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An Analysis of the Shamanistic Healing Practices of the Navajo American Indians through Mircea Eliade's Theories of Time, Space and Ritual

John W. Wick
Trinity College, john@wick.us.com

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The telling of the Navajo creation myth begins with the appearance of the "The People" from the three underworlds and into this, the "Glittering World", through a magic reed. Unlike human beings, "The People" were animals and masked spirits. Then came the appearance of the first man, *Altse Hastiin,* from the Dark World created in the east through the meeting of the white and black clouds. "The young man who walks in the darkness, may it be made as offering to him, may it be made as offering to him." Then, *Alse Asdzaa,* the first woman arrives from the Dark World, made by the meeting of the yellow and blue clouds in the west. The people from the three underworlds met in the first house and began the arranging of the world.

For the Navajo, this myth marks the beginning of time as they understand it and explains how the world is perceived and even lays the groundwork for ritual. Creation myths from many different practices share these same characteristics. Mircea Eliade sought to define the similarities shared by the religions of the world by thoroughly examining these similarities and drawing parallels to one another on the most fundamental of levels – a topic that he spent a great deal of time studying and writing about was shamanism, which he described simply as "religious ecstasy".[1] As an important element of smaller, indigenous or traditional religions, shamans often share many similarities and practices with those of other small religious societies. Stories of creation are often the backbone of these focused religions and often reveal more than what is apparent in the practices and rituals of these religions.

The Navajo American Indians are just such one of these cultures with an indigenous religion in which shamans play an important role, and have much in common with shamans of

[1] Mircea Eliade, Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1972). p. 3-7

other traditional religions. The Navajo traditions of seers and medicine men extend back in history for centuries, long before western civilizations ever came into contact with them. With this long history in isolation, the Navajo have been developing innumerable techniques for practicing their religion. The myths, songs, chants and sand paintings of the Navajo seers and medicine men provide what Professor Mircea Eliade would describe as an archetype or blueprint for ritual, which when used in the correct context invokes the power of the Holy People and Holy Wind and is used to heal the patient. Analysis of these rituals, including the myths on which they are based, will be the main method used to demonstrate that the Navajo spiritual leaders have ability to heal their patients in a way which supports Eliade's theories of ritual, space and time.

Ritual

Before analyzing the Navajo American Indians' religious practices within their own cultural context, one must first have an understanding of ritual in a broader and more universal sense, as Mircea Eliade explains it. Eliade's theories are based on naturism, symbolism and myth and attempt to draw parallels between many religions, both traditional and non-traditional. He argues that ritual is in fact a re-creation of myth and that time can be separated by either the sacred or profane. Myth, in traditional societies, is exactly what happened in a sacred past and is often linked with the creation myths, and those of cultural heroes, which are sometimes included in origin stories as well. When someone reenacts these myths in ritual, the performers' and observers' consciousnesses are transferred back to *cosmogony*, the time of creation. The performers can also be transferred to another time, or what Eliade refers to as *illo tempore*. The ritual itself encapsulates a moment in time and

makes the community relive the desired moment in the story. Therefore a myth acts as an *archetype* or blueprint for a ritual, which is a dramatic reenactment of myth using repetition. Sacred time is used to describe the extraordinary or supernatural, and therefore is connected with religion and myth, whereas profane time is secular, not devoted or related to religion or spiritual practice.[2]

When a ritual is begun the space in which it is taking place becomes sacred space and always has an *axis mundi*, the place where the supernatural force manifests itself when called forth by the performance of ritual. In this moment, the secular and divine realms cross one another. Any object can act as an axis mundi, although the specific object varies depending on one's culture and society. The axis mundi acts as an umbilical cord of sorts, which connects the human world to the realm of the sacred and is the source of power during the ritual. When this otherworldly power manifests itself in a particular place, it is called *hierophany.* This manifestation is usually made possible by the creation of an *imago mundi*, an image of the cosmos as the culture in question understands it.[3] The imago mundi is essentially a miniaturized version of the world which one can manipulate and is usually centralized between the four cardinal points of the universe. Western society would rationalize these points as north, south, east and west, but for indigenous or traditional societies, the four cardinal points of the universe are often much more concrete, such as a natural landmark, building or mythological home of spirits. The four cardinal points of the universe are typically represented within the ritual, which reflects their placement in the actual world.

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[2] Mircea Eliade, The sacred and the profane: the nature of religion. (San Diego: Harcourt Inc., 1978) p.8-19
[3] Mircea Eliade, The sacred and the profane: the nature of religion. (San Diego: Harcourt Inc., 1978) p.30-58

The People and Land

When people outside the scholarly community hear the word *shaman*, most are likely to think of a number of priests, healers or sorcerer figures associated with an uninformed concept of primitive religious specialists. For example, when hearing the term shaman, most people are likely to describe what is identified as a “flying shaman”, those who induce an alternative state of consciousness through a number of ways, whose soul physically leaves the body, flies into the Underworld or spirit world, and attempts to corral the spirits in an effort to use their power to restore the soul of the patient. This notion is not incorrect, but does not apply to all shamanistic practices. First, this common misperception likely comes from a lack of understanding of indigenous and traditional cultures based on years of flawed anthropological studies. Second, the term shaman can be applied to hundreds of individual cultural groups, each with its own unique religious practices based on longstanding traditions and narratives. As this paper will focus specifically on the shamanistic practices of the Navajo American Indians, I will defer to the definition of shaman provided by the Encyclopedia of Religion, which defines North American shamans as “individuals with extraordinary access to spiritual power.”[4] This definition is broad but fitting to describe these individuals who provide essential services to their people. Often the rituals and techniques that the Navajo shamans use can be very different from those of neighboring cultures. As this paper progresses I will explain what makes Navajo shamanic practices distinctive from those of other American Indian tribes.

[4] Eliade, Mircea, and Charles J. Adams. The Encyclopedia of religion. New York: Macmillan, 1987, 216

To understand the shaman, one must first understand the society that shamans serve. The Navajo, or *Diné* as they call themselves, are the largest Native American society in North America. In 2002, the Navajo population numbered approximately 300,000. The Navajo are a Western Apachean people whose language and history is tied to the Chiricahua and the Jicarilla Apache. The Navajo speak Athabasken, or what they themselves call *Dene*, a language spoken by the two large Northern (predominantly in Canada) and Southern groups of Native Americans. These people inhabit the largest reservation in North America, which is approximately 25,000 square miles. Officially called the Navajo Nation, the reservation itself sits in the Four Corners region of the southwest United States and occupies the northeast fifth of Arizona, and parts of southern Utah and western New Mexico.

The traditional Navajo homeland, or *Dinétah*, is comprised of semi arid and high desert plateau with some forest and mountain areas. The area itself is bound symbolically by the Four Sacred Mountains.[5] To the north is Hesperus Peak (*Dibé Nitsaa)*, a visually prominent 7,000-foot peak in southwestern Colorado. To the east, also in Colorado, is the Sacred Peak known as Blanca Peak (*Sis Naajini)*, which also is approximately 7,000 feet high and dominates the Sangre de Cristo mountain range. The Sacred Mountain in the south is Mount Taylor (*Tsoodził*), an 11,000 foot volcanic peak in western New Mexico, the tallest point in the San Mateo Mountains. The fourth Sacred Mountain, demarcating the west, consists of the San Francisco Peaks of north central Arizona (*Dook'o'¥osłííd)*, the tallest of which rises to 12,633 feet in elevation. These four mountains and the borders they create are of great

[5] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318

symbolic importance to the Navajo and play a significant role in the healing practices of the shaman, which will be addressed later in the paper.

The Navajo were originally a nomadic hunter and gatherer society, and gradually began herding sheep and practicing horticulture as they came into contact with Western settlers. At present, the Navajo manage large herds of cattle, horses and sheep, and also undertake agricultural practices ranging from horticulture to large scale agriculture. However, with the overworking and deterioration of limited land due to overgrazing, combined with a rising population, many Navajo seek employment both on and off the reservation in adjacent cities and towns. This increase in population and disconnect from the land threatens to change the traditional Navajo way of life.

Navajo society is primarily matrilineal, which means that names as well as possessions are passed down based on kinship in the mother to daughter line. Women are often the heads of clans and these matrilineages are important to everyday society and politics. However, this is not to say that men do not also play important roles in Navajo society. In fact, most Navajo healers are male. It is likely that more women do not become medicine men because it is taboo to be involved in ceremony when menstruating. Apprentice medicine men usually begin their training at a young age, which would be difficult for a young woman at that stage in her life.

The majority of the Navajo continue to practice their traditional religion, although many have joined the Native American Church (NAC). The NAC is a pan-tribal religion of loosely organized chapters or congregations belonging to specific villages. Beliefs of NAC members vary considerably between different groups of practitioners, and in some cases

include belief in certain Christian tenets and include the use of both the Old and New Testaments. A unifying attribute is the practice of ceremonial ingestion of the peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii)* which is known in modern western science to have psychoactive properties, and is believed by practitioners of the NAC and certain southwestern indigenous religions to enable communion with the Creator and with spirits. Peyotism's roots stretch back to pre-Columbian Mexico. The practice eventually spread northward into what is now the southwestern and Great Plains regions of the United States during the fifteenth century through the efforts of a number of different tribes which includes the Apache, Navajo and Great Plains tribes. As a result of increased pressure from the United States government, Oklahoma practitioners led by Quanah Parker created the NAC in 1918, "for the sole purpose of providing legal protection from federal and state harassment."[6] With legal support, the NAC and peyotism grew significantly. This growth is often attributed to the economic deficit and stressful period of the Great Depression. "Navajo began turning to the religion as a new source of power in a time of great confusion and distress."[7] Even with the increased popularity of the NAC in the 1930s and with its general acceptance by numerous Native American Plains tribes, peyotism has met with strong opposition among Navajo. The Navajo Tribal Council passed legislation in 1940 to forbid the sale, use or possession of peyote on the Navajo reservation grounds. In addition to defending the traditional religion, it is also possible that the Navajo Tribal Council enacted this law to help protect solidarity, as many Navajo were being drawn away from traditional practices. The NAC enjoys greater acceptance today,

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[6] Wade Davies, *Healing Ways: Navajo Healthcare in the Twentieth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 47

[7] Wade Davies, *Healing Ways: Navajo Healthcare in the Twentieth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 47

even among Navajo Traditionalists, who originally believed that peyotism was damaging to their practice and foreign to the Navajo. Even so, many medicine men themselves do not partake in the practices of the NAC as they are devoted to their traditional religion. Not all Navajo belong to either traditional practices or the NAC. Some Navajo even belong to various evangelical Christian sects such as Pentecostalism, whose roots date back to the 1950s when Christian Protestant missionaries made significant inroads in reservations to evangelize the Native Americans.[8]

A History of Healing

Just as western religion found its way into Navajo society, so too did western medicine, but traditional medicine still remained the majority practice among the Navajo. Even with the encouragement of the United States government and Christian missionaries, Navajo patients would not trade their traditional practices for hospitals. These outside influences did however place a strain on the Navajo society and on traditional healing. Moreover, events in the 1860s like the forced exile known as the Long Walk and the internment of the Navajo at the U.S. military post of Fort Sumner took a great toll on the Navajo as these hardships removed them from their sacred homeland and severed their connection to the Four Sacred Mountains. After successfully quelling the Confederates, the United States Army was determined to eliminate the threat of Navajo raids. Colonel Jackson ordered Kit Carson to enter Navajo land to receive the surrender of the people. No Navajo showed cooperation and Carson was ordered to begin a scorched earth campaign to starve the Navajo out of their land which would eventually force the Navajo to surrender. The Long

[8] Elizabeth Lewton, "Identity and Healing in Three Navajo Religious Traditions: Są'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhó" *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 14 (2000): 476-497

Walk began a year later, in January 1864, as the army led some ten thousand Navajo from their ancestral homelands to Bosque Redondo, New Mexico. Approximately 200 Navajo died walking the 450 mile, 18 day trek. These events were especially difficult for elderly Navajo, and many did not survive these ordeals. This was especially tragic due to that fact that as a society with no universal written language and where all information is passed down orally from generation to generation, much of the great wealth of information that the elderly possessed certainly vanished. For Navajo healers, the loss of many ceremonies, rituals and chants became permanently lost forever. The forced movement of the Navajo also provided a difficult challenge for the healers, as they were unfamiliar with the herbs and natural remedies that grew outside their sacred homeland.

Despite these troublesome times, the Navajo healers who survived the arduous journey continued to practice their ceremonies. In an attempt to neutralize the harmful effects of daily contact with non-Navajo and proximity to the dead, the healers would perform Enemy Way and Evil Way chants often. Resolute healers devised remedies from the new local plants and animals to combat the spread of diseases such syphilis and other diseases which ran rampant through the internment camps around Fort Sumner. When cures failed to effectively treat the ailing patients, Navajo healers were quick to blame and criticize the unsuccessful treatments provided by the U.S. Army.[9] Because of this, healers were able to maintain credibility in the eyes of their patients. Those who escaped or eluded capture returned to the homeland and continued to practice traditional medicine. In doing so, they preserved the traditional practices of the Navajo healers.

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[9] Wade Davies, *Healing Ways: Navajo Healthcare in the Twentieth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 24

The years that the Navajo spent in internment camps, although difficult, proved them to be a resolute and resourceful people, which is reflected in the continued existence of traditional healing methods through the time. The ability to ascertain solutions for new problems manifested itself in the Navajo healing practices which they employed to fight new diseases. The Navajo people also continued to have strong faith in their healers.[10] This was mirrored in a growing use of traditional medicine instead of hospitals. During the late 19th and into early 20th centuries, Navajo were being sent to U.S. government assimilation programs and were constantly visited by evangelical Christian missionaries seeking new converts. In spite of this considerable amount of oppression and turmoil, a majority of Navajo still adhere to their traditional way of life whenever possible. The creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Navajo Agency did not help to improve the extreme disregard for the Navajo way of life. Rather than help the Navajo, it was yet another source of authority attempting to fully assimilate the Navajo into American society. Anti-traditional attitudes likely increased as the government's presence grew.

Conversely, the Navajo people had mixed feelings regarding western medicine. Seers and medicine men did not outright dislike western medicine but rather contested any outside force which threatened to draw the Navajo away from their traditional beliefs. Navajo healers simply chose to ignore western medicine, because it rarely existed on the reservation in any substantial form. In the years following the New Deal, the Navajo saw an increased federal commitment to the health of Native Americans brought about by the Meriam Report, a

[10] Wade Davies, *Healing Ways: Navajo Healthcare in the Twentieth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 25

survey which collected information concerning the conditions of Native Americans.[11] This led to increased hostilities between traditional healers and western doctors entering the reservation to provide healthcare. The level of animosity between the two sides, traditional and western, continued to grow until about the 1940s with the creation of the Tribal Council. At this time the Navajo began to hold more sway as an individual people rather than a subjected group. This history speaks to the strength of both the Navajo people and their beliefs as a source of pride and a unifying cause.[12]

Hózhó

Similar to many other spiritual practices of Native American and traditional cultures around the world, the Navajo believe in an impersonal cosmic energy or power which resides in and permeates all things. "We only know air by its movement and its effects (rustling of leaves, whirling dust, the sensation of the breeze on our skin, and so on). It is not surprising then that in Navajo cosmology the hidden, vital motivating dimension of things is called *nilch'I*, or Wind."[13] This concept of Wind is not unlike the concept of Mana which originated with indigenous Pacific Islanders, which exists in inanimate objects, animals and people.[14]

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[11] Lewis Meriam, The problem of Indian administration; report of a survey made at the request of Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and submitted to him, February 21, 1928 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928) 9.

[12] Wade Davies, *Healing Ways: Navajo Healthcare in the Twentieth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 24

[13] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

[14] Emile Durkheim, Elementary Forms of Religious Life, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) p.28

What characterizes the Navajo spiritual belief as distinct from others is the central concept known as *Hózhó*, which loosely translated means 'beauty'.[15] Synonymous with this idea of beauty are concepts like goodness, harmony, health, and order. Hózhó is very much an internal state of being or a mental state which is affected by the flow of this cosmic energy through a person. Hózhó can also be referred to as a spiritual path and a way of life. It is a balance between the self and nature. Navajo shamans draw their power from this cosmological energy and guide it toward restoring, maintaining and even celebrating hózhó within everything. Hózhó is "the actual state of both perceived external events and hidden forces beyond those events."[16] *Nilch'i hwii'siziini* or 'the wind that stands within' is the relatively small portion of the greater whole that resides within human beings. The Navajo believe that when this is disturbed or unbalanced it can lead to misfortune and disease for those affected.[17]

Hózhó or Wind can become unbalanced or lost in a number of ways. When an individual does not actively live with hózhó in mind he 'forgets' it. As with any imbalance, this can lead to sickness. In order to return to equilibrium or the 'state of beauty', the Navajo believer must 'remember' to actively live with hózhó and right oneself back onto the path. To walk on the correct path or 'walk with beauty' was believed to have been taught to the Navajo by the Holy People (*Diyin Diné)* at the beginning of time and recorded in the Sacred Stories, which are essentially the Navajo creation myth. The Holy People are all manner

[15] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

[16] J.R. Farella, *The Main Stalk: A Synthesis of Navajo Philosophy* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press,1984),

[17] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

deities responsible for the creation and maintenance of the fourth world (earth) and who have the ability provide aid or harm the Navajo.

The following information is borrowed from Paul Zolbrod's *DineÌ bahane', the Navajo creation story*. Before the Holy People entered the Glittering World they ascended from three underworlds. The creation story begins the in the First World which, according to the story, is composed of four seas and an island at the center. This world was inhabited by the Níłch�i Dine�é, the Air Spirit People, who were an assortment of insects and bat creatures. First Man and First Woman were created by the four clouds (described earlier in the paper) and settled on the island. Shorty after, the Air Spirit People became jealous of one another and began to fight. The rulers of the four seas grew tired of this and sent those who lived on the island to leave this world. They did so through a hole in the sky and entered the Blue World. Upon entering the Blue World they found other people living there the Swallow People as well as, blue jay, blue hawks and other blue feathered beings. Soon after, the chief of the Swallow People asked the Air Spirit People to leave and they continued to the third world through a rift in the sky.

The Air Spirit People, First Man and First Woman passed into the Yellow world, whose borders were designated by four mountains with two centralized mountains. This world was inhabited by the Holy People who lived on the mountains. They asked First Man and First Woman to bath themselves and in twelve days they would return to them. After twelve days the Holy People returned and performed a ceremony which turned First Man and First Woman into the first human beings and bid them to live in this world as husband and wife. First Woman gave birth to twins who were neither male nor female. After twenty days, she gave birth to five

more sets of twins, who were raised by the Holy People. Time passed and many people came into being. Women learned to weave from Spider Man and Spider Woman and men learned to hunt. One day Big Water Creature took two daughters who were swimming across the great river of the Third World. First Man and First Woman traveled down to Big Water Creature's home and in doing so angered Big Water creature. He began to flood the third world. First Man and First Woman retreated to the mountain Sisnaajiní and called to the Holy People. Turquoise Boy brought a great reed which was hallowed out and used to escape up into the next world. After escaping into the Fourth World from Big Water creature First Man, First Woman and the others began to create the world according to the Navajo.

These Sacred Stories and many others are passed down from generation to generation orally. They are also seen as a way for the Navajo to relate to the Holy People themselves, who are manifested in a number of ways according to the Sacred Stories: Mountain People, Star People, Coyote People and Rain People, among others. Others believe that the Holy Wind is the manifestation of the Holy People themselves. The route to Hózhó or Way of the Holy People is essentially a set of instructions, in the form of songs and rituals, for the medicine man or clan elder to utilize.[18]

To remain on the path is a challenge in itself, which is why the Navajo have provided themselves with a number of ways to constantly remind themselves to walk with beauty. Artwork created by the Navajo is always created with a purpose and often reveals powerful, hidden spiritual dimensions of the world and Hózhó. It can contain mythological events, heroic figures and most often sacred themes and processes. These themes can take shape in

[18] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 320

a number of mediums including prayersticks, textile designs, jewelry, statues, masks and arguably the most important, sand paintings. These Navajo works of art and everyday objects are a steady reminder for the viewer to live according to the teachings of the Holy People and remain on the path.

Theories of Healing and Sickness

Before addressing the abilities of shamans, one must first clearly understand how the Navajo define sickness. Navajo shamans themselves are not always called upon to heal a person with sickness; individuals can notice their own shortcomings in following the path of beauty, and these shortcomings are viewed as the source of disease. In response to this, the individual can diagnose and proceed to cure himself, all without contacting a seer or medicine man. One way in which individuals may notice their separation from the path is through a dream or omen. These phenomena are very important to Navajo culture and can indicate the onset of disease or misfortune, both of which can stem from the same source and are often classified in the same manner. To diagnose oneself, the individual must be able to recognize the symbolic elements within the dream or omen and decipher their meanings. Once he has accomplished this, the individual will likely contact a herbalist or *azee¥ neigeedii*, which means "one who digs medicines", or a medicine man or *hataałi*.[19]

Besides leaving the path of beauty, the Navajo believe that an individual can contract diseases and become sick in a number of ways. Prolonged contact with non-Navajo people is

[19] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

believed to make an individual sick. This is not to say that Navajo will avoid all contact with people from the outside world, but rather they will seek to limit the amount of time they spend outside the reservation among other people and will perform cleansing rituals following interactions with outsiders. In fact, as mentioned previously, more and more Navajo are seeking employment off the reservation, which has been perceived to cause or increase sickness believed to stem from non-Navajo contact. The Navajo also believe they can become sick when near the sites of lightning strikes and whirlwinds. One's proximity to spiritually dangerous animals such as bears, coyotes, scorpions and snakes is also believed to cause sickness. These are all considered powerful sources of hózhó which when in close contact, can distort the wind within. Improper conduct at significant ceremonies or rituals as well as violating certain taboos, such as attending a ceremony while menstruating, also are believed to cause sickness in those who commit these acts. The reason for this taboo is due to the great spiritual significance associated with a woman and her ability to give birth. The blood which is expelled from a woman's body during menstruation can affect the hózhó of others as it comes from within her body and is therefore attached to her own hózhó. Her presence during a ceremony can adversely affect the hózhó of others and therefore be a danger to those participating. Finally, contact or closeness with spirits of the dead is also recognized as a means of contracting a disease or sickness.[20]

Another much more sinister way of contracting a sickness is to be the victim of witchcraft. Witches or *adiłga'shii*, are those known to manipulate evil forces. These evil forces are *hóchxó*, the polar opposite of hózhó, and are characterized by destruction, evil,

[20] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 320

disharmony and ugliness. Witches are believed to partake in culturally and socially unacceptable activities that normal people would recoil from, for example, committing incest, thereby disrupting hózhó and cultivating hóchxó. Witches also are believed to use the power of Wind to gain political power, seduce lovers, obtain money and even injure or kill others. Witches are believed to be able to propel objects imbued with supernatural powers into their victims, which will cause sickness. Moreover, witches are believed to possess the power to shape shift and turn into animals that move around secretly at night. The Navajo call these particular witches "skin walkers". Skin walkers are believed to be the source of a particular sickness called "ghost sickness", which witches will inflict upon their victims. Witches will obtain the flesh or bones of the dead and crush them into a fine powder which will be made to come into contact with the intended victim.[21] This is believed to be able to cause paranoia, confusion, nightmares, dizziness, fainting and even swollen or blackened tongue. When an individual is believed to have contracted a disease or sickness from any source they will seek the help of a healing specialist. In Navajo culture there are two unique specialists who use a number of different techniques in order to diagnose and cure; seers and medicine men respectively.

If individuals cannot diagnose themselves, they will call upon the expertise of a seer, who acts as a diagnostician. Navajo seers can be either male or female and use a process called divination, which draws meaning or significance from actions such as the manipulation of powerful objects or bodily movements to explain events in a person's life. Many cultures around the world employ the knowledge of diviners to explain occurrences in one's life.

[21] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 321

Navajo seers use one of three techniques to determine the cause of disease or sickness, and to ascertain the location of lost or stolen property, water sources and even witches.

These techniques of Navajo seers include hand trembling (*ndilniihii)*, listening (*iists'aa'*), and stargazing (*deest'ii')*, each of which "is intended to (or in the case of the listener, able to) evoke an alternative state of consciousness in which eidetic images (visual, or in the case of the listener, auditory) spontaneously arise in the practitioner's mind, and a diagnosis is rendered by interpreting those images."[22] Before beginning any one of these practices, a seer may or may not discuss the patient's sickness with the individual or his family. This is likely due to the fact that the seer has previously garnered what information he needs from events prior to the beginning of the practice. This information can come from visions or omens which the seer may interpret as relevant to the patient's condition. The seer will then spontaneously enter an alternate state of consciousness through chant and gather information about the disease or subject straight from the Holy Wind or the Holy People, believed to be one in the same. After the diagnosis is complete, the patient will undergo a ceremony to test the accuracy of the diagnosis, which is deemed necessary due to the expensive and time consuming nature of the subsequent curing rituals.

Hand trembling is the most common technique used today, and hand tremblers are, more often than not, female. A Navajo can only become a hand trembler by a calling.[23] This is exhibited by the subject unexpectedly entering an alternate state of consciousness during their participation in a healing ritual or ceremony. This person, usually younger, is then

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[22] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

[23] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 321

recognized as having the gift of trembling and is encouraged to apprentice under another seer. When a hand trembler is ready to perform the diagnosis of a patient, she will first bless her arm with corn pollen and hold it over the patient's head. The characteristic trembling or convulsions will begin when the seer enters an alternate state of consciousness in which her personality is shed. In this alternate state of consciousness, the hand trembler will witness images which will denote the cause of the disease and the remedy, the location of the lost property, etc. While this is happening, the hand trembler may also draw images on the floor with her other hand, and this can also indicate the kind of sickness the patient is experiencing.

Listening, now believed to be an extinct practice, begins with the blessing of the ears of the seer and those of the patient. This is accomplished with sprinkling of a fine powder commonly made from dehydrated badger eardrums on the ears of the seer and patient. According to Navajo lore, the deity Badger is believed to have exceptionally strong powers due to the fact that he was created where the Earth and Sky meet in the fourth world and as such is a child of the sky. Therefore, body parts of badgers are believed to hold special powers which help seers and medicine men to more effectively commune with the gods when in a state of alternate consciousness. Afterward, the listener will go outside, begin to chant or sing to enter the alternate state of consciousness and listen for the revealing sounds of the surrounding environment. The degrees that the listener will enter this alternate state are unknown. The listener will then provide a diagnosis based on the sound patterns that were heard.

The final technique a Navajo seer will use to determine a patient's sickness is gazing. This mode of healing has a number of different techniques which are used to discern the source of a patient's sickness. These include moon gazing, sun gazing and crystal gazing. Unlike hand trembling, these are learned techniques. A stargazer must learn a considerable quantity of sand paintings and chants to correctly perform any number of rituals. When a stargazing master takes on an apprentice, he will assign his student a star as his own and must also illustrate the correlating sand painting. In a similar fashion to the listener, a stargazer will bless the eyes of both himself and the patient with a powder made from dehydrated and ground lenses of birds' eyes. Birds are well known for their ability to discern their prey from long distances and great height. This act is likely done to imbue the seer's eyes with the aptitude of a bird's so that they may more clearly see the correct "answer" in the light source that they choose to fixate on. The seer will then sing the appropriate chant and say the appropriate prayers to coalesce the stars to show the source of the patient's suffering. The seer will then stare directly at their preferred source of light either through a crystal or not depending on their preferred technique. Depending on the technique the seer may also use the light from the moon or sun. Again, the seer will enter an alternate state of consciousness and observe the images which appear to him and decipher their meaning. A stargazer may also describe what he has seen during the altered state to his patient and the patient's family members and ask for their opinions on the matter. According to these suggestions and his own interpretation of the information, the seer will make his diagnosis.

Navajo Pantheon

The deities of the Navajo pantheon are believed to have lasting effects on the health of the people. Depending on their personality, a particular deity is likely to either help or hinder a person's fate through a number of ways. The Navajo pantheon is not organized like that of the Greeks or Romans; it is much more complex and fluid. The main god, Talking God, does act as the maternal grandfather to all others but is by no means all powerful. The generational relationship between the gods is not heavily stressed and does not play a large role in the way people worship. Each deity has a number of chants and corresponding healing powers associated with it. That is why Reichard divides the deities into different types of supernatural entities based on the personalities which he calls persuadable, undependable, helpers and deity of man, intermediaries between man, un-persuadable deities, dangers considered as deities, and beings between good and evil.[24]

Persuadable deities play important roles in the chants of medicine men because their personalities and motives are inherently benevolent. This group includes Changing Women, Sun and a majority of the *xa'ctc'é*. These gods can vary in power. For instance First Man, First Woman and Salt Woman all have major roles in the creation myth of the fourth world or earth and are therefore are called upon often in the chants of medicine man to help the sick.

The undependable gods feel no need to help humans whatsoever. This is "because meanness or desire to do mischief is a large part of their makeup."[25] One is never certain how these deities will respond when invoked. However, an experienced medicine man who is familiar with their personalities will know how to manipulate them to his patient's advantage.

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[24] Gladys Amanda Reichard: *Navajo Religion* (Pantheon Books,1950), 63-70
[25] Gladys Amanda Reichard: *Navajo Religion* (Pantheon Books,1950), 63-70

Helpers of deities and man are many and have varying personalities. A handful of these deities have the ability to jump between the realms of man and the supernatural.[26] They will often give instructions to those who need it and give answers to questions or forecast the future. These kinds of deities are always present within the world but are always invisible. They are known to make suggestions to those who have their hands full with particular challenges. They will tell men to make sacrifices to specific gods which will help with their problems. Helper deities, unlike full-fledged gods, never require payment of any kind because they willingly offer advice. They will also contribute to rituals and accept payment if offered to them. Another kind of helper deity is the messenger which will travel in search of information. It is said that when the earth was being created, these deities were sent off to gather information on the developing earth. A smaller class of helpers can be described as fatalists. Included in the groups of helpers are all animals. Each of these animals has its own significant role to play in the stories of the Navajo.

Intermediaries between man and deity often connect the Holy People and Earth People through stories of journeys. These journeys involve the passing of trials impressed upon the protagonist by angry deities. With each successful encounter the protagonist receives a part of a ceremony or ritual which he presents to his people. He then purifies his family and teaches them to sing the ritual that was given to him. After the chant is over, he will leave his family, often taking another with him, promising to bless and watch over his family, asking that the family remember him when they see a rainbow, rain, or other such natural phenomenon.

[26] Gladys Amanda Reichard: *Navajo Religion* (Pantheon Books,1950), 64

Un-persuadable deities are also intermediaries between man and god but will often ignore commands from gods. The deities are usually monsters, evil and the results of abnormal sex acts or of bloodshed at the time of their birth and are therefore not acknowledged by their mothers. They go out of their way to harm man and must be dealt with through exorcistic rites, lest they be forgotten. Dangers envisioned as deities are always bad for humans. In stories, they are not described as outright monsters but rather as natural phenomena which need to be brought under control.[27]

The last group, beings between good and evil, is very much like "the seven deadly sins" of Christian ethics but is told with a different light. These are best described in the myth of the hero Monster Slayer and his brother who travel the world looking for evils which they can suppress. Their mother informs them that during a great storm many evils were destroyed and none may be left. The brothers are then informed by Wind of a handful of monsters that are still left; these were Old Age, Cold, Poverty, Hunger, Sleep, Louse, Craving-for-meat, Desire and Want. Monster Slayer's mother tells him that they can but should not be destroyed as they are not inherently bad, but rather they are what make humans human.[28]

Navajo Medicine Man

Once the diagnosis is complete the patient is given the corresponding healing ceremony. For this, the patient and his family will seek out the local shaman, who will hereafter be referred to as a medicine man, as it is a more appropriate term used by the Navajo. Unlike the shamanistic practices of neighboring Native American cultures and other practices around the world, Navajo medicine men do not recognize the soul as the

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[27] Gladys Amanda Reichard: *Navajo Religion* (Pantheon Books,1950), 71
[28] Gladys Amanda Reichard: *Navajo Religion* (Pantheon Books,1950), 72

determining factor of one's health; therefore sickness is not caused by having an overabundance or a lack of soul. In Navajo spirituality, the hózhó plays this role and is altered by disconnect with nature and the Navajo homeland.[29]

Depending on the healing ceremony prescribed by the seer, the medicine man will select the appropriate song or chant, known as a *hataał.*[30] There are approximately 30 major types of chant, some of which have multiple subtypes. The medicine man must memorize each one of these in order to be prepared for whatever may be ailing his patient. These chants are divided into two major groups, Blessing Way and Healing Way. Blessing Way is used to reinforce or restore a state of hózhó and is often associated with but not limited to female patients. Protection Way is used to defend individuals from various kinds of assault and also is associated with but not limited to male patients. The healing ceremonies themselves can take a day or last as long as nine. Many of these ceremonies involve dramatic performances, chanting, songs, prayers and artistic creations which describe events that took place in a mythological past. These rituals and artistic ingredients are believed to have the ability to give the Navajo medicine man the power to heal and cure disease and as such are revered and seen as gifts from the Wind and Holy People themselves.[31]

Medicine men are rarely female and must serve an apprenticeship under an older and more experienced master for many years before they are considered ready to perform these healing rituals themselves. The apprentice must learn the stories, chants and corresponding

[29] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

[30] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

[31] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

ritual techniques. The apprentice will also participate in his master's rituals as an assistant. When the apprentice attains the rank of medicine man, he will build himself a bundle (*jish*), inside of which he keeps all the ingredients necessary to perform healing rituals.[32]

The new medicine man must now build himself a *hogan*, a round five- to eight-sided hut traditionally made from logs, mud and rocks.[33] More modern hogans can be constructed from contemporary building materials like cement, brick and lumber. These days, most Navajo live in modern ranch style homes, large row houses or mobile homes. However, even today most medicine men will insist on performing the rituals and chants within a traditional hogan. Even so, this once strict rule has been relaxed. The construction and placement of the hogan itself is essential to the rituals which are performed inside. The single door of the hogan must face east. This is the direction of the sunrise and the beginning of the daily cycle, which is closely associated with birth. The sun then moves across the sky in a clockwise manner through the south and then west, ending in the north, associated with death and night. The Navajo concept of the sun setting in the north is unusual, and is attributable to the relative location of the northern and western Sacred Mountains. It is also likely that the Navajo consider the west as the place where the sun sets and include the north and lack of light as a part of the cycle. When a Navajo medicine man positions his objects, symbols and people within the hogan, they must line up accordingly, in relation to the Four Sacred Mountains which align with the four cardinal points of the universe.

The Importance of Chanting and Song

[32] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

[33] Eva Fridman and Mariko Walter: *Shamanism: an encyclopedia of world beliefs, practices and culture* (American Library Association, 2004), 318-323

The chanting and songs of healing ceremonies and rituals are extremely important to the Navajo and all American Indians cultures alike. Songs are often accompanied by the beating of drums or staccato instruments. Bodily movements are sometimes performed in rhythm with specific syllables and beats. These overemphasized moments in the performance are thought to drive the medicine man and the participants into an altered state or sacred time, much like a hammer pounds a nail into wood. When performing a ritual, the medicine man is often the only chanter. He may ask his assistants or participants of the ceremony to accompany him depending on the particular ritual, but for the majority of ceremonies, it is only him singing. This makes the job of the medicine man especially arduous because he must prepare a number of chants as well as their corresponding sand paintings, especially if it is a particularly complex ritual. Although the pressure can be taxing, Navajo medicine men take great pride in having such an important and demanding occupation.

Navajo medicine men will prefer to prepare a complex chant and feel rushed in the process rather than offer a simple and uninspiring performance. This is likely due to the great responsibly that medicine men have within their communities as well as the great sense of pride in their position. When rituals involve consecutive days, more time is spent preparing the following night. This buildup and increasing quality of chants provides a sense of climax to the final rituals.

It is very difficult to know exactly how many songs exist that are used for rituals. One may compare this dilemma to attempting to count the number of songs within one's own society. Each ritual or chant can include many more songs than are actually used in the performance at any given time. "Just as the sand paintings or prayersticks for a chant are few

compared with the number possible, so are songs selected from a large repertoire. Some songs are favorites or required and may be heard often; some are appropriate only under unusual circumstances; occasionally one song and no other will do."[34] Of course, it is also possible that much like other societies, the collection of songs is evolving and medicine men of this era are creating new songs. "Song has numerous powers, each defined by something in addition to the song itself, and it seems as if the expression of pure joy is subordinated to other functions."[35] The power of these songs is one of many ways that a medicine man will use to encourage the involvement of those participating in the ritual, thereby increasing its quality and credibility. The more songs a medicine man has in his repertoire, the more prosperous he seems. In fact, individuals, whether medicine men or not, can own songs and gain new ones for increased wealth. Songs do not always have to do with rituals either. Many Navajo songs are devoted to menial everyday subjects such as the tending of domesticated animals or performing basic up keep of one's household. However, some songs are considered to be public and no one person may own them, regardless of the status or importance within Navajo society.

Rites of Passage

As the spiritual leader of the community, the shaman is responsible for conducting rites of passage. Rites of passage are found in every culture around the world. They can be as common as a high school graduation or a funeral. In general, rites of passage can be characterized as symbolic expressions of particular statuses into which individuals enter and

[34] Gladys Amanda Reichard: *Navajo Religion* (Pantheon Books,1950), 63-70
[35] Gladys Amanda Reichard: *Navajo Religion* (Pantheon Books,1950), 63-70

assume new social roles and positions within their groups. Many cultures have rites unique to their specific culture. However, they all share a common framework with one another, which revolves around significant stages within a person's life. In traditional societies, such as the Navajo, the movement of an individual from one stage of life to another is as "implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death."[36]

Each of these events in an individual's life has corresponding ceremonies, which symbolizes the movement from a clearly defined socio-cultural standing to another. This process usually occurs around the time that the individual is beginning or has begun puberty, but is not dependent on it. Individuals can also be given tests, which can be physical and submit themselves to the authority of the elders. Along with the transition from one socio-cultural group to another, the individuals are often instructed in the traditions of the society and are made privy to secrets which are often not divulged from one gender to the other.

There are three parts within a rite of passage that everyone goes through. These are *preliminal*, liminal and *postliminal*. In *Rites of Passage* (1960), Arnold Van Gennep refers to *preliminal* as the separation of the person's current status to one of transition, or liminality. The word *liminal* comes from the term *limen*, which is Latin for "threshold".[37] It represents a stage in which the person can be regarded as being "in-between-and-betwixt" , that is, an ontological state of being which serves as the portal through which the person must pass through to enter

[36]Arnold van Gennep: *The Rites of Passage* (The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3
[37]Victor Turner: *From Ritual to Theatre* (PAJ Publications, 1982), 24

into the post liminal stage. *Postliminal* is the final stage of a rite of passage and is then incorporation of the person into a new status or state of being.

To recall Arnold van Gennep's theory, the first part of a rite of passage is separation. In the Navajo healing rituals the patient is withdrawn from his society and brought to the hogan where the shaman has already drawn the painting. The Zuni people of New Mexico share a similar rite of separation ceremony to that of the Navajo. The individual is led into sacred hut by their sponsor. The individual's head is covered by a cloth and he or she undergoes a series of whippings with yucca branches by four men disguised with masks which symbolize the gods. This part of the ritual can be seen as a way of subduing the patient to the authority of the shaman. The cloth is then removed and an eagle feather is attached to their hair, a sacred ornament. The men take off their masks and reveal themselves to the individual. Their roles are then reversed as the four novices are given a mask and yucca branch and ceremonially strike each god four times on each arm and ankle. The novices return their mask and to the four men who then ceremonially strike each novices sponsor in the same manner.[38]

In addition to the prior description, Navajo novices are sprinkled with corn meal, while women are touched with a sacred object, made of an ear of corn with four grains close together attached to four yucca branches. The soles of their feet, palms, forearms top of the breast, collarbones, shoulder blades and two peaks of the head are touched with the sacred object and sprinkled with corn meal.[39] At this time the novices have gone through the rite of separation and have now entered the liminal or transitional stage.

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[38] Arnold van Gennep: *The Rites of Passage* (The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 77-78
[39] Arnold van Gennep: *The Rites of Passage* (The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 79

The individuals who are to become women are guided back into the hut which continues to act as a sacred space. The shaman begins one of the Blessing Way sand paintings by depicting the Earth Mother, which is most likely the same as Changing Woman, a Navajo deity. The Blessing Way chants, unlike most others, are not used for the curing of illness or warding off evil spirits. Instead, it is performed to bless and protect the individual and his home. In the case of woman, prevents complications of pregnancy, and enhances the good fortune that attendees and participants hope to foster through the *Kinaaldá*.[40] Changing woman is illustrated as a large yellow oval body and rectangular head with blue tipped horns. In her hands she carries a number of medicinal plants of seeds for food which can be found on the earth. Within her body are the four sacred mountains are used to represent her organs, each aligned with their corresponding directions and surrounded by a blue ocean. The male ceremonial equivalent to Earth Mother is Father Sky. He is illustrated as a large black rectangular supported by four triangular cloud symbols. Within his body are blue horned Sun and white horned Moon, with a number of constellations dispersed around them. [41] A number of significant stars are represented on his body each marking the four cardinal points of the universe.

Once these separate ceremonies are complete, and have now been incorporated back into society full-fledged adults. Individuals of this post-liminal group now have enhanced status within their communities. Unlike reoccurring calendrical rites, these ceremonies are irreversible

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[40] Elizabeth Prine Pauls. "Blessingway (Navajo Ritual)." 2 Febuary 2007. Encyclopedia Britannica. 10 June 2013. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/69323/Blessingway>

[41] Donald Sandner: *Navaho symbols of healing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 205-206

and cannot be repeated.[42] In many traditional societies, newly incorporated individuals are often given new names and are given objects which they must carry their entire lives to mark their age group.

The liminal stage is transitional and those within this stage of the process are ambiguous and are therefore, in some cultures, believed to be taboo and asocial with all social statuses and obligations removed from them. This stage can also be considered as "a sort of social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states."[43] Sand paintings, the ritual forms and the chants that accompany them can be considered as symbolic forms used by the shamans in the Navajo healing rituals, and serve as the threshold that a patient to pass from a state of illness to wholeness and restores patient's disease to health. Once the rite of separation is complete the Navajo novices are divided into two groups based on sex and undergo different ceremonies.

The "threshold" which Turner refers to as a hypothetical movement from one social group to another. It is also reflected in the physical space where the right takes place. "The passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another."[44] In traditional Navajo ceremonies, the liminal space the novices move through is the hogan. This same structure is also reflected in western society. In a graduation ceremony students often walk up onto a stage and receive their diploma, similar to the eagle feather which marks the age group of the Zuni novices. They

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[42] Victor Turner: *From Ritual to Theatre* (PAJ Publications, 1982), 25
[43] Victor Turner: *From Ritual to Theatre* (PAJ Publications, 1982), 24
[44] Victor Turner: *From Ritual to Theatre* (PAJ Publications, 1982), 25

then walk across the stage and exit from separate stairway. For that brief window where the Navajo novices are in the hogan or the graduating students are on stage, the ritual which they are participating in makes it space sacred and mirrors Eliade's theories of space and time.

Sand Paintings

Sand paintings hold great symbolic and religious significance for the Navajo American Indians. "The mandala is a primarily an imago mundi; it represents the cosmos in miniature and, at the same time, the pantheon. Its construction is equivalent to a magical re-creation of the world."[45] Despite their name, sand paintings actually contain no sand but rather pulverized stones of various colors which are trickled through the fingers to create an intricate and colorful image. These stones are naturally colored and made from ochre (yellow), gypsum (white), sandstone (red) and charcoal (black). When needed, these colors can be combined to make other colors. Blue is typically made through a mixing of charcoal and gypsum but can also be made from pulverized turquoise. Pink is made by mixing sandstone and gypsum. Brown is made through a combination of charcoal and sandstone. The sand paintings are only composed by the medicine man and his apprentice and are typically created on the dirt floor of the hogan, which explains their other name, dirt paintings. After the mandala is complete the medicine man must check it for accuracy. Each of the primary sand colors is used to differentiate the direction of the Four Sacred Mountains and therefore the four cardinal points of the Navajo homeland. Sis Najini, normally associated with Blanca Peak, Colorado, is typically associated with the color white but can vary in some ceremonies. Tso Dzil, associated with Mount Taylor in the south, is represented with the color

[45] Micea Eliade: *Myth and reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975)

blue. Doko'oslid is identified with the San Francisco Peaks, Arizona, and is represented by the color yellow, while Dibe Ntsa or Hesperus Peak, Colorado is represented by the color black.

These color delineations are based on a specific part of the Navajo creation myth and often have significant applications in Navajo daily life. However, it is important to understand that no color has the same meaning in every chant and there are many exceptions to these rules.

The Navajo view the creation of the sand painting as the magical re-creation of the world. Thus, the process of creating a sand painting is a re-enactment of the Navajo creation myth. This can be illustrated, for example, at the point in the myth after the fourth world (earth) is created. In the story the Holy People constructed a sweat house and sang the Blessing Song. They then met in the first hogan, constructed just as Talking God had specified. Within this hogan the Holy People began to arrange the world as they saw fit. They created the Four Sacred Mountains out of four different stones. Blanca Peak was created from the White Shell stone and is therefore represented by this color in sand paintings. In some versions of the creation myth the mountain is also associated with white corn. The wearing of white clothing symbolizes the purity of the one who wears it. This is based on a number of myths that describe a patient being washed and then mystically adorned in white clothing. White, the east, and dawn are often intimately connected. For example, as will be described below in the discussion of the Night Way sand painting, the representation of Talking God is the only figure wearing a white mask. The myth and its symbolic meanings of their details are borrowed from Gladys Reichard's *Navajo Religion: A Study of Symbolism*. This is because he is associated with the east and rising sun.

Directly after the sun rises in the east, it rotates to the south toward Mt. Taylor, which is represented with blue or turquoise. According to Navajo lore, Mt. Taylor is fixed to the earth by a great stone knife and can also be represented as blue corn. It signifies the daytime and frequently represents the female sex.

The next mountains in questions are the San Francisco Peaks in Arizona. They are usually associated with the color yellow and mythological stone is the abalone shell. The mountain is often associated with yellow corn and of pollen. Together with turquoise these colors are what spawn the first woman from the Dark World, which is why it is also affiliated with women.

The last mountain, Mount Hesperus is associated with black and the gem jet. The color itself is said to have protective capabilities but also can be ominous due to the belief that the north is where danger and evil resides. The Blackening is a rite which is used to ward away ghosts of dead Navajo as well as cloak the patient from any evils which may be in their proximity. The medicine man will cover the patient in charcoal from head to toe. It is said that when this is done to a patient they gain the powers of Monster Slayer, for he underwent a similar experience in the myth.

Thus, the medicine man, in creating a sand painting, reenacts the arrangement of the Navajo world as created by the Holy People. Within his hogan, the medicine man sets out the Four Sacred Mountains in the mandala, according to their traditional locations and colors. The more accurate the sand painting, the more effective it is at healing and therefore speaks to the skill of the medicine man himself. The eastern section of the painting is sometimes left open, pointed out of the open hogan’s entryway towards the rising sun. When people enter

the hogan they must move in a clockwise motion around the painting, effectively mimicking the movement of the sun in the sky.

Participants and family members must sit along the wall of the hogan according to gender and age. They are organized in accordance to the painting, each other, the homeland and the sacred mountains. For example, if an older man or woman were participating in a ritual for a loved one, they would likely be placed closer towards the north side of the hogan, as they are theoretically closer to death than those younger than they. It is important that one does not understand this to be seen as an insult to the elder Navajo but rather proper alignment with the world and the painting.

The patient is placed in the center of the painting and the medicine man will begin the healing song or chant. The sand painting acts as the axis mundi (which is also the center of power as described earlier in this paper) to attract the Holy People who will relieve the patient of his illness. In this way, the patient is positioned in a direct conduit to the healing powers of the Holy Wind or "immersed in the primordial fullness of life; he is penetrated by the gigantic forces that, in *illo tempore,* made the Creation possible."[46] When performed correctly, the ritual will have returned the patient back to his natural balance and hózhó. When the ritual is complete, the painting is destroyed and all the colored powder is swept up and disposed in a location north of the hogan. The sand is disposed of in this manner because it is believed that it still contains the power to influence the hózhó of people and physically contains the extracted illness of the patient.

Whirling Logs of the Night Chant

[46] Micea Eliade: *Myth and reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975)

Each sand painting is unique and is made for the specific purpose of healing. Every sickness has a corresponding chant or song which is used to cure it. The Night Chant or Night Way, is a nine-night ceremony which involves numerous prayers, songs and sand paintings. It is performed as a healing ritual, to cure people and bring them back onto the way of beauty, and restores the natural order and relationship between the Navajo people and the universe as a whole. The first four days involve cleansing, while the next four days involve identification of the sickness, and the ninth and final night reviews what happened in all eight past nights before the patient is released from the chant.[47]

On the sixth day, which is of special significance, the medicine man will create the Whirling Logs sand painting. (See Fig. 1) This unique painting is characterized by a large, black cross in the middle made from pulverized charcoal and extending outward from a central bowl of water or medicine, lightly covered in charcoal as well; this symbolizes the holy lake. The arms of the cross reach out towards the four cardinal points of the Navajo world, the Four Sacred Mountains, thereby symbolically representing the imago mundi. On each one of the logs or arms of the cross sits a pair of gods, one male and one female, totaling eight. Around the outside of the cross are four larger gods who are pushing the logs with their staffs in a clockwise manner, just as the sun travels across the sky. On the eastern end of the mandala is Talking God, depicted in a white mask, squirrel skin pouch and eagle plume of exactly twelve white feathers. On the opposite side of the mandala is Calling God dressed in black, wearing a blue mask and bearing a wand of charcoal.[48] Notice the alignment of the colors within the illustration of the gods. Talking God wears predominantly white cloths while

[47] Donald Sandner: *Navaho symbols of healing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 86-87
[48] Donald Sandner: *Navaho symbols of healing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 86-87

Calling God is adorned with a black charcoal staff. The gods in the north and south are dressed as mountain sheep which explains the bulge on their backs. The bulge on the back of these gods is done to observe the entrance of the hero of the story and myth, called the Dreamer. Like the Calling God, they wear blue masks as well as sheep horns and packs full of seeds. Between each of the logs grows four plants of great significance to the Navajo: corn, beans, squash and tobacco. Encompassing the entire mandala is the Rainbow Guardian, except an opening to the east remains.

When the painting is complete, the patient will enter the hogan and sit directly on the western limb of the whirling-log cross. This particular painting is approximately ten feet in diameter, so he or she will not cover its entirety. Once the patient is seated and the ritual is ready to begin, the medicine man's assistants, dressed as the gods from the story, will enter the hogan suddenly with a great roar. They will dip their brushes into the bowl at the center of the cross containing medicinal elixir, pre-prepared by the medicine man himself or by an herbalist, and sprinkle both the patient and the sand painting. During the day following the sixth night, two of the medicine man's assistants, dressed as beggar gods, will visit other Navajo camps. This is likely a reenactment of the creation myth where the clans created by the deity Changing Woman traveled to meet those that shared their heritage, the Earth People. The assistants perform dances at these other camps and hold out fawn skin bags for donations. These donations are usually food or tobacco. The assistants must complete this task and return before nightfall. The following night, songs accompanied by drums and rattles are played inside the hogan while members of the next night's ceremonies rehearse. As this

particular ceremony is extremely long and complex, the medicine man will enlist the help of the patient's family and even others in the clan.[49]

When one analyzes the different parts of the Whirling Logs sand painting, a number of recurring themes can be identified. When this part of the Night Chant is performed, the patient and all participants are taken back into illo tempore to witness for themselves the exploits of the Dreamer and his brothers. After a tenuous journey the Dreamer is given a chant by the Holy People, to cure all the members of his family that have been affected by an illness. When the ritual in the story ends the Dreamer begins to chant for nine days to relieve all of his family members from the illness. Similarly, the Navajo medicine man reenacts the myth and chants for nine days and his assistants will imitate the gods, who periodically reveal themselves in the myth. The assistants are dressed as gods with sheep horns to represent the point in the story where gods of the north and south disguise themselves as sheep. The patient is placed at the axis mundi in order to effectively absorb the power of the gods and push out the illness into the sand painting. Once the illness has been removed via the sand the person is restored to hózhó and is once again in harmony with nature and the homeland. Other uses for the Night Chant are diseases of the head, such as blindness, deafness, or insanity. This ceremony also is used for cases of "deer infection" which causes a kind of rheumatism.

Night Sky of the Hailing Chant

On the ninth and final day of the Night Way ceremony the medicine man will often create what is called the Night Sky painting from the Hailing Chant. (See Fig. 2) It is comprised

[49] Donald Sandner: *Navaho symbols of healing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 86-87

of a large black square which represents the night sky. In the center of the night sky is a blue Sun and a white Moon directly below. These central figures are surrounded by a number of star constellations which blanket the entire black square. On both the northern and southern borders of the night sky are the Cyclone and Storm people, which the Navajo believe are responsible for the movement of the heavens. Next to the eastern section of the night sky, a mountain goat, a bluebird and a bat are depicted. On the western side are the illustrations of a yellow shouldered blackbird, a mountain bluebird, a yellow warbler and the western tanager. Of note are the small and exquisite details in the illustration of each bird which are achieved so that the species of bird can be told apart from one another. The medicine man does that to make sure that each bird is represented clearly because each one plays an essential role in this part of the myth and Night Way chant.

The myth which corresponds with this painting begins with the calling down of Rain Boy to the earth. Sun uses his magic to make his image appear on Rain Boy's chest and the Moon on his back. Soon after, streaks of black and white begin flashing across his body, beginning at his hands and working their way up to his mouth. Secondly, a yellow band will appear across the upper part and a blue line across the bottom part of Rain Boy's face. The stripes which cross his face symbolize the rising and setting of the sun. Afterward, various types of pollen from plants sacred to the Navajo are sprinkled over Rain Boy's head. In this same ceremony as reproduced by the medicine man and his participants, body painting is used to represent the colorful stripes which spontaneously appear on the body of Rain Boy. Following the previous ceremony is another which is hosted by the medicine man himself dressed as Winter Thunder.

> Winter Thunder dipped a curved prayerstick into the medicine bowls and touched the heads of the Cyclone People and the feet of the birds in the painting. Holding these prayersticks he led Rain Boy to the center of the painting. Rain Boy sat at the center and a sacred feather symbol was tied to his scalp. Braided wreaths made of bulrushes, cornstalks, spruce twigs, turkey feathers and medicinal herbs were placed over his shoulders and on his wrists. Rain Boy swallowed an obsidian figure and drank herbal medicine. White Thunder pressed the prayer sticks to Rain Boy's body. Then White Thunder pressed his hands to various parts of the paintings and to Rain Boy's body. Rain Boy left the hogan and, facing the Sun, inhaled four times. The spirit of Thunderbird shot arrows in his body. The painting was rolled up and Rain Boy re-entered the hogan. He ate cornmeal mush from the corn pollen basket and drank form the "Bowl of Changing Colors." This means the powers of nature were transferred to his body and he was completely restored."
>
> (abstracted from Wheelwright, 1946a)[50]

In the ritual which recreates this myth all five senses are used to effectively engulf the patient and the participants in the myth itself and transport them back to the sacred time and cosmogony. The medicine man dressed as Winter Thunder will mimic the movements in the myth with prayersticks and draw the very same sand painting used in the myth by Winter Thunder. The person playing Rain Boy, most likely an assistant of the medicine man, will be endowed with the colorful stripes said to appear on Rain Boy himself. The use of incense and the consumption of a gruel concocted from corn and medicinal herbs will pull the patient into the myth even more. Of course, no ritual is complete without the recitation of songs and prayers alone. The combination of these stimuli is believed to successfully transfer the consciousness of all involved to the past, as if actually participating in the event with the supernatural deities themselves.

Endless Snake from Beauty Chant

[50] Donald Sandner: *Navaho symbols of healing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 214

Another significant painting for the Beauty Chant is the Endless Snake (See Fig. 3). In this painting a large black snake creates a perfect circle with its head facing east. Inside this large outer snake is a secondary black snake and four smaller, tightly coiled guardian snakes of black, blue, yellow and white. All of the lesser snakes face east towards the head of the greater snake. Each smaller snake guards certain aspects of the Navajo homeland: the black snake guards the sky, the blue snake guards the mountains, the white snake the earth and the yellow snake the waters. The snakes are thought to be representations of the Navajo creation myth. The color of the outer snake denotes the darkness of the spirit world where the Holy People are believed to reside and where the Navajo first came from. The small deer hoof markings on each of the snakes represent a prayer for abundant game as well as the path of beauty which all Navajo must follow. [51]

Within the Beauty Way, snakes play an important role in the protection of the homeland. They are deemed with the protection of fertility, moisture and rain. In fact, snakes are so integral to the Beauty Way that they are a common appearance in many sand paintings. Snakes are also employed in a number of different chants as guardians and messengers. They can also be representations of life and death. In the Endless Snake sand painting, they are more likely a positive symbol of equilibrium and used to return the subject of the ceremony to hózhó.[52] Again, the colors of the four minor snakes represented are tied to the four cardinal points of the Navajo homeland and epitomize the imago mundi. Other Beauty Way ceremonies can also be used to treat many different ailments such as snake bites, rheumatism, sore throat, stomach trouble, kidney and bladder trouble, abdominal

[51] Donald Sandner: *Navaho symbols of healing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 217
[52] Donald Sandner: *Navaho symbols of healing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 216

trouble, aching feet, legs, arms, back, or waist, swollen ankles and knees, itching skin, painful urination, dry throat, mental confusion, fear, and loss of consciousness.

Holy Man and Thunderbirds

Another visually remarkable sand painting which is used in the Male Shooting Chant is the Holy Man and Thunderbirds. (See Fig. 4) This painting depicts the myth of Holy Man being captured by the Thunder People, who are represented in the painting by birds. Holy Man is surrounded on all sides by the Thunder People and according to the myth is being carried off by them. Notice that Holy Man is bound to Black Thunder by black lightning. In some depictions of this scene, Holy Man is drawn with a dark circle beneath his feet which represents a lake. In the myth which this painting depicts, the lake sits at the entrance of Big Thunder's home and at the bottom of the ladder made of lighting rests Big Thunder himself. When Holy Man neared the ladder, Big Thunder became angry but when he was told Holy Man's reasons for being there Big Thunder taught him the ceremonial knowledge which he was lacking and for which he came. [53]

Shooting Way chants are used for the counteraction of infection after being hit by arrows, bit by snakes and even when someone has come into contact with lighting. Medicine men have also used these chants to fight colds, fevers, rheumatism, paralysis and abdominal pain. It is fitting that Holy Man would seek out the help of Big Thunder, who along with his minor divinities is depicted in sand paintings surrounded by lighting or arrows. This can be seen along the edges of the Holy Man and Thunderbirds sand painting.

Conclusion

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[53] Donald Sandner: *Navaho symbols of healing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 218

The myths, songs, chants and sand paintings of the Navajo seers and medicine men provide them with the divine blueprint which allows them to commune directly with the Holy People and utilize the Holy Wind to heal. The analysis of the rituals supports the theories of Eliade and demonstrates that the Navajo spiritual leaders have the ability to heal their patients through the manipulation of ritual, space and time. Eliade characterizes myth as a true story, one that is the most precious possession because it is sacred. Myth in itself is an all encompassing set of stories which provide humans with a means to reach a higher level of existence. Myth is an essential facet to the Navajo way of life and plays a major role in both everyday life and special events like rites of passage. For the Navajo, this is represented in a stunningly skillful and artistic performance. However, more than a mere expression of beauty, the chants, artwork and rituals created by Navajo medicine men are imbued with a powerful purpose and a spiritual dimension, and are re-creations and reenactments of mythological events. The Navajo creation myth stresses the attachment of the Navajo to their sacred homeland through the identification of the Four Sacred Mountains as landmarks and makes them indispensible to the ritual. Without these, the ritual would fail to work and the medicine men would lose their connection to the divine. The myths, songs, chants and sand paintings of the Navajo seers and medicine men provide them with the divine blueprint which allows them to commune directly with the Holy People and utilize the Holy Wind to heal.

Navajo sand paintings act as the imago mundi, a miniaturized snap shot of the universe as the Navajo see it, and manipulated in order to focus the power of the Holy People onto the sick, thus restoring the patient’s connection to nature and his homeland. The Whirling Logs sand painting clearly outlines the four cardinal points via the placement of the

gods around the outside of the central cross and the color delineation of the drawings. The ritual and sand painting work is a blueprint or archetype which guides the medicine man through the drama and reenactment of the myth.

The symbolic correlation between the symbolic colors in the sand paintings and these related to the four directions reinstate hózhó, defined earlier in this paper as beauty but also as the harmony between nature and the patient. Furthermore, the healing rituals can be seen as rites of passage that entail various symbolic steps note by Van Gennep and Turner that make possible for the patient to go from a state of illness to health.

The Navajo's connection with the way of beauty or hózhó is essential to their way of life. Hózhó is an internal state being, a mindset and philosophy. There are many ways to fall off the path. When a person's wind within is made off balance either by the person themselves or by some external force it must be made whole again through ritual befitting the specific illness or misfortune. Fortunately, there are just as many reminders and ways to get back on the path to harmony. When ritual is done correctly it throws the medicine man and his participants into the sacred past, back to cosmogony. The point encapsulates the all participants in a point where the sacred and profane meet. Eliade suggests that sacred space is a hierophany, an interruption of the sacred that results in the detaching of a specific area from the surrounding environment and moving into all together separate time. Through their healing rituals and sand paintings, the medicine men recapitulate the Navajo creation myth and in so doing, open a portal to sacred space and time thereby accessing the power of the Holy People and Holy Wind to heal their patients and fixing them back onto the way of beauty.