



JAMES R. WALKER

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# *Lakota Belief and Ritual*

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## 2. Instructing Walker as a Medicine Man. Little Wound, American Horse, and Lone Star, September 12, 1896 (Antoine Herman, interpreter). (AMNH)

We have decided to tell you of the ceremonies of the Oglalas if you will provide a feast. We will do this so you may know how to be the medicine man for the people. . . . (*Feast was promised and afterwards a beef, ten pounds of coffee, a box of crackers, and one hundred pounds of flour were given for the feast.*)

The Oglalas do ceremonies because this pleases the Gods. Some ceremonies please some of the Gods and other ceremonies please other Gods. A shaman has authority over all ceremonies. A shaman should conduct all the greater ceremonies. . . . A simple ceremony may affect only the one who does it. . . . Some ceremonies affect all the people. In such ceremonies all the people have a part to do. If the people do not do their part in such ceremonies, the Gods will be angry. . . .

We will tell you of the ceremonies as if you were an Oglala who wished to take your part in them. We will not tell you of the parts of them that the shamans do secretly. . . .

## 3. *Wakan*. Little Wound. (AMNH)

As the Oglalas speak, this is two words. It is *wa* and it is *kan*. *Wa* means anything which is something. It also means anything with which something can be done. When one says *wakan*, this means anything which is *kan*. *Wakan* is something which is *kan*.<sup>3</sup>

A *wakan* man is one who is wise. It is one who knows the spirits. It is one who has power with the spirits. It is one who communicates with the spirits. It is one who can do strange things. A *wakan* man knows things that the people do not know. He knows the ceremonies and the songs. He can tell the people what their visions mean. He can tell the people what the spirits wish them to do. He can tell what is to be in the future. He can talk with animals and with trees and with stones. He can talk with everything on earth.

The *Wakan Tanka* are those which made everything. They are *Wakanpi*. *Wakanpi* are all things that are above mankind. There are many kinds of the *Wakanpi*. The *Wakan Tanka* are *Wakanpi*. The spirits are *Wakanpi*. The beings that govern things are *Wakanpi*.

The *Wakanpi* have power over everything on earth. They watch mankind all the time. They control everything that mankind does. Mankind should please them in all things. If mankind does not please them, they will do harm to them. They should be pleased by songs and ceremonies. Gifts should be made to them. Mankind should ask them for what they wish. They may be like a father to mankind. But the evil *Wakanpi* are to be feared. They do evil to mankind. There are many of these. The greatest of these is *Iya*. He is *Wakan Tanka*.

Mankind should think about the *Wakanpi* and do what will please them. They should think of them as they think of their fathers and their mothers. But the evil *Wakanpi* they should think of as an enemy.

Animals may be *wakan*. When an animal is *wakan*, then mankind should treat it as if it were one of the *Wakanpi*. Things that do not live may be *wakan*. When anything is food, it is *wakan* because it makes life. When anything is medicine, it is *wakan* for it keeps life in the body. When anything is hard to understand, it is *wakan* because mankind does not know what it is. Anything that is used in the ceremony and songs to the *Wakanpi* is *wakan* because it should not be used for anything else. Little children are *wakan* because they do not speak. Crazy people are *wakan* because the *Wakanpi* are in them. Anything that is very old is *wakan* because no one knows when it was made. Anyone with great power is *wakan* because the *Wakanpi* helps them. Anything that is very dangerous is *wakan* because *Iya*<sup>4</sup> helps it. Anything

that is poison or anything that intoxicates is *wakan* because the Sky helps it.

The songs and the ceremonies of the Oglalas are *wakan* because they belong to the *Wakanpi*. A very old man or a very old woman is *wakan* because they know many things. But an old man is not like a *wakan* man. If he has learned the *wakan* things, then he is a *wakan* man. The spirit of every man is *wakan* and the ghost is *wakan*.

*Wakan Tanka* are many. But they are all the same as one. The evil *Wakan Tanka* is not one of The *Wakan Tanka*.<sup>5</sup> The *Wakan Tanka* are above all the other *Wakanpi*. The Sun is *Wakan Tanka*, and the Sky and the Earth and the Rock. They are *Wakan Tanka*. *Wakinyan*, this is *Wakan Tanka* but it is different from The *Wakan Tanka*. The Thunderbird and the Wind are *Wakan Tanka* with the Sun and the Sky. The stars are *Wakan Tanka*, but they have nothing to do with the people on the earth. Mankind need pay no attention to the stars.

#### ✧ 4. *Wakan Tanka*. Good Seat. (AMNH)

I am an old man. I know what my father said. I know what his father said. In the old times, the Indians knew many things. Now they have forgotten many things. The white men have made them forget that which their fathers told them.

*Wakan* was anything that was hard to understand. A rock was sometimes *wakan*. Anything might be *wakan*. When anyone did something that no one understood, this was *wakan*. If the thing done was what no one could understand, it was *Wakan Tanka*. How the world was made is *Wakan Tanka*. How the sun was made is *Wakan Tanka*. How men used to talk to the animals and birds was *Wakan Tanka*. Where the spirits and ghosts are is *Wakan Tanka*. How the spirits act is *wakan*. A spirit is *wakan*.

In old times, the Indians did not know of a Great Spirit. There are two kinds of spirits. *Wanagi*, that is the spirit (*nagi*) that has once been in a man. *Nagi* (a spirit) has never been in a man. When *wanagi* is in a man, it is *woniya* (the life). When a man dies, his *woniya* is then *wanagi*. When a man is alive, he has his

*woniya* (breath of life) and his *nagi* (spirit). His *nagi* is not a part of himself. His *nagi* cares for him and warns him of danger and helps him out of difficulties. When he dies, it goes with his *wanagi* to the spirit world (*wanagi makoce*). The spirit world is far beyond the pines.

There is no *Nagi Tanka*. How the spirits live in the spirit land and what they do, that is *Wakan Tanka*. The *nagi* are in the world all the time. They do things and talk to men. Then they are *wakan*. The *wica nagi* (the spirit of a man) may come back to the world to see its people.

When a man dies, his *wanagi* leaves his body. It stays near it for a short time. It is well to please it while it lingers near the body. If it is not pleased, it may do some harm to someone. After a time, it goes on the journey to the spirit world. Its *nagi* goes with it to show it the way. It is happy if it has company. If another *wica nagi* goes with it, it is better. It is happy if it can take the *wamaka nagi* (animal spirit) of his horse and his dog. It is happy if it can take *wo nagi* (spirit of food) with it. His gun and food.

The journey is *wakan*. It is *Wakan Tanka*. He must cross a river on a very narrow tree. If he is afraid to cross the river, he returns to the world and wanders about forever. If he crosses the river, he goes to the spirit world.

The spirits live in spirit tipis. They do only what gives them pleasure. There are women in the spirit world. They do not bear children. If a man conquers an enemy, the enemy must serve him in the spirit world. If a man is killed by an enemy, he must serve the one who kills him in the spirit world. A spirit who is serving another in the spirit world may come back to this world and do something that will give him his freedom. Some wise men can call the spirits.

There are good spirits (*nagi*) and bad spirits (*nagi*). The bad spirits are in this world all the time. They only do mischief. They were driven out of the spirit world by the good spirits. A man's spirit (*wica nagi*) may become a bad spirit. The spirit of animals (*wamaka nagi*) may go to the spirit world. Only the spirits of good animals go to the spirit world. The spirits of bad animals like the wolf and the snake do not go to the spirit world.

A spirit is like a shadow. It is nothing. There are other beings. But they are not spirits. They belong to the world. They are *wakan*. They have power over men and things. They are *wo*

*wakan* (belong to the mysterious). They are *taku wakan* (things mysterious).

The *Wakinyan* (Thunderbird) is one. The *Tatanka* (Great Beast)<sup>6</sup> is one; the *Unktehi* (One Who Kills), *Taku Skanskan* (Changes Things), *Tunkan* (Venerable One), *Inyan* (Stone), *Heyoka* (Opposite to Nature), *Waziya* (Of the North), *Iya*,<sup>7</sup> *Tate* (Wind), *Yate*<sup>8</sup> (North Wind), *Yanpa* (East Wind), *Okaga* (South Wind), *Iktomi* (Spider-like). These are all *wakan*. The sun, the moon, the morning star, the evening star, the north star, the seven stars, the six stars, the rainbow—these are all *wakan*.

Anything that moves or does anything has a spirit. Men give the spirits things to get their help or they give them things to keep them from doing them harm. If the spirits would stay away from men, then the men would care nothing for them, only for the spirits of their friends. The spirits often do things against each other. The strongest or the cunningest spirit wins.

A man may be *wakan* and then the spirits are afraid of him. This is the way the white men have driven the spirits away. The white man's spirits are very far away. They will not come when called. They can not be bought with gifts. They do not care for men who are alive. The white man's spirit land is no where.

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### 17. *Ni, Ini, and Initi.* George Sword (translated by Burt Means). (CHS)

The white people call it a sweat lodge. The Lakotas do not understand it so. The Lakota think of it as a lodge to make the body strong and pure. They call it *inipi*. This means a tipi to do *ini* in. When a Lakota does the *ini*, he makes his *ni* strong and helps it to bring all out of the body that is hurtful to it. The *ni* of a Lakota is that which he breathes into his body and it goes all through it and keeps it alive. When the *ni* leaves the body of a Lakota, he is dead. When a Lakota says *inipi*, he means he does the *ini*. The *ni* goes all through the body all the time. Sometimes it is weak and then hurtful things get into the body. When this happens, a Lakota should *inipi* in an *inipi*.

The spirit of the water is good for the *ni* and it will make it strong. Anything hot will make the spirit of water free and it goes upward. It is like the *ni* which can be seen with the breath on a cold day. An *inipi* is made close so that it will hold the spirit of water. Then one in it can breathe it into the body. It will then make the *ni* strong, and they will cleanse all in the body. They wash it and it comes out on the skin like *te mini*. *Te mini* is sweat. It is water on the body. A Lakota does not *inipi* to make the water on the body. He does it to wash the inside of the body.

He may do this to cure himself when he is sick or he may do it to make himself feel strong. He should always do it when he is about to do some important ceremony so that he will be clean inside before the *Wakan* beings. When a Lakota says *ni*, or *ini* or *inipi*, or *inipi*, he does not think about sweat. He thinks about making his *ni* strong so that it will purify him.

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### 29. The Spirit of the Buffalo. Bad Wound. (CHS)

The buffalo were given to the Lakotas by *Inyan*. They came from the earth. Their tipi is in the earth. They know all the ceremonies. They dance in their tipi. Where the round depressions are on the prairies is where the buffalo danced.

The Crazy Buffalo is very bad. Young buffalo cows may become like women. Their children will be like the children of men. If they run away, they become like cows, and their children become like calves.

The spirit of the buffalo stays with the skull until the horns drop off. If the horns are put on the skull, the spirit returns to it. The earth eats the horns and when they are eaten the spirit goes to the buffalo tipi in the earth. The way to the buffalo tipi is far in the west.

*Tatanka* is like a Buffalo Bull. He is like a spirit. He is *wakan*. He helps men who hunt. He helps women who work. If a woman is lazy or lewd, he will not help her. He is pleased to see a woman with child.

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# 41. "I Was Called by Jocko Wilson." Short Bull (interpreter unknown).<sup>47</sup> (CHS)

(*Interpreter's comment*): wants to prove that he was not the cause of the trouble of 1890-91). He saw a woman. It was told that a woman gave birth to a child and this was known in heaven. This was told to him and he wanted to see the child when they heard this. This man professed to be a great man, next to God; [he] told them that he wanted to be their intermediary and that they should dance and be together and he would be with them.

He had a look. He said as many nights and days as it would take to do that he knew all about it. He said Indians [are] like grass and flowers and they learn and they sing and pray. He said "Do nothing wrong." He said the people can't take away anything when they die. Whiskey is bad. Who drinks, they cause murders and suicides.

Across the ocean is a great church where he came from. "That church belongs to me. You may go as you please, but one church, one belief, one faith. When you listen to me when I pray or teach from my church all good people will come with me. The whole world will sing. The whole earth is now filthy and stinks. These murders and suicides are that which now stinks. You say, 'Father, oh Father, is that you? All that will say, say that the Father, God will look at you. Those that have done wrong, he will shake the earth. This part of the earth will get it.'"

First heard of this man at Rosebud in the year When Red Shirt's Sister Committed Suicide.<sup>48</sup> I did not see the child. I do not know where it was born. I was called by Jocko Wilson to go

and I went to see him. I went to the Rabbit Blanket [Paiute] Indians. I went in March. I was a long time in going. I first went to the Arapahoe Agency. I do not know how long I was there. I was six days at Pocatello. I went to the Bannocks and was there nine days. Then I got on the train. I was on the train two days and the third day in the evening, I came to the Fish Eaters<sup>49</sup> and I was there eight days. There were many whites and Indians there. I left there.

I left there on [a] train and on the hills above Pocatello, there was an accident. Big river washed out [the] bridge and [the] train upset. [I] came to Arapahoe Agency [Wind River Reservation], came from Arapahoe Agency on horseback. To my home it took fourteen days.

Red Star went. At Rosebud heard that this man had sent representative[s] to Rosebud and Pine Ridge and told them to have Short Bull come over there. He wanted a man who would be straight and would not lie. Rosebud Indians called a council and tried to pick out a man to go and they chose me. There was a paper at Rosebud that called for such a man made by the Oglala chiefs.

I first heard that this was a holy man. Said that God's daughter gave birth to a child and we should go and see it. I do not know where. I did not see this woman. All I saw was the man and his wife. Dance for five days; first pray and address. The other four all dance.

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# 42. Ghost Dance. Short Bull. (CHS)

First: purification by sweat bath. Clasp hands and circle to left. Hold hands and sing until a trance is induced, looking up all the time. Brought to pitch of excitement by singing songs prescribed by the Messiah. Dressed as prescribed. Froth at mouth when in trance. They must keep step with the cadence of the song. The[y] go into trance in from ten minutes to three quarters of an hour. Each one described his vision. Each vision is different from others. Men, women, children have visions.

The ghost shirt is *wakan*. It is impervious to missiles.

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### 43. The Buffalo. Short Bull. (CHS)

The buffalo were given by the Spirit of the Earth to the Indians. The Spirit of the Earth and of the Buffalo are the same. *Iktomi* named all the animals. He [gave] food for all animals. But he did not give food for Indians.

The Oglalas should venerate the Spirit of the Buffalo. An Indian went to a hole in the ground and found the buffalo. They were given to him for his food. He drove some of them up on the earth. From these came all the buffalo.

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