

# THE PEYOTE RELIGION AND THE GHOST DANCE

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WHILE working on a History of the Peyote Religion I have become aware of numerous statements in scholarly literature to the effect that the 1890 Ghost Dance preceded the Peyote Religion among the Plains Indians. It would almost seem from the literature that the Ghost Dance gave rise to Peyotism, that the Ghost Dance paved the way, that here is an example of a theory of cultural evolution from a violent militant nativistic movement seeking supernatural means for the overthrow of the dominant white culture being inevitably followed by a peaceful, accomodating rite because the militant one failed (see Slotkin, 1956, 20).

As a matter of fact, a close examination of the literature of Peyotism shows that prior to the Ghost Dance, Peyotism in the United States was well established, the importation of Peyote buttons already a thriving business in parts of Texas and Oklahoma, and probably had been flourishing for at least 30 years. One of the earliest references to the Ghost Dance-Peyote sequence comes from James Mooney, who initiated the ethnographic studies of both the Ghost Dance and Peyotism. In 1907, in his little monograph *The Cheyenne Indians*, he wrote: "The Ghost Dance cult, which took hold upon the Cheyenne about nineteen years ago, (i.e., 1888) was foreign to the tribe . . . The Peyote Rite, introduced from the neighboring Kiowa more recently, is finding many adherents among the younger men . . ." (p. 418).

Shonle (1925, 56-57) set the pattern more firmly: "In the four hundred years prior to 1890 that the Indians have been known to white men . . . peyote spread at most to only five or six tribes north of the Rio Grande: in the thirty-four years since 1890 it has been carried to some thirty additional tribes . . . The building up of intimate and friendly contacts was perhaps the most lasting effect of the Ghost Dance reli-

gion; . . . The dissemination of the Peyote Cult flowed easily along the newly opened channels of friendship."

In 1928, MacLeod (p. 530) phrased it as follows: "The sense in which the Ghost Dance messianism may be considered to have paved the way for this sudden diffusion of the use of the vision-giving drug in the religions of the reservation tribes of the United States has been noted by . . ." (Shonle).

La Barre (1938, 43 fr) put the idea most succinctly: "In the Plains, peyotism largely followed the Ghost Dance frustration of anti-White Sentiment and preached conciliation instead; such Christian elements as were added had a largely propagandist function in this direction." A similar view was expressed by Barber (1941, 671):

" . . . the Peyote cult as a significant nativistic movement came in approximate temporal succession to the Ghost Dance of 1890." Barber (p. 674) goes on to say Frank White, Pawnee, and John Wilson, Caddo, became Peyote leaders after being Ghost Dance leaders. It is the other way around; both were Peyotists first.

In 1942, Swanton wrote (p. 121): One . . . "may put the ancient fire cult of the Natchez and Caddo, Franciscan teachings, the Ghost Dance religion, the peyote cult, and the Native American Churches founded on the last mentioned, in one line of descent."

La Barre rephrased his 1938 statement in 1947, as follows: "With the dying out of the Ghost Dance revivalistic cult associated with the Sioux uprisings in 1890's the use of peyote spread from group to group until today it has assumed proportions of a great intertribal religion." (l. 294).

In 1953, Ruth Underhill, in her popular textbook *Red Man's America* gave the same idea a new twist (p. 176): "The massacre of Wounded Knee gave Custer all the revenge he could have asked.

"That ended the Ghost Dance for all the Plains

Indians . . . But at the south, where the Kiowa and Comanche were raiding into Mexico, another religion arose which lives to the present day . . . the Peyote Church."

Others who have voiced similar ideas were Bittle (1954, 69), Voget, (1957, 376; and 1960, 7), Vogt (1957, 146), Lanternari (1960, 108), Underhill (1965, 268), Robert K. Thomas 1965, 132), Newcomb, (1970, 12), and Marriott and Rachlin (1971, 20-21).

The Messiah Craze or Ghost Dance of the Plains resulted from teachings of Wovoka, a Northern Paiute of Western Nevada who directed his first Ghost Dance in January, 1889 (Mooney, 1896, 784. Delegations visited Wovoka in the fall of 1889, and returned to Wyoming and South Dakota in the Spring of 1890. The Sioux Medicine Man, Sitting Bull, was killed December 15, 1890, and the Massacre at Wounded Knee occurred December 29, 1890. The peak years for the Ghost Dance were 1890 to 1892.

The dates for the start of the Ghost Dance are not in dispute, since Mooney worked them out in 1891-1893 at a time when he could talk to most of the people involved in the process of introducing the Ghost Dance. By April, 1890, some Southern Arapaho knew about the Ghost Dance. A Northern Arapaho named Sitting Bull, but not to be confused with the Sioux medicine man by the same name, arrived on the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservations in the summer of 1890 and by September could attract as many as 3,000 people to one Ghost Dance. Everyone living on the reservations of western Oklahoma—Kiowa, Comanche, Wichita, Caddo, Kiowa-Apache, Cheyenne and Arapahoe, with a few Delaware and Lipan Apache—had a chance to learn of the Ghost Dance doctrine and dance procedure by the Fall of 1890. Ghost Dances were first held among other Oklahoma tribes in 1891 and 1892. Some individuals of all of these tribes might have been attracted to participate in the dances. Mooney (1896a, 902) discovered that most Comanche were not attracted to the Ghost Dance, and he gave credit to "Quanah Parker, their head chief, a shrewd half-blood," for barring the Ghost Dance from the Comanche.

But here is the rub. In his monograph entitled *The Ghost Dance Religion*, Mooney did not tell that Quanah Parker was also an active leader of the Peyote Religion. It was in an article in *The Therapeutic Gazette* (1896b, 9) that Mooney reported on Quanah's role as leader of the Peyote Religion, at the same time suggesting that Peyotism had been practiced by the Comanche since about 1850. Wrote Mooney: "I

have seen a tottering old man, who had been a priest of the ceremony for half a century . . ." In the same article he told of one of his Kiowa interpreters, Paul Setkopti, who had been sent to Florida to a Prisoner-of-War camp in 1875, but had been released to study medicine and Christianity in New York State. In 1883 Setkopti returned to Oklahoma, too sick of tuberculosis to stand, expecting to die. His Kiowa friends and relatives took him to Peyote meetings and in 1891, thirteen years later, he was able to accompany Mooney to the latter's first Peyote meeting.

It was another Peyotist, Apiaton, who was at first attracted to the Ghost Dance, but rejected it after a visit to Wovoka in Nevada. As a result, the Kiowa dropped the Ghost Dance, for several years.

From Mooney's Notes, on file in the Bureau of American Ethnology, we know he was aware of the official report which was sent to Washington by J. Lee Hall, August 26, 1886 (four years before the Ghost Dance), regarding the use of the tops of a narcotic cactus from Mexico by Comanche, Kiowa and Apache in Oklahoma. In 1888, two years before the Ghost Dance began, Agent E. E. White reported that Peyote was considered "as an oracle, endowed with the power of revelation." Mooney could have been shown the report, also of 1888, from E. L. Clark to Agent White, which was sent to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but was not published, in which Clark reported the name was *Piote*; that it had been used by Comanche of Quanah Parker's Band for twenty or thirty years through association with Lipan Apache; that since 1878 the Cheyenne Reservation had also known of Peyote; and that "almost all of the little stores in Greer County," just southwest of the reservations, kept Peyote for sale as well as some stores on the reservation. As he wrote his articles about Peyote in 1896 and 1897, Mooney discovered the reports by Dr. J. R. Briggs in *The Druggist Bulletin*, in 1887, about the use of Mescal Buttons, i.e. Peyote Buttons, by Indians. Mooney probably did not know of the letter to Parke, Davis and Company, Detroit, from Mrs. Anna B. Nickels, Florist, Laredo, Texas, July 11, 1888, in which she reported her partner had the previous year gathered 30,000 Peyote plants to slice, dry and ship to someone to supply Indians.

The point I wish to emphasize is that many Texas and Oklahoma tribes knew Peyotism before they knew the Ghost Dance. The tribes and references are: 1. *Comanche* (Mooney, 1896b, 9; Wallace and Hoebel, 1952, 332); 2. *Kiowa* (La Barre, 1938, 111; McAllester, 1949, 13; Slotkin, 1955, 205); 3. *Kiowa-Apache* (Brant, 1950, L, 73; Beals, 1967, 17); 4. *Oto*

(La Barre, 1938, 117; McAllester, 1949, 13); 5. *Caddo* (Speck, 1933, 540); 6. *Southern Arapaho* (La Barre, 1938, 114; and Mooney, 1918, 104); 7. *Delaware* (Petrullo, 1943, 23); 8. *Southern Cheyenne* (La Barre 1938, 120); 11. *Northern Cheyenne* (Lindquist, 1937, 3); 12. *Pawnee* (Murie, 1914, 636); 13. *Tonkawa* and 14. *Lipan-Apache* (Bellandier, 1969, 62); 15. *Kickapoo* (Rouhier, 1927, 100); 16. *Shawnee* (La Barre, 1938, 153; McAllester, 1949, 13); 17. Carrizo and 18. *Mescalero Apache* (La Barre 1938, 40); and 19. *Osage* (Speck 1933, 553). John Rave, the Winnebago Peyotist, told Paul Radin (1925, 393) that he first ate Peyote in Oklahoma in 1889, with either the Osage, Ponca or Oto.

Thus, in contrast to Shonle's view that "five or six tribes north of the Rio Grande" knew of Peyote prior to the Ghost Dance, there were at least twenty and possibly a half dozen more tribes which knew of Peyote before they could have become converted to the Ghost Dance. In addition, to cast doubt on Shonle's idea that Peyotism "flowed easily along the newly opened channels of friendship" prepared by the Ghost Dance, one might mention the fact that at least eight of Shonle's tribes listed as acquiring Peyotism after the Ghost Dance, did not participate in the Ghost Dance at all. Non-Ghost Dance tribes, according to Mooney (1896a) were Comanche, Ponca, Kansas, Kickapoo, Five Civilized Tribes, Crow, Winnebago, Omaha, Potawatomi and Menominee. Other non-Ghost Dance early Peyotists were the Southern Ute of Colorado, Chippewa and Cree. Lipan, Mescalero and Tonkawa of course, did not accept the Ghost Dance.

The confusion started with Mooney. His great stature in the study of both religions has contributed to its continuation. Although he knew that Peyotism existed before the Ghost Dance, he was apparently impressed with the spectacular nature of the Ghost Dance and felt that something should take up the vacuum left by its passing—and Peyotism was there to be used. But in adopting this theory, he has given the impression that Peyote barely existed in the United States before that time, whereas the evidence is unquestionably that it was a strong, independent, native movement already of some duration before the Ghost Dance, and that Peyote's enlargement during the 1890's and after the turn of the century was perhaps more due to increased communication and intertribal friendliness provided by Indian schools and increased mobility provided by railroads rather than due to the failure of the Ghost Dance. Mooney's mistake, and its perpetuation to the present, appears to be based on the willingness of scholars to accept ethno-

logical theory over historic fact. Mooney (1896a, 654) presented his theory in the introduction of his famous monograph, *The Ghost-Dance Religion*: "As the Ghost Dance doctrine is only the latest of a series of Indian religious revivals, and as the idea on which it is founded is a hope common to all humanity, considerable space has been given to a discussion of the primitive messiah belief and of the teachings of the various Indian prophets who have preceded Wovoka, together with brief sketches of several Indian wars belonging to the same periods." Being without a particular messiah of the calibre of Wovoka, Peyotism was not included among the pre-Ghost Dance religions analyzed by Mooney. He had himself discovered that Quanah Parker was a powerful chief and ardent Peyotist before the arrival in Oklahoma of the Ghost Dance, and I am tempted to think he might have made an interesting example from him.

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### SELAM CASE IS SETTLED

The case of Leroy Selam, the Yakima student at Oregon College of Education who was arrested on a complaint by his anthropology professor (Paul Nesbitt) because Selam disagreed with the professor on the interpretation of Yakima history and culture, reached a happy conclusion early in December.

All charges against Mr. Selam were withdrawn.

Despite the fact that a prejudiced judge found the Yakima historian guilty, Selam appealed. The American Indian Historical Society filed a complaint with the Civil Rights Commission, and prepared evidence proving the incompetency of the professor. Selam himself fought for a correct interpretation of his own history, and appealed the case. See *Indian Historian* (Vol 5, #1), for background.