

Some Perspectives on Indian Traditions

Transcription of Tapes

by

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The Indian Culture Has Something To Say
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There is no one "Indian culture," of course. There are many. There are some common characteristics of Indians, however, which are virtues on their reservations but do not serve them off the reservations--a lack of competitiveness, strong kinship with family and clan, a casual attitude about material things, and so on.

These are usually looked upon as "Indian problems" by Anglos, and by some Indians, because they make it difficult to thrust the Indian into the dominant white society. Now, however, people are pointing out that the white society itself doesn't function too well. And some experts are predicting that it won't work at all as technology, automation and information force us into a new kind of world.

Perhaps, some people are saying, there are clues in these Indian characteristics that will help the whole society adjust to change. This is a sensitive area, as with any human values. When you begin to talk about culture, an appreciation of cultural differences can be a learning experience for everybody.

One difference is the concept of competition versus the concept of cooperation. For the non-Indian it has pretty much been to train the individual with strong emphasis on the rugged individualist, the frontiersman concept.

Within the Indian tribes, and I would say with rural people in general, there is an awareness of the extended family, and kinship ties, and this has been continued in the Indian cultures. This is beginning to dissipate. But still the concept of kinship ties is so strong that most of the Indian languages do not have a word for "orphan." Even though the father and the mother have been killed, there is still that concept that the child belongs to the larger family.

You see some cultural conflicts with the student who lives in one culture with his parents and grandparents and his peer group on the reservation, then must travel into the city to go to school. This is a competitive society as opposed to living in a society that extolls cooperation. In educational circles we talk about a system of reward, but it isn't well to single out a person. His peer group will make it kind of tough on him because he seeks to be better than they are.

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There is an awareness of almost equality and you do not aspire for personal aggrandizement. Aspiring is permitted if it is for the purpose of serving your people.

It's difficult to talk about a distinct culture here. We have a kind of pre-Columbian culture, a present-day culture, and a developing culture. In some instances it is a culture of poverty rather than an Indian culture. In the more traditional Indian culture there isn't so much animosity and backbiting. It's a matter of living out life as it is and being a respecter of persons.

In this age we think of the generation gap, but within the Indian tradition there has been an appreciation of the older person. The "gray hairs" exemplify wisdom, maturity and sage advice. Indian people are very much concerned about this as some of their cultural values to diminish.

Tribes are beginning to explore the possibility of old-age homes. Sioux on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota have created a home with some basic differences. Many times in the summer the older people are permitted to go back home. The institution curtails its operation and some of the older people, who have had a natural affinity for the forest and land, will go back home. Then, during the winter, they return to the safety and security of the institution.

There's a natural inclination for Indian youth to identify with the youth culture. When the Beatles first wore their hair long, one of the students on the Pima Reservation was the first to wear his hair long. One of his peer group made the comment, "You look like an old-time Pima."

The next morning he had cut his hair. He identified with the youth culture and did not necessarily identify with his own Indian culture. But now it's changing, with the emerging attitude of Indian awareness. They are wearing long hair for a different reason. This is giving them some integrity and some sense of pride.

It is almost a cliché that what an Indian has is to be used and shared with his family and friends, whether on the reservation or in the city. Now that we're in a wage economy it's much more difficult to be the host because it comes out of the paycheck, whereas before it might have come out of the garden in back of the house. Oftentimes this has defeated some of the people who have moved to the city, gotten a decent job and begun to draw a wage. Then many of their

relatives would come and locate with them.

The concept developed very naturally. There was no refrigeration so if a hunter went out and killed a deer he had no way to preserve it unless there was a lot of salt. When he came back he would divide it among the people of the village. When someone else went out, they came back and shared their deer.

It's still relevant on the reservation. A person who is down and out can go to a relative and find some source of help, knowing that he might be called upon later when he comes into better times.

I see American materialism in a sense as building for obsolescence, of advertising to sell people goods that they may not need but that will help them compete with the Joneses next door. Indians acquire or build things to utilize and use up.

Many people will not install a telephone on the reservation because of this idea that a thing is to be used. Others would come and utilize that phone to call relatives in San Francisco, Denver, all over, not realizing that the person who had the phone installed is going to have to pay a bill. The thing is to be used. If you have a car, it is to be shared.

The Anglo culture talks about saving as a virtue, putting something away for a rainy day. The Indian is present-day oriented, with much shorter goals. I've often heard people say, "Well, the Indians didn't save, but the Anglo is a saving culture."

But I question this when we get to ecology. When it comes to the conservation of natural resources, with the idea that their children and their posterity will have something of value to live for, I'd say the Indian has been the saver.

The Indians did not have a sense of individual ownership of the land. They had the concept that this was Mother Earth, so to speak, but they derived many benefits from earth, their food, materials for clothing, a geographical area to explore, to hunt, to fish. The natural boundary would be a mountain range or a stream or a river.

This was quite different from the English, whose concept was one of metes and bounds and a description of that piece of property that they owned. To the Anglos this was property to be used, nature to be exploited, land to make a profit off of. It's interesting that that's one of the criteria that they used to determine whether an Indian was civilized or not, whether he was willing to accept that.

I think the feeling for Mother Earth has been traditional, and this concerns a number of tribal leaders today. Now, if you said that, some people would take you out to the reservation and show you ways in which seemingly things have deteriorated and try to say that is not so.

But I can recall, for instance, going out hunting with some of my relatives in Idaho where my tribe is located. This was very early, when I first began to hunt with the older people. The person who was successful in bagging a deer might offer a short prayer saying, "I thank you my brother that you've given your life to sustain my life." There's an awareness that all of life is somehow integrated and under the Great Spirit.

Other times when I helped my grandmother and other older people, they would dig roots from the ground and very carefully place the turf back, almost like a golfer has to do. Again there might be a prayer of thanksgiving, an awareness that if you took care of Mother Earth she would take care of you.

In the Imperial Valley they are concerned because they used chemicals that would increase growth, and pesticides and all this. They're now learning that the land might not be useable or productive for many years.

Many reservation communities have used some of these things too, of course, but there is a whole area of land that could be considered virgin land. Many times I have been driving and I know there's a reservation in the area and I will see the landscape completely leveled. And all of a sudden I will see a fence and trees and I will almost know that that's where the reservation begins.

People have questioned the locating of industry on reservations, both because of industry's effect on the environment and because industry may become automated. This was one of the options open to Indian leaders a few years ago because there were few job opportunities on the reservations. The people who had some education and initiative were moving into the cities.

The leaders began to rationalize that if jobs could be developed on or near the reservation, you would be able to keep your leadership there to develop the community. As they got into this, they realized that there would be a number of things that would be affected, their whole life style, the fact of a larger population, greater exposure

from all sources. There was the matter of laws which needed to be changed to cover non-Indians on the reservation, always a gray area. But the leaders also realized that with the communication as it is, they could not remain insulated from the world.

Simultaneously, there began to be developed a whole national awareness of ecology. The reservation people began to look at this in a different light, whether or not it really was worth all that to pay the price of development. And for some of the poorer tribes, where minerals had been found, it has been quite a temptation. This is the thing that the Papago Tribe faced with the copper mining. The tribes are as much interested in maintaining a properly balanced ecology as they are in deriving benefits from their minerals.

At the Fairchild Electronics plant at Shiprock on the Navajo Reservation, there has been some concern expressed. It gave employment to well over a thousand people. But many of those employed were women because of their manual dexterity. This reduced many men to babysitters, and changed the life style of a kind of nomadic people now compressed into an urban situation.

Indian communities now are being much more selective in the kinds of industries they would like to locate there.

We have seen the statistics showing that with automation, a tiny percentage of the population could do all the productive work. And science and medicine are prolonging life. The whole concept of leisure time is a thing that the United States is going to have to deal with. That means a whole new frontier must be developed and that is the area of human concern, how do we get along with each other?

Within this context, the Indian culture has something to say. Don't get uptight. Live life out as it is. If your attitude and your response to other persons is above board and congenial, then it's like a bouncing ball that you can throw against the wall. That same response comes back.

We're beginning to get into this area, the legislation for the guaranteed wage and the whole human welfare system, I see so much of the money being dissipated by the bureaucracy that doles out funds. Under a guaranteed annual income, at least there would be less of this so more funds would be placed in the hands of the people.

I can see why others would argue against this, saying it would take away people's initiative. But one of the things that has not been done in education is to challenge the creative abilities of people. There is a kind of a select breed that we look upon as artists and so on. Not many of us have really tried, except maybe as a hobby, to develop some of these creative kinds of things. And again, a kind of an appreciation for what is around you.

There's the story of the man who saw the chief sitting beside the stream fishing. He said, "Why chief, why don't you leave this and make something of yourself?"

And the chief replied, "What should I do?"

He said, "Well, you could go and get an education and study and get a degree."

"Then what would I do?"

"Then you could go to work and be productive and if you fulfilled your responsibilities well, in several years you could retire."

"Then what would I do?"

"Go fishing and do what you please."

"Well, I'm doing that right now. Why should I go through the whole process?"

That oversimplifies the situation, of course. There's a danger in romanticising about Indian ways. Oftentimes history has been sentimental or unrealistic. The Indian has either been painted as a noble red savage or a bloodthirsty savage. I think some of the historical and cultural studies are beginning to show that actually he was a human being trying to live out his existence with his neighbor. Depending on the circumstances he was thrown into one character or another.

I have seen articles lately from Indian papers talking about Vietnam. General Maxwell Taylor said, "We have always been able to move in the areas where the security has been good enough, but I have often said it is very hard to plant corn around the stockade when the Indians are still around."

There's still this mind-set where you have to show your manhood, the old stereotype of a guy standing with his six-guns. He's not going to bow down to anybody. When the Anglo society talks about conquering the West, somehow mixed up in that whole picture is that they've conquered a people and that this therefore makes them

more manly.

In some of the studies we have made, there is a concern about the historical stance of the church. It, like the government, has been paternalistic and has not always had an appreciation for the heritage of Indian people. This and that were called heathen and pagan and this depreciated the culture, made the people feel kind of inferior.

I feel our approach now is like grafting onto a rose and maybe coming up with a hybrid that is a bridge between two cultures, trying to take the best out of both. The old melting pot theory is really kind of a myth. The church is developing a concept of a mission to a pluralistic society, appreciating the cultural contributions of ethnic groups.

This is what many of them are saying: "We want to be appreciated for who we are and what we have to contribute, if you would only permit this."

I think this is the kind of thing that could make America the country that could be foremost in the world, that appreciation among peoples.

Tape I Brown

I would like to express formally my gratitude to Dr. Gustafson for inviting me here and indeed for the amount of work that I have seen here on your campus that he has done to make me feel very welcome by putting me in contact again with the kind of Carolina hospitality that I knew when I was at school in your state. I think that was about 33 years ago. Of course I would also like to express my appreciation to the Lyceum committee for sponsoring my visit here. I thank you for making the qualifications to the article in the Pine Needle. I appreciated the article very much. I do want to make it clear that I certainly would not presume to do any research on the seven rights of the Oklahoma Press! It is too esoteric an area to approach. I received a letter from the press the day before I left Montana saying that due to the advantages of a new computerized system that the University has installed the annual business report and royalty proceeds will be delayed six weeks this year. This is a mystery that is beyond my comprehension. I also appreciate very much the reference to my being for many years at the University of Indian. The suggestion is excellent that there might be somewhere a University of Indian called Indian Studies. We will talk about that at another occasion. I was there for only two years any was dismayed to find that in a state such as Indiana, and at a University such as Indiana University there were I found one and one-half Indians. I wanted to move to Montana where we have at least 7 very large reservations. Where I am now there are large number of Indian students which makes for an enormous challenge that I appreciate.

In talking about religious beliefs in relation to social structures, social customs, ethics, mores, and so on I want initially to

make a certain bias which I have very clear. And that is I don't subscribe to the kind of deterministic school which argues that religious belief, religious structure is determined by social force. I want to argue either that it is perhaps the other way around. First there are the religious ideas, the religious values, and then the social forms are as reflections of these. Although I think I could make a stronger case for that particular point of view. Let us simply say that we are dealing here with two specifically kinds of materials. The two are intimately interrelated deeply interrelated, and questions of primary of which comes first, that I will leave it to each of you to determine for yourself.

In relation to this concern, I would like also to say that I feel that the whole area of functionalism in these studies is very barren. That is, it is evident that religion, (although we are talking about politics, rites, ceremonies, and so on) these things do serve definite functions in relation to the social and political orders of these societies. And the bulk of literature concerning religion in society, notably of course the anthropological literature, is almost exclusively for this kind of functionalistic perspective. I think it does injustice to religion as it is in itself, and I'd like to make this bias I have very clear. I feel that there is more than just functionalist concerns where we are dealing with religious affairs and values religion transcends, these concerns, although from the scientific point of view this other dimension of religion is something that cannot in a sense be tied down and cannot be proven. It has been eliminated out of these approaches which I feel is an injustice to the field of religion as it is in itself.

Presenting the kinds of materials I'm going to in context of a course, a ongoing course such as Dr. Gustafson's, I am entering into a rather large area I feel because of the vast differences. I understand

that you by and large are interested in the Christian forms within Christian civilization. You are dealing with a very complex kind of area. You are dealing with forms of society, civilizations which are very sophisticated and which are interrelated in these times when all kinds of technological developments, techniques concerns, and a host of problems which technology is related. I think it is a little unfair to you to ask you here to enter into another quality of world. A world which, to put it simply one could say is on a technological level that is not so complex. That is not in sense, so sophisticated. We are dealing with smaller groups who have needs which are much less complex than those of our contemporary society, in which you are very very familiar. By saying this, I am not in any sense, and I want to make it very clear, implying that culture which is technologically more simple is in any way inferior. This is I think a very important point and there has been enormous misunderstandings about this. I think that today we are becoming aware of certain indications here. We are becoming aware that what ultimately counts is not a mechanical sophistication, technique sophistication, but a qualitative concern, a quality of being that is the dominant thing. I hope that as time goes on our orientation will be more and more away from quantitative concerns, the evaluations of culture and civilizations of progress in terms of quantity, rather evaluation in terms of quality, the quality of persons, which a culture produces. I am only going to be able to give a few selective examples here. I don't know what else to do in such a very short time. My only hope that in the few examples I am going to give, drawn from American Indian cultures, that these might supply certain clues, certain keys that can be used in other examples for which there are moods.

This is one of the most impressive things I think about before rare American Indian cultures, societies, religion. There is enormous

diversity that is here. We tend to forget this when often in language we lump all these diversities together and for to refer simply to the American Indian. There is no such thing as an American Indian culture. There is enormous variation here in terms of language. Also there are several hundred major language families which are involved here and in each of these families there are dozens of subfamilies and dialects. All of which are mutually unintelligible. We are dealing here with a vast world of enormous diversity and richness, and to try to speak to some of the manifestatations within this diversity is to do injustice to the material. I am very well aware of that, and I will simply give a few samples and I will say that these samples are very typical of situations that you confront. By and large I have drawn my examples from two areas that I am mostly familiar with. That is the area of the Great Plains, the prairies and also the south-west. One other point of qualification and that is that in talking about the kinds of things that we are talking about, I shall be using what is referred to as jargon is the ethno-graphic present. That is in many cases I will be talking about forms as if they were alive and viaible today, at this moment where, indeed I am talking of them as they existed in earlier periods. Classical periods of the plains and so on. There is historical dimen- sions here that I have to view on, in this kind of approach, we use this present ethno-graphic approach. At the same time I would like to emphasize that many of the values, indeed cultural social forms that I shall be talking about, are still alive and viaible. This varies a great deal according to the area, according to the groups within the particular area. To me the really mariculous thing is that today, in spite of everything, in spite of the enormous forces which have been brought to bear upon the peoples, in terms of the reservations system, in terms of the BIA philosophy, in terms of the educational system that

has been imposed for so long upon these peoples, the miracle is that they have persisted to the degree that which they have. The old patterns are still there in many many cases and they are still real and viable, and still give life to cultures and to the people. To me considering the history of all the Anglo or the white man's encounter with these people, this persistence is a most remarkable fact that I feel has not been given fair treatment in history and so on.

Now in talking about religion in relation to social forms, ethics, mores as of the people, the first thing that I shall make clear is that in these kinds of approaches there is no listing of what is right or wrong. There is no moral code that one has that state this you shall make clear is that in these kinds of approaches you shall do, and this you shall not do. It's not quite that way with these kinds of cultures. Rather what we are involved with here is something that is far vaster than this. We are involved in an enormous web of inter-relationships which from conception until after birth engulf the individual who grows up in these societies which then orients him in relation to values and realities of his culture, which give to him all the orientations that it is necessary for life here on this earth. It is, therefore, a difficult thing to talk to because we are dealing with essentially a cosmology, a vast kind of world of value; to which the individual grows up.

Let me give you some specific examples of what I am talking about. I guess really what I am talking about is dimensions which contribute to identity, forces which give to the individual sense awareness as to who he is, where he is. The dynamic corollary to that, is where he has come, from and whence he is going to. Speaking to this essentially, I would like to suggest that these are concerns which are universal; these are concerns of ourselves today as well. These are today I feel concerns for which we have no parallel; that is we have no similar kind of engulfing web which tells us these things. By and large there are

exceptions to these. The child brought into one of these cultures is introduced soon after birth to this quality of the cosmic world that I have talked about. For example among the Navajo, Arizona, New Mexico, when a child is born the first thing the mother will do is to take the child outside of their dwellings, the hogan and the first phenomenon of nature which appears to the child will determine the name of that child. It might be a blue-bird or any form or force of nature. That first glimpse of natural form will determine what the name of that child will be. Later on in life the child may have other names or more names, but this initial name is the first step in a long continuing process which continues to create a multitude of interrelationships with the natural environment. As the child grows he or she learns the web of relationships. First of all is one's immediate family and one's extended family (aunts, uncles, grandparents), and this extends out to the members of the larger group-tribes, bands, or in those cases where there are clans, members of the clans. The child is continually learning the qualitative nature of these relationships to his large family surrounding him.

Among the culture of the Plains, kinship terminology is relatively simple. Only a few terms which refer to these relationships. These few terms have several dimensions to them which have a certain religious dimension which I will indicate. The term for the mother (Ena) is also a term that is used for the earth itself. The term used for the father is (Otee) is a term that is used for the creative principal of life. Father. We have this of course also in the Christian theology, our Father refers to a principal of the earth, the productive principal of the earth. It is a more abstract, a deeper concept than that of the mother. Mother refers to the appearance of the earth, the growing things that come forth. The grandmother is a term that refers to the vital underlying principal, the energy that gives the source of life you

might say. The same way with the term for grandfather (toncashna). This refers not only to father as creator, but to a deeper concept, a concept in which Christian theology, if you are familiar with the term as you say Meister Eckhart it refers to a primal source. A source of the source one might say.

We.., these relationships then are extended to include more than the biological mother, grandmother, father, and grandfather. We use the term the father here to refer to any male who is old enough to be your father. We use the term mother to refer to any woman to is of a generation level to be your mother, and so on for grandmother and grandfather. You use those terms for all those members of the larger extended family group or clan. It gives to the individual who is brought up in this a kind of group the feeling of relatedness. It also implies obligations. If you can go and visit somebody on the other side of the reservation you go into his house and call him father. He must give of you to eat and so on.

In living in this kind of world for some years, even though I was an outsider, I felt the power of this ever expanding web and it was a good feeling. One has a sense of belongingness, a sense of security. You knew that whenever you might travel among this group you will always find relatives, and they will take you in and feed you and care for you. Even though, quiet obviously, I am not a Dakota, they knew that I had been taken adopted into the family and so this same system was extended and offered in relation to myself. It gave one sense of belonging, a sense of identity as if you were enormously important.

This, generally contrasts to the nature of the family generally in our society today, where it is by and large a nuclear family only with the mother and father and so on. If the great aunt should come to visit, it is a catastrophe. Probably not in North Carolina, where I know there

is hospitality and so on. We are not set up to accept the great aunts and so on who just come in. Whereas in this other kind of culture, it is expected. For example it was happened often in our household among the Dakotas I find that if we are successful in hunting and have a deer in the house all the relatives would come. They would just appear and nobody sends out invitations. I don't know how it happens. I remember once it was my job to hunt for this family because none of us had enough of money to live by. I remember once I shot a deer way out in the hills about 8 miles from our log cabin home and by the time I had packed up that deer and brought it into camp all the relatives were there sharpening their knives. I don't know how they knew, and they stayed with us until all the meat was gone. Nobody thought that it was an imposition at all. It was indeed a great time of fun. Everybody enjoyed it. It was a time for gossiping, exchanging stories. It was great. We know if we ran out of meat, as we did on occasion, we could go over and visit aunt Sulffy Bluffing Bear. We had heard that her son-in-law had just brought in an elk. It was just an afternoon visit and we stayed there for one week, until the elk was eaten up. When you come there are no introductions. You just come and nobody asks you any questions and when you leave, you don't say well I'm going now, and nobody asks where are you going; you just leave. That's the way it is done. It's really nice. You see this is part of the relationships that are found in terms of kinship, terminology. If one goes to other cultures one finds different systems of terminology and such.

I want to say that the relationships do not stop here. They don't stop with just people. First of all in these cultures it should be understood that there is a certain primacy that is given to the other beings of our world. To the four legged animals for example, to the birds. In mythic statements of creation myths and so on, it is established that the animals were here on this earth first and therefore because of this

primacy they deserve respect. They are in a sense superior to man who came later. This feeling has been destroyed and so again in terms of language of the Dakota dialect of the Sioux, the animal beings are referred to relatives. One is reminded of Francis of Assisi's affection for animals. This is a living reality. Every animal has a relationship to men. He is one of your family too. It is not just the aunts and grandmothers and so on. It is also animals who are related to them.

This greater relationship expands even further. It expands to include the elephants, the strong powers of the world. To these also, we are related to in mysterious kinds of ways. Indeed this system extends out to include the totality of all there is. It includes the entire universe in rites of the sacred pipe, for example, when a group of men smoke this communal pipe together, in finishing smoking, every man or woman, says in Oakota we are all related. They are referring, not just to all those who are present and smoking that pipe in a circle. They are referring to everything. In the rites of the pipe there is placed in the pipe, grains of tobacco and, each grain of tobacco in this world represents some form of creation. There is a grain for each animal, for each blade of grass, for each flower, for each dream. Everything is compacted into that space on the pipe, and smoking it you see there is this relationship established that is sacramental. When they say we are all related, they refer to all fossils, the 2 legged things, the stars, and all. I think this is point because very often I know we have this feeling that somehow the Indians have this relationship with nature and it is very nice you know. We have a sort of romantic understanding of it. It is kind of a general mood we feel, which is nice. I assert, it is far more than that. It is indeed a science. A written science that we are involved with here. It is spelled out in enormous detail, and it is all part of the law that is passed on with the child as he grows up, and as he becomes increasingly engulf-

ed in his vast awareness of relationship.

There are techniques whereby this question of relationship is intensified or whereby this question of relationship is intensified or whereby these relationships are never allowed to be forgotten. It is in terms of another dimension of this question, that I would like to say just a word about. I think we could call it sacred geography. One finds among the Tewa, peoples of the Rio Grande, one finds that the village where they live and have lived for a thousand or more years, that the center of orientation which involves series of forms. There is to the North as there is to the East and South and West. There is established a geographical, physically certain sacred centers and spots. Farther to the North is the sacred high mountains; there is a lake, a body of water and a sacred shrine. And coming in closer to the village at the center, is a lesser mountain, the Black Mesa Mountains and coming in closer is a shrine, just outside of the village, the village, the outskirts of the village itself. And so you have this fourth place the Kira is in the center. This relationship to the series of the sacred shrines are identified with known mountains extends out to all four directions of space. That center of the centers, because at each of the mountain tops the shrine there is also considered to be a center. At the center of the village this Kira is known as the center of the centers. It is represented by what is known as the "seaport". It is actually a hole which is there at the bottom. It is in this Kira here, as you know, all the ceremonies, take place, the rituals are prepared and so on. So the individual, here, Pueblo Indian grows up with this kind of orientation. With this world which extends in four directions in space and with the center of the four directions at the heart of his village. Of course it is the same for all of these villages because there is a unit of culture here. One might say if it not a conflict,

how would this village be the center of the world and another make the same claim. We are talking about a center which is everywhere.

What theologian said that God is an circle whose center is everyone and whose circumference is no where. This defines I think rather nicely what we are talking about here. These people do understand that indeed center is everywhere, and yet they also understand in their wisdom that man needs to make this kind of abstraction very concrete. So he focuses in terms of that as the center of his keeper as the relation to the geographic direction.

So one could go on for probably all the Indian peoples off the Americas, and show how they understood their land, their geography in this way, the sacred way, and see their growing up in kind of world. one grows up in a world of meaning in which one is oriented, in which one always knows where one is, and what way one relates to all families.

There are other techniques for intensifying this kind of world as you know, and again what I want to talk to you about speaks to areas that we are very casual about in our culture and don't give to much attention to it. I am talking about puberty ceremonies for example when a young girl becomes a woman. She is treated in a very very special way. She is considered to be in a dangerous state, although she is in a dangerous state, in a sacred state, and this must be treated carefully. So often young girls in times of their first periods they are put in a special place a special little teepee and there she has to observe a certain number of taboos, rites and so on. The dominant thing that goes on here is that the old people of the group, the old grandmother, stays and spends much time with this young girl and explains to her what is taking place. She explains to her the nature of this sacred transformation. She goes into great detail now to explain all the

functions she must observe, fulfill, all the things she must be carefully of and not to do. Again we have here a technique, a transmission of these social cultural values that serve to make evident to a growing person, through the years, what is his place here.

And for the boys too, and also for the girls to, at this time, it is almost universal among the Indian peoples, they are expected to make a retreat, to go away from camp alone. For boys it is a very isolated, a high mountain. For the girls it is not so far away from camp because the girl needs greater protection, and so on. They seek a dream or vision experience in solitude and in suffering, because usually in these retreats one undertakes a total fast. Neither water nor food is allowed and often the vision seeker goes for four days and four nights, although that may vary. And in this experience, if it comes, it does not always come, but if it comes, it tends to come because of the forces of this web that I am trying to define for you. Since they have known of other experiences and experiences have been recounted to them and since others experiences have been graphically presented in art for so long, they are receptive to this quality of experience and normally it does come and usually it does come in one of the forms of nature. Usually it is an animal being that comes either in a deep dream state, a true vision experience and that being enters into a relationship with the individual and, explains to him or her some of the secrets of life that he knows, it is assumed here and known that each animal manifests his own particular bit of wisdom and man would share in this. It is from this experience, from he who comes, that the individual then receives what is probably now a name, a second name. He will be given a sacred name that refers to the experience that has come to him during the time of his first vision. These are names that are so sacred, that they are not

used in everyday speech. One should not refer to a person in this kind of name. Rather one refers to the person in terms of relationship. This may be a continuing experiences. Those who have had a positive experience during the retreat may do it often, again and again, and indeed in cases of many individuals they have received a series of these experiences.

Other reinforcing forms for this identity, for relationships can refer to are thousands actually, is the way in which living groups are organized physically. The Plains, the group is organized in terms, of camp circle. The circle because the circle is considered to be sacred. The circle represents totality, and so the people live in circles arranged in larger circles, and if they are many bands that are gathered together there will be many circles all of which constitute one vast huge circle. Here again living in a circle in relation to circles, the individual is not able to forget the power that is manifested in various forms. Among some people such as the Omaha, the camp circle is divided into two halves. One half related to the heavens, and the other half to the earth. One half of the clan groupings refer to the aspects of the earth, the others to heaven. This even extends to personal names. So you have here again a world projected which has this formality of heaven and earth almost in a oriental kind of way of Yin Yang. It is indeed the interrelation between heaven and earth that is necessary for this totality which the total circle represents.

We have the same kinds of feelings with the arrangement of the villages of the South West. The villages are divided into halves. One half is related to turquoise which represents heaven and the other half may be something that grows on the earth, squash, pumpkin. Here again is a way of emphasizing the dynamics of the world, the interaction, or the active or passive formality of heaven and earth.

So those are not just social organs, social reasons for con-

venience. These are actually patterns that reflect and transcend the area of social concerns.

I want to turn more specifically to this question of harmony. I have talked about polarity, polarity, heaven and earth, and the equilibrium, the balance that is here. Let me refer to an example that is taken from the Navaho. Navaho believes that ideally man lives in a state of harmony in this universe. That man is also able to create a rupture in that harmony by having bad thoughts, negative thoughts of whatever it might be. Through breaking a taboo he can interrupt that idea, harmony at which time he then becomes ill. Illness is always caused by this kind of rupture. It is whole and the great Navaho ceremonies are for placing man again back into a state of equilibrium and harmony in his world. You see right and wrong here is not just a question of rules and laws. It is the question of integration of harmonious and relationship.

There are techniques that are very powerful used sometimes to enforce conformity, to enforce virtue for example. In the plains, when the sacred tree has been chosen for the great rites of the Sundance, the first chopping of that tree must be done by a young girl who is pure. If there is a young man there who knows that she is not pure he has the right to step forward and to say so and thereby disgrace her. This is a very powerful technique. Or in the society the work for the clearing of the field to plant the sacred tobacco, involves both men and women. Neither a man nor woman can participate in that work unless they have led a pure life. No adultery and so on. Anybody there has the right to protest such a person. Old Luey gave account of such a tobacco ceremony where the people were most embarrassed because everybody who stepped forward to do whatever his job was was protested not virtuously. It went on and on and they finally had to give up the tobacco ceremony. There was no virtue

there. There are also very simple little techniques that we try out here to enforce good conduct. In the Plains for example, if somebody has been violating something in camp, misbehaving, running off with somebody's wife or whatever it might be, some night in one of the teepees, one of the families will start talking about it in a rather loud voice. The teepees next to this hears it and they take it up and start talking about in a rather loud voice, and so on it goes around the whole campsite so that everybody has been made aware of the misdoings of such and such an individual. That is a very powerful technique for bringing about conformity to ethical norms and such.

There is one other area I would like to talk about. That is the power in these traditions. The oral transmission. I don't have time to talk about the myth but I would like to say just one thing about the folk tales. I think that in so many folklore studies there has been misunderstanding. We have not understood how to read some of these tales, such as the coyote tales. The reason why this is so is that the stenographer has simply been busy recording the tale accurately verbatim. He has not paid attention to the context in which the telling of the tale takes place. He has not recorded how people react to various episodes in the tale. If one watches the people as these tales are told about coyote, one notices that certain points they laugh. Things which to us are not funny, but for the people themselves it is hilarious. You see this is one of the great functions of coyote in coyote tales which are quite universal in North America. Coyote is always a sneaky kind of a guy who is always hungry. He is always complaining, he is always jealous, he is always trying to trick someone, and so on. Every time it is described how coyote is asking for sympathy because he is hungry, people simply break up laughing. This is so funny. You know why? In their culture this is something one never does. One never should complain

one is hungry. Here you never complain about the normal adversities of life. If you can't get a square meal you tighten your belt. You know you will get one maybe another day. You do not complain. Folklore, the telling of tales is a very important tool for transmitting values, virtues, and efforts, what is right what is wrong. I am sorry that there are so many things that I would like to talk about the power of the world, dance ceremonial dance cycles, and the nature of leaders chiefs, and how they come to be such through sacred sanctions. I would like to talk about warfare which has been enormously misunderstood and which has been misrepresented continually through movies, TV, and so on. There is in Indian warfare a quality aspect that I would enjoy to talk about. The taking of scalps for example which incidently was a trait that was diffused very rapidly through the white man. The taking of scalps has a sacred sense to it. I would like to talk about societies, secret societies, the animal societies and so on. All these aspects that make up the total kind of cultures that we are talking about here. Essentially what I am trying to say here is that we are talking about this total web of culture within which the individual grows, and through which he is taught all the important things of life and how to behave and how not to behave, and to what is his relationship to the sacred beings and so on. I am talking about total worlds, worlds which have meaning, beauty, dignity, and worlds which are of excessive complexity. Today we can learn from it if we pay attention and if we ask the right questions.

Influences on American Indian Religion

In religions studies we take into consideration the Monotheist tradition, and if we introduce concerns for the native American or primitive religions, it is done as a disservice to the primitive religions.

In our approach to these studies we have often fallen prey to a certain kind of prejudice which has to do with concepts of evolution which have often misread and misapplied, and which have to do with quantity rather than quality, and which have to do with a certain bias coming out of the Judeo-Christian tradition. So we have tended, as anthropologists, to consign primitive tribal religions to a religious scrapbasket because we don't quite know what else to do with them.

In our concern with them, we have developed a sense of superiority in relation to them. Of the great founders of Anthropology, men like Al Croker for example, who is responsible for works on "Ishee", even he evaluated the peoples and the traditions he worked with as inferior. This I assert has no place in the science of anthropology. I think its high time we rid ourselves of it. I think anthropologists are becoming more aware of the disservice being done those traditions labeled primitive. There's a long history of this attitude and I think it's related to the evolutionistic bias, applied to the religion of misreading, and misapplying these biases with respect to the history of religions and the development of ideas regarding high religions. We've come to think in the last 100 years or so that somehow people who represent earlier phases of culture are inferior in cultural forms and as human beings. We look for example at the so called "aborigines" of Australia - "most primitive" as being inferior because he wears no clothes. We forget that the Old Testament recounts that Adam and Eve wore no clothes. We don't assign to them the ranks of primitive or inferior in any sense of the word. The point is we have judged people according to the richness of their material

possessions. At least in the case of the Australian Aborigines this is so. I assert this is all unfair judgement, because wearing clothes has nothing to do with being human. What has really bugged the anthropologist concerning Australian Aborigines in studying oral traditions, kinship structures, etc., they've been surprised to find an incredible richness. In feeding data about Australia Aborigines Kimsley system into a computer it blew the computer up; it is that complex. Anthropologists still haven't come to the end of this study.

My point here is that sometimes certain things are possessed at the expense of other things. If a people have a scarcity of material possessions and so on, it might be that they are able to have rich developments in other non-material areas. How are we going to assign our priorities? What ultimately is most important? Two cars in a garage or whether you can relate oral literature which is thousands of years old and has to do with the nature of man and his origins, which has to do with who I am, where I am, where I have come from and where I am going to? If an oral tradition can answer these questions and give the individual a sense of identity, is this not notable: Is it not worthy of our consideration?

The same thing has been done to the American Indian, I feel, They have been placed in the category of the primitive. They have been evaluated too often as being inferior, as being not quite "with it" in some way not quite up with the 20th century. Indeed the whole energies of the trusteeship of the government.. Over the Indians, the history of the B. I. A. for example has been based on the premise that these people are primitive, that they are inferior, and therefore they must be brought into the mainstreams of modern contemporary western society as quickly as possible. It is for their own good, whether they know it or not. If they don't want, that's because they are too ignorant to understand that they need it, and therefore we have to force upon them all kinds of systems and concepts. The most crucial one of all in the history has been

an educational system which has never been adapted to the needs of the people and which has never taken into account the integrity and orientation of these cultures. It's changing now as often as people are taking their destiny and educational options into their own hands. I see this as positive and these people are going to tell us that we need to know and that what is important is quality being and not the quantity of what we possess.

In using the term primitive, which has taken on these negative correlations over the years, I mean "primal," coming first. These then are people who were here first literally on this continent. They are also people whose traditions, very ancient, go back to early time - very close to origins you might say, and therefore from the point of view which I accept, close a richness that possibly we have proceeding away from. In relation to these concerns, the focus of students of Native Americans has been in relation to their religion. Earlier students have been concerned with whether these people had a God or whether they knew a high god, whether there might be some sort of a monotheism present here. Father Schmidt asserts that the high god concept existed in North America. Many of the early works assert that these people had no such belief in a supreme principle or supreme being. This view affirms the belief of many inferior primitives customs among Indians. Darwin and his voyage with the Beagle to South America made contacts with peoples there, studied them closely and came away with the belief that these people had no belief or image of a high god. Many students have the same conclusion, yet what has happened here is supported or borne out by literature in that all these students with these negative evaluations have failed to understand the language of these religions to be the forms in which these religions express themselves. In terms of our culture we have come to think of religion and life as being separated. Whereas for these people of a relatively simple technological culture that kind of dictionary is not made in relation to religion and life. The two are one. Two come together in one experience. There is no activity in these cultures which is not in some

way an expression of religious belief, of religious values. If I practice a craft, it is a religious act. I assert that the practice of ceramics in an Indian culture is a religious spiritual act, because there is a language involved in this craft which is part of the tradition of these people which they understand. For example the clay used in making a pot is the earth itself. In forming a pot they are forming something out of the earth and taking the role of a creator, of the Creator himself. This is a sacred tradition to be in. You can go to other forms of Indian cultures and find that they are all in a sense extensions of religious beliefs systems. They are ritual acts from birth, to death. It is their religion. Life itself is religion. The two are not artificially separated. Experience is one. It is not dictiontonized or fragmented, as we tend to do in our culture.

For example, three categories we tend to think in terms of are animals, vegetable, and mineral. This way of thinking of forms is inconceivable to the Indian cognitive orientation. That is that all forms that exist have life in some way or another. A rock has life and can talk in certain circumstances. Life is a continuism, a whole, not fragmented. Failure to understand this had led early students to assume that these peoples had no religion, no high god because they had no theology in which they talked about these things. This has been a basic misunderstanding. There have been other students who have seemed to understand that it is very possible for a people to have beliefs in a multiplicity of gods or goddesses, (what we call polytheism) or at the same time, it is possible for a people to have beliefs in a multiplicity of spirits beings. Every form of experience has a spirit counterpart as it were because it is a living thing and it has a vital and animated force at its center. Having these beliefs does not mean necessarily that having a belief in a supreme being is excluded. It's possible therefore, that these people may have a form of theism-polytheism, which recognises a multiplicity of spirits and on another level a single supreme being, possible monotheist in nature.

In the culture dialect of the ^{Sioux} their term for this principle is Wakan-
touka the great spirit, or the great mystery, or the great holy. It is a poly-
synthetic term and refers to a single principle containing within it a multi-
plicity of possibilities. It is inherently one and supreme, yet it contains
the possibility for a multiplicity of extensions. Its like a well cut dia-
mond with many facets, each facet representing a different reflection of the
light, so that each reflection is a form of the worldly existence that reflects
a principle that is one in total. It is this way of thinking that has evaded
students of American Indian Religions and has given rise to very gross mis-
understandings.

Another source of misunderstanding has come from early missionaries among
these people. In terms of the early Christian tradition, it is an either or
proposition. One is either a Christian or something else. But you cannot be a
Christian, and something else at the same time. Again the Indian doesn't see
this situation in terms of this kind of exclusivistic position. Rather in terms
of our traditions they would affirm whatever appears to them to be good and
true and beautiful. Early accounts of these peoples exposure to christianity
indicate that the Christianity was explained to them in languages that they could
understand, they understood it and they found it to be good and true and beauti-
ful. And therefore, they would affirm it and embrace it. A Missionary in his
books would claim he had made a convert, and was assured that Indians have given
up their own indigerous traditions. That has not been the case at all. They
may have affirmed Christianity, but they have never lost contact with their
traditions at the same time. This is the situation of Black Elk. If you have
read Nieharts' book Black Elk Speaks you are aware of this man, and the inten-
sity with which he participated in his own heritage and traditions. But you
are not aware of the fact in that books I did with Black Elk called The Sacred
Pipe that he was devoted to Christianity and at the same time he was deeply
entrenched in his own traditions and saw this as also right and valid and true
and never gave it up. Niehart was right, though he gave us half the picture of

the man.

These questions, I think are crucial when we consider the role that a study of religion of American Indians can play for the history of world religions. This area can open up to us many dimensions for the study of other religions. We are dealing here with relatively small groups - tribal groupings and are able to embrace the totality of these groups affirmations and to see from their possible perspectives in a way that is so difficult in world religions such as Buddhism with its large world membership. Here we are talking about a group that can be approached in small groupings with a good deal of vigor for analysis. We're talking about a range of these groupings that have enormous variety and differences, and this can be useful to the student of the history of religions. We're talking with religions experiences, that in spite of all the forms I've mentioned before, are still viable. They have a remarkable sustaining force behind them. I think it is worthy of our attention to find out what gives these traditions this tenacity.

We are observing today in many traditions a revival of ceremonies such as the Sun Dance for example a ritual form that goes back many thousands of years. It involves essentially sacrificial celebration around a central tree which is center of the world. This is a primordial symbol. This is being celebrated today in 20th century America. I think the dynamics underlying this can be considered as an enormous contribution to the study of religions in general. In spite of the diversity across all these cultures there is one universal theme that is crucial to us in the study of religion and it is the manner in which these traditions relate to ecological concerns. These traditions have taught us about man's interrelationships to his environment. These traditions involve certain forms of ritual practice, which should be understood better for the understanding of the nature of religion itself. I refer to such things as the utilization of sacrifice. Sacrifice is a central element in most American Indian rites or ceremonies. I mentioned the Sun Dance. Maybe you

Saw a film called "Man Called Horse." It was supposed to be a Sioux Sun Dance, but Hollywood liked the Mandan variety, which had the individual being suspended from the central pole by the muscles of the chest, and he rears back until the muscles tear loose and he is freed. It is an act of sacrifice and it involves suffering.

The retreat or the quest for a guardian spirit involves fasting, four days and four nights with no water, or no food. Some individuals have done this for ten days. It is said that Crazy Horse received his power through having done this for ten days. Or an individual will offer a sacrifice by cutting off a member of his body. The individual sacrifices something of himself for a religion and/or goal, or purpose. From the whole concept of sacrifice, our society has a lot to learn. Consider the vision experience, for example. It is remarkable, especially in the Plains tradition, that every young man or woman is expected to go out on a vision quest. The amazing thing is that normally almost everyone in this culture at one time or another receives a vision experience. Robert Louie called this democratized shamanism because normally this kind of practice is for particular practitioners such as shamans. Here it is experienced by everyone. In terms of religious experience, we can learn a great deal. We might consider shamanism itself and the states of ecstasy the shaman must enter into as invaluable for the study of religious experience.

In these traditions we also have a range of concepts which are very valuable to the study of religious phenomena. Concepts such as "Orenda", an Iroquois term for spiritual power. Sometimes Orenda is referred to in their pictographs with a little man with wavy lines issuing out from him, saying that all creatures of creation have

this power. Maybe we are getting back to the Orenda concept today as we speak of vibrations, or good vibes'. There is belief in guardian spirits inhabiting animals, and which have influences over humans. In a way they correspond to Christian concepts of angels. Animals are ranked in hierarchies. An eagle may outrank a prairie chicken, for example.

If you've read Black Elk, you know that we're talking about more than physical manifestations. We're talking about principles underlying the manifestations. We have rich beliefs involving the master of the animals conceived to be one particular species. There is a lot here to help us understand the nature of religious phenomena.

There are questions of cosmic symbolism, of ritual. Mythological theories, the relation between religion and society, ethical norms and so on.

Finally, we have in relation to North American Indian religious tradition, perhaps above all else, the necessity to study personality of people who represent all this wisdom. We have in Black Elk's example, a sacred person. According to any religion anywhere, he was the man who lived very close to the Great Spirit always. He expressed this relationship in all that he did and said. Today, he is taken as a symbol of all that is good in the American Indian traditions. My assertion is that if we can reevaluate these religious traditions, if we can rid ourselves of the old prejudices that have been brought to bear on them, we shall have a vast rich resource which we can apply to our study of religion in general and the great religion

traditions of the world, which can clarify problems that could not be clarified in any other way. It is appropriate that this kind of acknowledgement is being given this tradition, and I am glad to see it. The American Academy of Religion has recognized the importance of these traditions and had organized a section for the study and presentation of materials in Indian traditions. We had an auspicious beginning for this concern when Scott Mamonoday spoke at the International Council for the Study of Religions in Los Angeles in 1972.

9
Joseph Brown - "Influences of American Indian Religion"

"I don't know in what direction this topic might take us. It is my personal hope that just as there is a growing activist movement, that there will be at the same time a growing concern for importance of Indian traditions on non-Indians. Oftentimes, action for the sake of action is not enough. I think there be other concerns. I think where there is injustice, that it is right to take action against injustice. I think at the same time there should be action or activity in relation to renewed religious awareness. Values which are ultimate are frightening you see, since they challenge us so deeply."

Let's consider the placing of the tepee as one example of an Indian influence. Tepees must be pitched so that the doorway is oriented toward the east, because the sun is associated with life and it is important to face the rising sun. It is important for that sun to enter into your house and to purify that house and to bring light into it. I recall a funny incident. I was traveling with a band of Ogalla in the Black Hills several years ago. We were traveling to rodeos and things where the Indians were given a place to camp, and it was good because the Indians were given some buffalo to eat. At Deadwood, the teepees went up and everyone pitched their teepees facing the arena which was to the west, because they wanted to be able to sit in their teepees and look at the action in the arena. I was a bit fanatic in those days I guess. A man was not supposed to set up his own teepee and there was an old lady who used to do it for me. I said, "The door to the east," as was always done, and she did it. I saw some of the old men looking around at each other. Finally I

saw all those teepees coming down and being repitched with the doorway facing east, which didn't hamper their view at all, because the teepee is such a versatile form that it's very easy to roll up the lodge cover in any size that you want, so that you can see in any direction.

I think if Frank Lloyd Wright had invented the teepee form he would have been more proud of himself than he was. I've been in some camps for example where there have been teepees and wall tents. Wall tents are very permanent. A twister came through and the wall-tents were destroyed and the teepees remained. Because of its conical shape, the twister could not pick it up. It's ideally suited. Indeed at my home I had a teepee pitched for a year and a half while building my place. I haven't had to reset or repitch it. It's stood for a year and a half through winter storms and everything.

I have been asked, "What is soul and spirit in my description of man?" I use here soul in perhaps a special sense, in perhaps the sense that Christian Scholastic Theology uses it in referring to an area of the mind, the psyche. In our theological language today there is sometimes a confusion between the terms soul and spirit and they are sometimes used interchangeably.

The mind is a subtle domain. In the religion of Indians there are multiple kinds of souls. For example the Shaman is able to project out of his being one of his souls and that soul can travel. They speak also of ills caused by soul walks. There is a dimension of subtle being that can come out of the soul and be lost. It is then the duty of the Shaman to make sure that the soul goes back into the body. It goes to show the richness of this world. It is not simple at all. It is very sophisticated.

"Is there some form of non-understanding or communication?"

Response: I'm not sure. But I can tell you as it relates to my initial encounter with Black Elk which I still don't understand. I spent a very long time looking for him because he'd been traveling with his family, working on farms in potatoes. I finally found him in Nebraska and I entered into his tent and I had a pipe with me which I had been taught how to use and I didn't speak to him at all, I simply filled the pipe and passed it to him and he smoked and passed it to me and I smoked. I was a bit anxious to know whether I would be rejected or thrown out. I had been told that this was not the best way to see this person because he would not receive me. But he smoked there for a half an hour and nobody said anything. And at the end of it, he asked me, which surprised me, "Where have you been all this time? I've been expecting you." Would you now come home with me and spend the winter, I'd like to talk with you." So I don't know, this is the way it happened.

In a previous lecture I said that Black Elk not only accepted the Christian belief, but adhered to his tradition rather strongly. One might ask did these conflict in any way? And if so, which one would dominate? I don't think either one. The day before Wounded Knee broke out, I attended Black Elk's funeral for his son Benjamin Black Elk. Here again you have a person deeply entrenched in his own tradition but very faithful also to Christian conduct. There at his funeral, a Catholic high mass, in his coffin he wore a pin-striped business suit, with an eagle feather in his hair. He was holding a pipe; and he had various sacred things people had put in there--a crucifix alongside a peace pipe. Russell Means was there

and he put in a little bag of some sacred things, I don't know what it was. And then just to show you how things have changed, in the course of the mass, which was a Catholic high mass, the priest took up a sacred Sioux pipe and went through correctly all the rites with great sincerity. And it is an Indian rite which was integrated into the mass of the church. There seemed to be no priority given to one or the other.

Years ago such an experience would be inconceivable. I remember living and working with Black Elk. Sometimes we would see over the horizon a cloud of dust coming over the dirt road, and the cloud would come to our front door and into our log cabin would come the Catholic Father, Zimmerman, a very funny man. He took exception to our talking about old traditions being accepted. He would say these are works of the devil. These are pagan superstitions. These are practices which should be forgotten the sooner, the better. Then pointing to me he said I was doing the work of the devil by getting this man to talk about these things. It was an embarrassing situation. Finally he would leave in a trail of dust and nobody commented or said anything. This was the attitude of the official church; that all this traditional thing was evil and pagan destructive. It's very much changed now, as a matter of fact at the Holy Mission at Pine Ridge, they all read their books of sacred rite. Whether they have ulterior motives, I don't know, but certainly on the part of Black Elk and due to his intense participation in his own tradition, he had no trouble understanding the sacred dimensions of Christianity. It's the same kind of thing you get around election time at the reservation. Two buttons: one for the Republican campaign and one for the Democratic. And at the election time you come in and simply take off the losing button.

5 Joseph Brown - "What We Can Learn From American Indian Religion"

I find the topic I've been asked to speak on tonight somehow remarkable. It is a topic that I doubt would have been asked not many years ago. There are, however, profound reasons for our change of attitude here. I'd like to go into a few of these, but first let me give you an example of the change of attitude in relation to the book, Black Elk Speaks, which was recorded by John Niehart in 1932, published I think in 1934. Nobody bought the book then. I found it in my last year of undergraduate work. Somehow that book struck a chord which was meaningful to me in many ways. Somehow it opened up a dimension of American Indian thought and culture that I'd always thought was there, but I'd never encountered that kind of demonstration of it. I tried to find copies of that book and I couldn't because the publisher, William Morrow, had sold the remaining books. It was such a failure. I bought all the copies I could at the second-hand store and I sent them to friends in Europe, and then I tried to get American publishers to consider republishing it. It seemed to be so very important to us in many ways, and there was absolutely no interest. We arranged for translating the book into three or so European languages. It became very successful in Europe and I was then able to come back to the states and approach publishers, notably, The University of Nebraska Press, and finally it was reprinted in paperback in English some years ago, as you know very well.

I recently heard that that book has sold over a million copies. Today it is still going strong and is still a best seller. Moreover this figure Black Elk, has come to be a symbol among many American Indian leaders of all the best in some of the new orientations stirring within the New Indian Movements.

You are aware that Black Elk died sad, disillusioned, a pitiful old man, thinking that his dream had never been realized, his dream to bring back the hope of his nation, his dream to make the flowering tree grow and to bear fruit again, thinking he'd been a failure, but I assert that his life was not a failure and his message was not lost. I believe that there are reasons for this.

I'd like to just hazard one reason that impresses me very much, and it relates to my initial question; why should I be asked to talk on this topic. What can we learn from the American Indian? It seems to me that there are two main currents to this question; one is in relation to ourselves, that is to non-Indians and to non-Indian society; and the other is in relation to the Indians themselves. For a very long time Indians have been told it has been the point of view, the culture, the civilization, the religion of the white man are the right ones, are the ultimate ones. It is for your good Indians have been told that you give up your own ways, your own traditions and you come along with us on our express train that is going onward and upward, and is going higher and higher and better and faster to this new way of life. Many Indians accepted this point of view, and now things are changing somehow. Some are asking, "Where are we going?" We're beginning to see signs that possibly we are not going in directions that may be fruitful. We are asking "root questions" about ourselves, the nature of our society, the nature of our civilization, the nature of our ultimate orientations. We are being caused to ask these questions because our path has taken us in directions that somehow brings ruin in various dimensions around us, especially to the ecological types of problems that technological applications of science have brought us to. We represent, it seems to me, phenomena, that are no longer attractive to the American

Indians. They are no longer willing to join us in a pursuit which seems to have no real purpose, which seems to lead into blind passageways. Where they have often tried to acculturate into our society, it has been at the level which is least attractive, one might say, because the options are very few for their entrance into forms of our society, and they have been required to participate in certain aspects of our culture, notably foreign wars which have exposed them to some of the ugliest dimensions in our society. It is indeed, and studies have demonstrated this, notably by studies of the southwestern Zuni, of returning Indian veterans from Korea, from Vietnam, who when they come back into their reservations, into their communities, somehow become leaders of traditional elements. They are people, who having seen our world at its ugliest, have vowed that if they should survive, and if they can get back to their people eventually, will try to build a better way of life. Rather, they will try to rebuild their ancient and traditional life-ways. They see these now as being real and reliable; as offering man dignity and beauty, self respect, etc.

This is yet a growing trend. As I mentioned, there are two paths here which parallel each other. There are questions about ourselves. The Indians question our way. They resolve now to try to find lost roots, and to try to recover lost ground. And so it is today that we are asking these kinds of questions. We're looking in all directions. Those of you who have lived in California know what is going on out there. Students are looking everywhere to the Orient, to exotic forms of religious participation. They are more and more not only looking outside our own culture, they are looking into our own culture. They are finding here at home peoples representing values and patterns of life that somehow make sense. So more and more we are asking this question: "What is it that we may learn from Indian religions, from Indian traditions, from Indian culture, that we may somehow apply to the problems with which we are all today confronted? And so it is

with a sense of great personal gratitude that I am here tonight, and I would like to share with you a few thoughts about this question which I think is important.

Let me make one comment before I go on, because I would not have misunderstandings here as I have seen happen in the past. For a number of years I have given courses at Indiana University and elsewhere in American Indian religions and religious traditions and I've been amazed at the really misunderstood what I've tried to communicate. Often in place of a written final examination, I allowed students to engage in certain projects and this a very popular way to "cop out" of the traditional exam, and I found that come the end of the quarter or semester that I spent an enormous amount of time travelling around the Indiana Countryside inspecting Indian teepees, plains teepees, inspecting sweat-baths, participating in Indian meals, etc. and it is great fun. This is a painless way of correcting papers and requires a great deal of time. Also it is dangerous. I've been nearly poisoned to death by eating Indian foods, and I've nearly been boiled to death in home-made Indian sweat baths. The point I would make is that in seeking to learn from Indian traditions, it should not be with a view, as I said, and I am now talking from the point of view of myself, as a non-Indian. It is not with a view of entering into the world of the Indian in an existential kind of manner. One cannot do that. It is a world that is excluded to the outsider. It is a world that we cannot enter into unless we are born into it, brought up with the language. This is a vast and complex type of world, a very sophisticated world indeed. And we can only identify with it if we start with it from birth or conception. The point is, as I see it, that if we are not to try to enter into this which is always. I suggest, an artificial endeavor, what is it that we can gain from our attempt? As I see it, it is a way by which we can stand off from ourselves a little bit, look back at

ourselves from a certain distance, gain some sort of perspective for ourselves, and see more clearly the nature of our condition, the nature of our problems. I think that all that we can learn from American Indian traditions can open this up to us, this new way of looking at ourselves. We become so encased with our own structures, that we aren't aware of what these are, and what affect they have on us. So, my position here then is, that is through the Indian we may be aided in regaining contact with our own roots, our own traditions, our own heritage, which have been lost. We must do what the Indian today is doing. We must try to regain contact with our own heritage, whatever that might be so that we can start to build with possibly and hopefully other kinds of orientations.

But now, to the question at hand, what is it that we may learn from Indian traditions? I'm not sure where to start here; there is so much involved. I'd say in the first place perhaps we are able to learn what a religious tradition really is. Some of us perhaps have lost touch with our traditions. Those who have been alienated from our own Judaeo-Christian heritage. I think we have here a paradox in talking about Indian religions, or Indian traditions. Because, for the Indian, there is no such thing as religion paradoxically enough. There is no Indian language that I'm aware of, no single word that may be translated as religion. And this fact has been misunderstood by those who had early contacts with the Indians. They have assumed, well, that they have no word in their vocabulary for religion, therefore, there is no religion here! This is not true. That is why I prefer to use not the term "religion", but the term "tradition", which includes the totality of culture. We are talking of a total life way that is rich, that is whole. We're talking about patterns of living, wherein all dimensions, all aspects. What we call "religion" is integrated. I come back

to my original point. We can learn what a tradition is. We can learn that here in these peoples, man is understood as the total being that he is. Man is seen in terms of his total needs. Man is understood in terms of, not just a physical being with physical needs. But he is a person with a body. Yes, but also with a soul and a spirit. And he needs forms; he needs supports that take into account his totality as to who man is. This is the nature of the tradition. And so one finds as one examines this vast array of American Indian traditions, supports of every kind from house types to subsistence pursuits, practice of crafts, in every activity, one finds the thread of religion. And it is then, I would assert, in coming to grips with what a tradition is, that we may be able to better realize some of the dimensions as to what we are lacking in our contemporary traditionalized type of society, where excessive interest is placed generally on pursuit of material things to the cost of these other dimensions that are absolutely necessary, for man's well being.

One of the dominant lessons we may learn, as I see it, from Indian religious traditions is the qualitative attitudes present here and man's relationship to his physical environment. This is one of the dominant concerns that we have today for the American Indian, for the American Indian traditions. Our danger is that, in looking to these traditions with a question of the nature of environment, our approach is apt to be too superficial, too romantic, too sentimental. We are apt to think here that there is here a simple mood of "belongingness" to the world of nature. We're apt to think that this is something that should/could, be very easy to enter and partake of. There is enormous interest now as we are getting back in touch with nature. It is a huge interest in camping equipment. It is a result, I think, of our sense of alienation from our world, where we live and have our being. It may be

that the feeling is that by simply going up into the hills, the fields, the mountains by going to the rivers, that somehow that feeling of "belonginess" that the Indian knows will somehow open up to us, or enter into us. All we need is exposure. Alas, it is not that simple. Because the tragedy is that wherever we go, we're obliged to take ourselves for ourselves. All our mental habits and bad habits are there with us. And although it is there in front of us, this world of Virgin nature, we are looking at it through glasses of our own vision, glasses of ourselves, that have been conditioned through many decades of education. We are not able to face the world of nature with any kind of spontaneity. We lack forms of distinctness and directness. It's not easy for us.

What I would stress here is that the Indian's relationships with world of nature is not easy. It has been conditioned by long periods of teaching, suffering, and experience, from the time the child is very small throughout his entire life. In books by a Sioux Ohiyesa, Charles Eastman, he explained how, when he would go out hunting, and come back, his father would ask him endless questions; what did you see? What was it doing? What was its color? What are its habits? What was it eating? What was the environment in which you saw it?, and so on. This endless quizzing causes the child to make keen observations; his eyes become sharper. Finally after years, he is able to perceive the minutest secrets hidden there in nature.

This is the kind of training that is excluded to us, I suppose. Although it is always possible for us to try to sharpen our vision, it is so difficult for us, because in our culture, in our lifeways, we are bombarded so continually with superficial random images from television, films, that soon we become inoculated against entering into any kind of real experience through these images. We tend to "ice-skate" over this world of artificial phenomena.

We are no longer able to penetrate, to focus. Focus is another factor. I believe it was Ohiyesa who said that if he were sitting with a group of elders, and his eyes moved or wandered, that he would be reprimanded. Focus on one thing. This is deeply instilled in the Indian; to focus and to concentrate.

In addition to the process of sharpening awareness, there is the lore provided by very rich oral tradition; whether it be in terms of myth or the folk tale. Every form in this world of experience is charged with meaning. Every form is related to other forms and has values which transcend other forms. These are things that are taught. Every animal being is seen as related to some kind of principle that transcends the similarity of that breed. This is not then just a question of worship of the forms of nature. It is a question of being able to view forms of nature as if they were windows looking out into a larger world, a spiritual world, a world where ideal forms lies behind the physical manifestations. We come here into almost a kind of Platonic world of ideals. Black Elk has referred to this way of seeing very often. Indeed, the fact that he was almost totally blind in his later years was not to him a problem at all. Because, as he said, he was able to view the world of everyday experiences as a world of shadows. And he has been able to enter into a world of light, a world of reality that underlies this world of shadows, of the world of everyday existence. So he was not hindered at all by the fact that he could not see very well. In coming to grips with our problems relative to crime, political turmoil, violence, ecological troubles, we look to the use of more and better technology. But our problems have been created by technology. What technology really is, is modes by which man conceives of reality and of the whole.

I assert that we are not really going to get out of our problems in any lasting way, if we don't approach them on the basis of changing our world views, of changing our vision of the world area. This is asking for something

of a revolution. It may be that we shall be forced into this kind of reexamination of fundamental principles. We shall be forced to re-evaluate the basic ways in which we conceive of experiences. I think it is only by a shift to this kind of vision, that we can change the directions of contemporary empty life from destruction to constructive ends.

So, there I think is one of the dominant areas from which I think we can learn from Indian religions. This is a religious world, this is a world which it seems to me, has not been outside itself. It is a world with which, we are unfamiliar. It again touches on fundamental differences between our world and theirs. That is for us, the world is somehow out there and we are here. We have made it a continent. We have created the split between the outer and inner worlds, and we don't know how to join the two together. The Indians has learned how to do this. He sees the outer world as being not other than himself. It is the vision that man has of himself that is going to determine his impact upon the outer world and upon his environment. What man creates is an extension of the way man sees himself and sees reality. Man creates ugliness, and it is an outward extension of the ugliness within him. Man is able to create beauty because it is an inner beauty within that must find expression. That is why I would say that so many, but not all the cultural forms of these people are forms of beauty. Whether they are house types, or clothing or utensils, whatever it might be, everything created there is created in beauty and is made with dignity and a vision that transcends the utilitarian purposes of the object. For you it is a study of art form, but for the American Indian, one can gain a perception of the world of beauty. Tomorrow I am going to talk about such art forms and the way in which they express such inner religious meanings. Something of this has caught our attention. Indian clothing is an example. Many of the contemporary styles for example have taken cues from Indian clothing. Fringes, fringe purses,

jackets, Indian footwear, moccasins, are but a few examples. If you ask students who wear these fringes, they may not know the fringes are pleasing. They express a religious value. Fringes, to Indians, represent the tradition of power. If a person wears a shirt with fringes, it means he has power, and it radiates out from him, as indeed do all aspects of creation. The clothing tends to support this world of religious value.

There are other areas that one could talk about here, that are deeply ingrained in Native American traditions, I mentioned sacrifice. The willingness, the ability, to sacrifice something for something greater, the ability to go without and not complain as mentioned in the Coyote tales today for example. Coyote in these tales is a fellow who is always hungry either to feed his belly or to feed his sexual appetites. Wherever he's doing funny things, complaining about being hungry for example, everybody laughs when they hear these stories. They know that one should never complain when denied the regular things that they need. If you don't get a meal when you want it, you don't complain, you tighten your belt and wait. This type of personal discipline is, I think, something we can learn from, and which I think we need to learn. It relates of course, to the whole ecological fix. Because if we're not going to learn to give up certain kinds of things, we're going to have to pay for them very dearly indeed. So, it's the ability to sacrifice, to renounce, the ability to do without that is something we can learn from these peoples.

There are in Indian traditions as multiplicity of ways by which the Indian finds, recognizes his identity, and asks the questions, who am I? and where am I? That is why in so many of the Indian traditions we find symbols as well as rites which give to man a center. In some rites you have a central sacred tree which stretches from the earth to the sky as the center of the world. This sacred rite takes place with the tree as the axis and with man

always focusing in on the center. Through this type of experience man is able to be aware of that center which is symbolically there while in reality it is everywhere and is at the center of his being. There are an infinite array of supporting symbols which give the people a sense of identity, of knowing where one stands. This is a conspicuous void I think in our own society. We do not have to take the kinds of answers, the kinds of techniques by which the Indian traditions search for and find through rites answers. We can find them in terms of our own traditions if we would look beyond popular culture symbols.

The Indian lives with a cyclical concept of life; a cycle of birth and death, a cycle recapitulated throughout the entire creation. It is for this reason too that for all these cultures, the circle is a sacred form. We used to think in these terms, but we've turned from this cyclical concept to a linear concept which is one dimensional. We consider life and death as a calamity of two extremes. We don't see them as does the Indian, as a cyclical process of all forms of life and creation. The person who understands the meaning of death knows the nature of life and vice-versa. This represents a belief so deeply ingrained in the people that there is no fear of death because it is known to be simply another side of the coin of life, so to speak. This is probably why in warfare, one finds no fear of death, but our observer the Indian in seeking death, is not gripped at fear because he knows what it is. We somehow in our culture go to infinite pains to hide from this ultimate reality of death. We have all kinds of subterfuges whereby we do this. Here again I think we can learn from the Indian if we can leave behind this linear view of life that focuses view on progress and come back into the cyclical process once again. This type of thinking and orientations leads to the development of a certain kind of personality, a quality that one could call spontaneity. The individual developed is not bound in a square

frame as it were. There is something about the spirit that is allowed to act free and spontaneously whatever the situation might be. We tend to be excessively mental in our orientations. If a problem comes, we have to look at it, analyze it in all dimensions, until finally we are able to say this is the way I am going to act. If we do that sort of thing in battle, the Indian is likely to act first, because he does not stop to think how am I going to get this man, or to look this way or that? He acts spontaneously, like a lightning bolt. It's comparable to the kind of spontaneity manifested by a Japanese Samurai who disciplines himself through Shinto rites. Indeed there are similarities between Japanese Shinto and the American Indian traditions. We get a personal account of this ability to react with spontaneity, with freedom and appropriateness, to new kinds of situations, from Indian traditions.

I use to travel with Black Elk a great deal. It was always fun to travel with him because you never knew what was going to happen next. His reactions to new things were spontaneous. He was not enslaved to certain rigid kinds of patterns. I remember once we went to Denver. This was many years ago I should say, because I suspect Denver has changed today. He didn't like Denver then. It had influences he thought. When we went to a restaurant there was a sign in the window - "No Indians, or Mexicans allowed", sometimes the sign would say "No Indians, Dogs, or Mexicans Allowed". Finally, after we found a place to eat it was a very rough place, we had to find a hotel, because his relatives were not at home. We found the dingiest type of hotel that you could imagine. In that hotel room he said "I am unclean, I want a sweat bath." I didn't know how one was going to have a sweat bath in this hotel room. But he proceeded to show me how to do it. He had never been in this type of situation before. It so happened that the only heat in this hotel was an old fireplace open and with loose bricks which had fallen down. He said take

those bricks and put them in the fire and get them red hot. Then we took the chairs in the room and put them in a circle. Then we took all the bedding and put it around the chairs to make a dome shaped lodge. Then we put the bricks in the center of this little home-made lodge in the hotel room. It was immediately very very hot as those of you know who have taken part in an Indian sweat bath. One perspires very freely. Black Elk felt at home offering sacred prayers and singing the sacred songs. It was a good experience as we sweated there together for about an hour. It caused the good and bad influence of Denver to be "sweated away". It was the first and I guess the last time an Indian sweat bath was constructed in a hotel room. I sometimes think the term ingenuity must have come from the Indians, because this is just one of dozens of experiences where the reaction of this man to new and unfamiliar circumstances were very appropriate.

I'm off the subject maybe. But yesterday as I was flying from Montana we flew in some very turbulent air. The pilot announced over the intercom that he was very sorry for the turbulence but there was nothing he could do about it. I smiled at this because I remember travelling home from Denver that time with Black Elk and we hit a terrible storm. The road was icy. I turned to him and said "Why don't you do something about it?" He said "alright, stop the car." Beside the road there, in the middle of the storm, he filled his pipe and offered it to the four directions and as he stood there smoking the clouds broke up, the sun came out and we continued on our way. To him it was perfectly natural. There was nothing extraordinary whatsoever. I don't know what we can learn from this I doubt if we can learn to control the weather through the practice of a Sioux Medicine Man. But I think that there are some things that we can learn here. If nothing else, that there are powers we can't understand any that transcend explanation.

I'd like to sum up suggesting a kind of structure that is inherent in these traditions; and that is, I believe inherent to all authentic religious traditions. It might provide a key to the question "What is it that we can learn from American Indian traditions?" As I survey all the forms, beliefs and supports of these religious traditions, I can see a sort of pattern emerging. It has three parts. It has to do with man's increased spiritual awareness and realization. The first dimension is what I would call purification. In every American Indian tradition there are rites which work for the purification of man, of the total man, as visible being and as a spiritual being. In all these areas man is purified by rites such as the sweat bath. There is a second dimension which I would call expansion. In all these traditions there are techniques and methods which help man to realize his totality as a being, and that he is a being that includes all things, and that he is not a mere fragment. There are a vast array of rites that instill this sense in man. One has only to think here of a plains Indian teepee for example. It is circular and has as its center the presence of the fire. This, to the Plains Indian, is a symbol of the world and of a totality. And in relation to that circle, that totality, there is at its center, at its heart, the presence of the spirit of the universe. Man is also in that circle, microcosmic. Man has also at this center the presence of the Great Spirit as they call it. Man in living within this circle or structure is continually reminded of its totality which has its center this prized sacred friend. Where man is able to realize the state of purity, he is able in an integral manner to enter this state of wholeness, or totalness. Where that is possible, we have the third stage which is, one might say, almost automatic. It comes in of itself, and that stage I would call identity. To identify with the

circle of wholeness, one is then able to identify ultimately with the center of that circle. These are the three dimensions which are ingrent and personal to a man like Black Elk. He is a man who manifested this quality of purity. He was a man who manifested this quality of wholeness, who had this sense of identity. He was a man who manifested and who lived close to and never forgot the induelling prescenceof the Great SPIRIT. So I think that in getting back to the original question of Indians being able to teach us through tradition, it is here that we have the most important clue to the whole thing-a tradition can only be total, can only hope to be spiritually operative where these three dimensions are accessible, where they are able to be participated in.

There is much more to be said, but I think this is the crux of the whole matter that we can learn who we are, not in terms of the Indians traditions only, that expresses these dimensions, but that we can learn to find these dimensions in terms of our own heritage and traditions.