him in the wing. I was with a Navaho boy. I shot the hawk with a pistol. I told the Navaho boy, "Don't touch him; he will scratch you!" But he hit the bird with a stick, and the blood spilled on top of his hand.⁴

3. Possibly a Holiness Rite is meant here, since this is the curing ceremony still carried on in which the sacred clowns appear. However, sometimes clowns alone are costumed to relieve the sick.

4. The Jicarilla say that the blood, bill, and talons of the hawk are sources of danger. This is essentially because hawks prey on snakes, which are particularly unclean.

In a few days a sore broke out there. The sore went right through his hand. One formed on his foot too. It killed him finally.

A Navaho who had a ceremony with the hand, a ceremony in which the hand is moved by supernatural power, and could find out what happened, looked, held a ceremony over him, and told him, "You know what made you sick. Someone told you not to do something but you did it."

Those sores killed him several years later. He no longer remembered about the hawk, but I did. He had some sores on his body by that time too. I saw that myself.

Not always, as we have seen, do the efforts of the outsider prove beneficial. An unhappy incident which cost the life of the patient and imperiled the safety of the shaman was told in these words:

My brother was very sick and weak. My father got a Navaho to make a ceremony for him. This Navaho, though the boy was too weak, made him go into a sweat-house four times.

Right after that I came out to sheep camp where all this was happening. My brother sat there in terrible condition. His eyes were protruding from his head. I asked, "What's the matter?"

He didn't answer. He just swallowed some food down as fast as he could and lay down. I saw that he was too weak to get up again. So I went after that Navaho and brought him back, for he was the one who had done this.

The Navaho and I went out in the open. It was a clear night. He built a fire and we watched the moon. Under the moonbeam the smoke seemed to gather. We said to each other, "It must be sickness from fire." Then we noticed that the smoke gathered and passed to a point over the sweat-house that he had built for my brother. Neither of us knew what it meant. The Navaho sang and sang. He couldn't find out anything. After a while he went home.

I stayed a while and tried too. Then I went back to my brother. He wouldn't say what was the matter, so I looked him over. I took down his pants. All over the buttocks he was badly burned, even up his back. He was all black there.

I turned to my father. I said, "See! You always say the Navaho have more power. You always stand up for these Navaho. Now look! That Navaho has burned your son."

My father and I went out to gather weeds to chew and spit on my brother. But it was too late. He lived only four days and then died. The Navaho ran away after that night. He was afraid something would happen to him.

But in spite of the suspicion of outsiders which is occasionally revealed in these accounts and the misadventures that sometimes occur, it is plain that Navaho ceremonialists are esteemed by the Jicarilla and are often consulted. It will be interesting to determine how important and enduring these ritual interchanges may become.

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