

Does Looking Back Woman Have 'The' Sacred Pipe?

By Jim PathFinder Ewing (Nvnehi Awatisgi)

An issue of potentially powerful implications in Native America is brewing with the claims that The Sacred Pipe of the Lakotas (the C'anupa Wakan of the OcetiShakowin, the Seven Nations of the Sioux) is in the hands of a Mnicoujou Lakota woman by the name of Suzanne Dupree, or Looking Back Woman.

The issue is potentially divisive because it raises questions about the Pipe held by Arvol Looking Horse, who is widely known as the 19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe. While the issue is particularly pertinent to the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate (People), others may find it of interest, for it cuts to the heart of what is the Sacred Pipe, or Canunpa, and what it means. On her Web site, "Looking Back Woman Speaks" (www.lookingbackwoman.com),

Dupree outlines her claims, including who she is, where she came from, and how the Pipe she declares is The Pipe came into her possession. She says: "I have in my possession the C'anupa Wakan used by Grandfather Frank Fools Crow as Ceremonial Chief and Holy Man of the Western Teton Sioux during the first through the fourth White Buffalo Calf Pipe Ceremony and Sun Dance held at Green Grass, South Dakota between 1971 and 1975." It is this Chanunpa, she outlines, that is considered The Pipe, or the traditional ceremonial Chanunpa of the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate which, she claims, is no longer held by Arvol Looking Horse.

A reading of the whole site details that there were two Pipes traditionally used as the C'anupa Wakan -- one, the buffalo leg bone Pipe given the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate by PtesanWi, White Buffalo Woman, and another carved catlinite/pipestone Pipe used in public ceremony, which she explains is the Oyate's traditional ceremonial C'anupa Wakan. It is this Pipe she claims she has, along, presumably, with all rights and authority to speak, while also questioning if the original C'anupa Wakan even exists, making the Pipe she carries, in effect The C'anupa Wakan of the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate.

The significance of White Buffalo Woman and The Pipe to the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate is explained most cogently by the medicine man Crow Dog, who has said: "This holy woman brought the Sacred Buffalo Calf Pipe to the Sioux. There could be no Indians without it. Before she

came, people didn't know how to live. They knew nothing. The Buffalo Woman put her sacred mind into their minds."

It is the Sacred Pipe which allows and confers that knowledge, when treated in the way that PtesanWi, White Buffalo Woman, prescribed. It is the most holy of holies for the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate, or lila waken, very sacred. The white buffalo itself is considered wakan (sacred), with prophecies that the birth of a white buffalo calf would be a sign that it would be near the time when PtesanWi, White Buffalo Woman, would return to purify the world and to return spiritual harmony and balance to the Earth and all our relations, all beings.

Indeed, in the legend, PtesanWi, White Buffalo Woman, said in parting with the people: "The four ages of creation are in me; I am the four ages. I will come to see you in every generation cycle Toksha ake wacinyanitin ktelo, I shall see you again."

The questions Dupree raises are many, including: does she carry The Pipe traditionally used as the ceremonial Chanunpa? Does the original C'anupa Wakan of the OcetiShakowin still exist? If Arvol Looking Horse has the traditionally used Chanunpa, or even the original C'anupa Wakan of the OcetiShakowin, then why are neither no longer used in ceremony among the Oyate as commonly occurred throughout the last century, into the 1970s?

Dupree fully explains her history and her questions. These are not idle claims, nor is Dupree to be taken lightly. She states her standing to bring these questions forthrightly and everything she says is documented. The question for the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate to determine for itself -- and it is a matter purely pertaining to the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate — is how true is it? And is it The Truth? Arvol Looking Horse has, so far, not publicly responded to her claims.

And, for her part, Dupree's Web site is new and still under construction (it suddenly appeared last month, Jan. 28). But already it is finding its way around Cyberspace in Indian Country and exciting much comment among Indigenous listserves. There could be more to this story to come. But, outside of The Truth about The Pipe, Dupree raises questions that could prove even more unsettling for the other truths that she brings. For example, she notes the patriarchal bent of Native society today, which is not in keeping with traditional ways.

Specifically, she scolds "The Protection of Ceremonies" controversy that Arvol Looking Horse engineered (See On The 'Protection' of

Ceremonies) that would -- horribly -- have the federal government intervene to make the Chanunpa solely the property of certain individuals within the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate and prevent any others from practicing any Native Spirituality they claim as their own without their permission.

She notes: "I find it interesting that not a single grandmother was allowed to speak during the meeting when it was decided to write the Proclamation. In fact, all women were excluded from discussions. It was not like that in the old days. The Grandmothers had the respect of everyone, and they were the last word.

The Grandmothers are really who I am standing up for." As Dupree explains, in the old ways, each of the 7 Council Fires of the Oyate had two Pipes: one carried by a man, one by a woman; and all were brought to Council. There was balance by men and women.

Yet, largely, in Native America today, women are not given their due respect. Indeed, all would be denied practice of Native American Spirituality or only "allowed" if recognized by a few men, given the thinking of those who claim they hold the C'anupa Wakan and the authority they claim derives from it. She challenges that notion, its basis and its expression as being counter to the teaching of PtesanWi, White Buffalo Woman, and traditional Native culture.

Says Dupree: "How can anyone say who is or is not qualified to perform ceremonies? Is it not the Creator who touches ones heart and calls them to the altar? By demanding language, blood quantum and other self-serving requirements, dogma and doctrine are being injected into our spiritual ways where none has existed for thousands of years. We must not tell people what they must believe. "By closing the door to our faith and ancient rites to 'outsiders,' the Proclamation closes the sacred Hoop that is supposed to include all life.

Instead of having compassion for the thousands of people worldwide who sincerely wish to learn the ceremonies, they are met with a closed fist. Instead of taking the awesome task to teach them, the writer of the Proclamation wants to corner the market and dictate who may or may not come into the circle."

She also lays down a challenge: "I believe whoever has possession of The Pipe should be doing the White Buffalo Calf Ceremony at Sun Dance, as Grandfather Fools Crow and other Lakota medicine men and woman have in the past. The Pipe should be used to strengthen our

faith and relationship with our Creator. "I know Lakota, Dakota and Nakota elders would like to see it made available to our nation at this time; it is the property of the people, not a select few."

What Dupree may have started with this "proclamation" of her own may have greater power and farther reach than if she indeed holds The Pipe. As a mother or grandmother would chastise her children, she observes: "It is important that balance between men and women be honored once again for decision making for the good of all people. We must have the democratic process we possessed in ancient times. These people are calling themselves traditional when they are not really representing a traditional viewpoint. Without the presence and participation of women at these meetings and ceremonies they are acting like immature little boys. "I feel it is so important for everyone who believes, and practices Lakota religion, to be encouraged in their faith by being able to see our Sacred Pipe.

It is really the people's Pipe, it belongs to the nations who believe in the teachings. It is not a tool of spiritual materialism, belonging to a select few. I believe, as Grandfather Fools Crow tried to teach us, that anyone is welcome, as long as they are pure of heart, and follow the rules." Does Dupree have The Pipe? It's hard to independently assess, at least, from a distance.

There's plenty of room for speculation. As stated, each of the Council Fires of the Oyate had two Pipes: one carried by a man, one by a woman; and all were brought to Council. Nothing is known of where the original 14 Pipes went. The Pipe she carries could be one of those. It is also said that Fools Crow had made several copies of The Pipe, which he gave to select individuals in the 1940s; it could be one of those Pipes.

But it could very well be The Pipe she claims that it is. Not to in any way impugn Chief Arvol Looking Horse, who has a perfect right to respond or not respond to any questions without prejudice or drawing any untoward conclusions, but Dupree also raises detailed questions about the Chanunpa that he is said to have in his possession that are made all the more persuasive by its absence and his silence.

The claims and uncertainty, however, pose great risks. This issue has the potential to rend apart those who follow the traditions of the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate and, in Native America as a whole, reignite sensitive issues of race, gender and who holds spiritual authority. The whole ugly system of male patriarchy, tribal

membership, federal government control, and blood-quantum stand to be regurgitated anew, spilling over into renewed resentments between tribes and Indians and non-Indians over who is "qualified" to practice Native American Spirituality, why and how.

The issue also has the potential to unite peoples, if fear and resentments can be turned away. For this, two issues should be remembered: First, the Canunpa because of its power cannot be reduced to logical thinking or rational explanation. It is the physical expression of The Power, Creator, The Great Mystery, The Apportioner. All true matters of Spirit such as the workings of the Canunpa are outside of rational explanation because only human beings in the egoic state try to reduce the world and all things to an understandable level and, hence, can only be wrong. Not even close.

The power of Creator is too great, broad, deep, eternal, beyond words or even human conceptualization. Second, it doesn't matter, in the final analysis, if Looking Back Woman has The Pipe or another Pipe. All Chanunpas held in Sacred Manner are The Pipe when it comes to Creator's Power. It is always The Sacred Pipe, not a facsimile, for Creator's Power cannot be "faked." As a Pipe Carrier, Looking Back Woman, when holding The Pipe, whether it's either The C'anupa Wakan or any other Chanunpa, is speaking her truth and should be respected for the truth she shares. Her words may be true whether they are The Truth or A truth, holding the Pipe or The Pipe.

It will be up to the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate to decide if the truth she speaks while holding the Pipe or The Pipe is The Truth. And the truths she gives are worth pondering beyond the confines of the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Oyate. Is it not true that our world is out of balance? Is it not true that our Earthly Mother is in sore need of healing and that the divine female power is equal to the male power? How can our world be balanced when the male and female powers are out of balance? Do we not each carry these powers within ourselves with the duty to make them manifest? And if we cannot honor all our relations in balance in this way, how can we hope to heal and balance the Earth? In the Oyate's own way, was it not a woman, PtesanWi, the White Buffalo Woman, who brought The Pipe to the Buffalo Nation? And did she not say, "The four ages of creation are in me; I am the four ages. I will come to see you in every generation cycle"? Did she not say: "Toksha ake wacinyanitin ktelo, I shall see you again."

Maybe, in a way, this is the return.... a recognition that balance is needed again, a call for us all to be Looking Back, honoring the

Women. In this, we must remember where Power resides, truly, eternally.

Who holds The Pipe in his or her hands is ultimately of little value to who holds The Pipe in his or her heart. Creator gives us eyes to see and hearts to ponder with which to see the Truth. In that way, we all carry the only Pipe that is eternal: Creator, within. That is the medicine that matters.

Tsiwonisv,
Mitakuye Oyasin,
Gus dii dada dv ni,

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