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Circles, Trees, and Bears: Symbols of Power of the Weenuche Ute

Robert S. McPherson

Spirit means everything. In the trees, the animals, the insects, the grass, the ancestors. I saw the grass move, like there were people walking toward the center. _____ saw it too. They were dancing with us. It will grow and grow. It will never be lost. So I think of it in a good way for the people.

—Anonymous Northern Ute Elder

The Ute community of White Mesa sits in the corner of southeastern Utah, eleven miles outside of Blanding.¹ Approximately 315 people live on this high Colorado Plateau promontory that overlooks the desert lands stretching to the horizon, broken only by Sleeping Ute Mountain to the east in Colorado and Blue Mountain to the north. Viewed as an extension of the Ute Mountain Ute Agency forty miles straight-line distant, this community still assumes a semiautonomous role in a number of its activities. When members of the White Mesa Ute Council approached me in 2007 and asked that I write an ethnohistory, I readily accepted, having published bits and pieces of it throughout the past twenty years. Council members suggested that I address the various aspects of change in Ute culture that have been part of their history during the past four hundred years.

The White Mesa Utes are an amalgam of Ute, Paiute, and Navajo ancestry rendered in a crucible of historic circumstance. They derive from strong Ute and Paiute traditions because the westernmost band of the Southern Ute, the

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Weenuche, extended into southeastern Utah, while the easternmost group of Paiute, the San Juan Band, roamed the same territory. At times, intermarriage as well as linguistic and cultural practices made distinctions between the two groups difficult because they were based on degree instead of clear difference. In some instances, such as with the Bear Dance, use of the tipi, and other Plains technology, Ute culture predominated. Confusion between the two groups in the historic record is profound, with local people assigning affiliation without ethnic understanding.

As I set out to document certain cultural aspects of the White Mesa Utes, I turned to the somewhat limited studies of these people. Unlike many Plains Indian tribes such as the Sioux (Lakota), Cheyenne, Blackfeet, and Comanche, the Utes, as mountain people, have not attracted as many writers and researchers. Exceptions exist, such as Joseph G. Jorgensen, Anne M. Smith, Julian H. Steward, Omer C. Stewart, Don D. and Catherine S. Fowler, and more recently, Ned Blackhawk.² But most of these scholars have centered their work predominantly on the Northern Ute. Interest in the Paiute fostered a similar amount of scholarship. Add to some of the authors already mentioned, Pamela A. Bunte and Robert J. Franklin, Michael Hittman, Martha C. Knack, and Ronald L. Holt, and one has the major historians and anthropologists writing about the Paiutes in parts of Utah, Arizona, and Nevada.³

All of these diverse works are excellent and well written but do not fully connect or interpret some of the prominent symbols found in Ute culture. For example, Jorgensen is an expert on the Sun Dance and Hittman specializes in the Ghost Dance (1870s, late 1880s to early 1890s), but they give only a passing nod to the interrelated cultural symbols common to both practices. This does not suggest that they have missed looking in-depth at symbols relative to their specific ceremony, but they do not discuss these recurring elements found in other ceremonies. Likewise, many of the same symbols are found in the Bear Dance, believed to be the most “traditional” of all of the Ute public ceremonies. The presence of recurring images and patterns leads to a clearer understanding of concerns and beliefs inherent in Ute religion. Their interconnectedness provides a more unified worldview.

As I set out to examine these interconnections, I encountered another aspect that only Jorgensen mentions in passing. In “Ghost Dance, Bear Dance, and Sun Dance,” a general historical accounting of these practices, he recognizes that although most historians and anthropologists consider the end of the Ghost Dance to have been during the early 1890s, elements of it continued. No one else expressed awareness that “these people began to dance a modified version.”⁴ Although the origin of the Ghost Dance is credited to two Paiute men—Wodziwob and Wovoka—no one has looked beyond for a

mythological origin. At White Mesa I found the practice and the myth, never before connected in the literature.

What follows is an investigation of the commonality of symbols found in the Bear Dance, Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, and Worship Dance of the Weenuche White Mesa Utes. The recurrence of shared symbols suggests their importance not only in a traditional worldview from the past but also as practices persist. Elders emphasize that the teachings and symbols that represent power are real. It goes far beyond what many see as having only a social function. The powers are present and available for those who believe.

THE PAIUTE-UTE CONNECTION AND SHARED PANTHEON

Ever since the first white men entered southeastern Utah there has been confusion about the ancestry of the White Mesa people, some claiming them to be more Paiute than Ute. The debate goes beyond the topic of this article, but suffice it to say that there is a strong mixture of both cultures. There have been a number of avocational as well as professional anthropologists who have tried to unravel the Gordian knot, but much of the answer is based on unrecorded relationships now buried in the mists of history. William R. Palmer, whose avocation included the study of Southern Paiute culture, was a man who sought an answer. In August 1935, he set out from southwestern Utah with translator Woots Parashont for Allen Canyon in southeastern Utah to visit a group of Indians with which he and the main body of Southern Paiutes living around Cedar City had little contact and knew even less about. Directed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) in order to determine the needs and status of the Indians living in southern Utah and Nevada, Palmer decided that a visit to this unknown group would answer a number of questions. First on the list was to determine whether these people were Paiute, Ute, or some kind of combination mixed with Navajos. If they were Paiute, why had they left the main group located in southwestern Utah; what effect had this separation had on their language, customs, and stories; what did they know about the Anasazi (Ancestral Puebloans); and what characterized relations with their white neighbors? All Palmer knew was what he had read in the newspapers about past friction. It was time for him to gain his own perspective.⁵

On August 22, the men arrived in Blanding, and after making initial contact with LDS San Juan Stake President Wayne H. Redd and Ute Subagent Edwin Z. (E. Z.) Black, they bumped their way over the rough roads to Allen Canyon with Paiute Jim Mike as their guide. When they arrived around five o'clock, Parashont went to work calling the people near the small agency building

known as the Government Station together in order to explain what he and his white companion wanted. Although Palmer spoke enough Paiute to understand what was being said, he wished to keep this talent a secret so that he could sense a grassroots impression of what the people were feeling. A leader identified as "Paddy" (Anson Whyte) stepped forth with a few questions of his own: Was the white man a government man? (They were tired of them.) What did the two want to know and how much would they pay for that information? (There had been a long string of broken promises so payment needed to be up front.) Both replies were negative—no government man and no pay. One does not pay a friend for information, but the visitors had a great deal to share that all would find interesting. Following some deliberation, relations warmed and everyone agreed to meet around a campfire that evening to discuss things while giving a chance for others in the Allen Canyon area to join them.

In the meantime, Palmer and Parashont gathered some of the simpler answers. The physical arrangements for life here were primitive. All of the Indians were poorly dressed; one man wore part of some overalls for shoes while others went barefoot. When asked where their homes were, a person pointed to a cottonwood tree and said, "This is the best house we have. We can only make brush wickiups for we are too poor to make homes." A sheepskin served as bedding, bread tortillas were the mainstay in the diet, and small game was all that was hunted. Parashont suggested that they go out and kill some deer—"raise a fuss"—so that the government would provide more and better food. Palmer tacitly approved, noting that "the Indians in San Juan are right where our Cedar [City] Indians were thirty-five years ago."⁶

Other answers came that evening. The oldest member of the approximately seventy Indians assembled swore that his people had not had any contact with the Paiutes in the Cedar City area within his lifetime. That was why Palmer was "surprised, almost amazed to find this long isolated band speaking more nearly pure Paiute than some of the clans that attend the tribal *saparovan* [storytelling fest] held every year and do much visiting back and forth every summer. Their words for water, grass, mountain, tree, fire, camp, man, woman, sun, moon, stars, and scores of other things were the same as the Paiutes at Cedar City."⁷ He was even more surprised when Palmer began to tell the story about the North Star.

In Paiute mythology, "the heavens are an inverted world with great rivers and valleys and mountains, the peaks of which are pointing down toward us. Many of the stars we see are [beings] glorified by the gods for special deeds of courage or bravery."⁸ Palmer told the story of Nahga, or Mountain Sheep, who accepted the challenge of climbing the tallest peak, persevering under difficult circumstances. Shinob (Sináwav) watched his efforts and then rewarded him by positioning him as the North Star and giving him a set of large earrings,

which are his horns. This allowed Nahga to provide direction like a compass and divide the sky at three angles into parts—morning, midday, and afternoon. Partway through telling the story, one of the elders interrupted and said that he already knew it; Palmer had him complete it and found it to be identical to his version. Other tales followed with similar results.

Palmer attributed this accuracy to the way the stories were told. Each group would have one man responsible for relating the narrative on an annual basis, but if anyone disagreed with part of what was being said, he could interrupt the speaker and call for clarification and group response. “The fact that I found the same stories so faithfully preserved in these two branches of the Pahute tribe that have had no chances of comparing their legends since time out of memory of any living Indian proves their fidelity in this tribal trust,” said Palmer.⁹ In addition to this understanding, Palmer purchased a medicine pouch from Jane Lehi, an elder who at first did not want to sell it. She warned that it would bring bad luck, perhaps kill the white man whose spirit would then return to trouble her. Palmer persisted, she relented, and later he sent a nicely beaded pouch “filled with good luck medicine” to her.¹⁰

This last incident perhaps characterizes Palmer’s work. He was intellectually invested in learning about the Paiutes and successful in accomplishing it, even to the point of being “adopted” with full, formal approval of the tribe. He learned early on that he must “never laugh at anything they told me however absurd it might seem to me. Now I had their legends and I wanted to try them out among the distant Indians who had never heard of me before.”¹¹ Like the medicine pouch, which held inherent powers, Palmer missed the spiritual power invested in the stories. Consequently, he has preserved a series of “Just So” tales that are delightful to read but void of the guidance and power associated with deeply believed and spiritually felt conviction.¹² Like a string of pearls detached from a necklace, they stand alone, interesting and informative in their own way but missing cultural efficacy. Even John Wesley Powell, in collecting materials from different Numic groups, fell into the same pit, unable to see the connected pearls of teaching strung together to make a complete necklace threading through the culture. Consequently, few historians or anthropologists have used these teachings to interpret elements from the past.

The southern portion of the Colorado River in Arizona is the general area of the Numic-speaking Chemehuevi, often characterized as the most southern of the Southern Paiute. Although their culture and history is geographically far beyond the scope of this article, these people were fortunate enough to have an individual, Carobeth Laird, to assist them in collecting and recording many of their early teaching tales while they were still “strung” together in a cohesive interpretation of their worldview. Married to George Laird, a full-blooded Chemehuevi, she spent much of her adult life recording, with her husband’s

help, the teachings of his people.¹³ Her approach, rooted in the mythology of these Numa, offers insights into the work of Powell and Palmer, tying separate, seemingly unconnected pieces of information together and allowing a more complete interpretation. Her approach and some specific information are utilized here to better explain the beliefs of the White Mesa Utes.

Laird, Powell, and Palmer have recorded the same characters in similar stories. Supreme above all is Tavwoats, often referred to as Elder Brother and portrayed in both an anthropomorphic form and as the Wolf. Sináwav, the Younger Brother, can also assume an anthropomorphic shape as well as that of Coyote and at times is referred to as a Trickster, Imitator, and Younger Brother. These two personalities figure heavily during the time of creation called “When Animals Were People,” which serves as the setting for most of their experiences, explaining how the Numic people should live when the world took on its present form. Both of these characters have human traits and lack the omniscience assigned to Christian deity. Wolf, however, has superior knowledge, making him close to an ideal man with strong supernatural powers. Coyote “embodies all the human traits: cowardice and incredible daring; laziness and patient industry or frantic exertion; foolishness and skillful planning; selfishness and concern for others. If he were simply the dark shadow of Wolf, the People would not have said, ‘We followed Coyote.’”¹⁴

Laird holds this position. Powell generally agrees, noting some minor differences between the two, but places Tavwoats as the Creator and as one who directed his associate. Sináwav has the responsibility to ready the world for mankind, as much through trial and error as purposeful design.¹⁵ Powell actually identifies two Sináwav brothers (Skaits [Sahkaič—Younger Brother] and Pa-vits [Pavíč—Older Brother]) with Tavwoats as a third superior deity. Regardless of the combination, there are more stories about Sináwav than Tavwoats. Palmer does not give “Tobats” the same kind of power and recognition, referring to him more as an “idle genius” who “has no patience for irritating detail” and depends on “Schinob” his brother to set events in motion.

Between the powers of these two great ones, there is an essential difference. The works of Tobats are everlasting, eternal. He builds [with] massive stone and the products of his hands are enduring. He cares little for artistry or color and does his work in bold and mighty sweeps. Schinob his brother god is artful and tender. He is the author of life and light and love. . . . But alas! The touch of Schinob is a blighting touch. Whatsoever his hand falls upon shall perish and its days are ephemeral and fleeting. It will take the mighty work of Tobats to call back into being such perished creations as he shall deem worthy of preservation.¹⁶

In interviews, Bonnie Mike Lehi and Adoline Eyetoo of White Mesa noted that Sináwaw's name is used only in stories but is not connected in prayers to "The One Who Created the Earth," although they could not give a reason for this.¹⁷

The Creator is often represented in a variety of the stories, dances, and ceremonies that contain intense, powerful values for the Ute people. The Bear Dance, Sun Dance, and Worship Dance share recurrent symbols of deity and power. The circle, a center pole, the Bear, Sináwaw, and Tavwoats are part of this unified complex that speaks to important values. The Bear Dance and the Sun Dance have been explored in a number of publications and so will be examined briefly here, while the Worship Dance, which is now performed only by a White Mesa elder, Jack Cantsee, will be looked at in greater detail. All three ceremonies share similar values expressed in different ways. One should also note that although some of these practices are older than others, some reaching back to antiquity, there have been different interpretations of their form and meaning over time. For instance, with the introduction of Christianity, some Ute people changed the names of Tavwoats and Sináwaw to God and Jesus Christ and assigned similar function and meaning from the old pair to the new. At this point, there will not be any attempt to separate the two, assign some type of chronology to the change, or advocate for any particular position regarding why these changes occurred.

CIRCLES, TREES, AND BEARS

The origin of the Bear Dance is unique to the Utes and is explained in at least a half-dozen stories with variations. In some narratives the bear is a male while in others it is a female; in some versions the hunter who stays with the bear may be alone or accompanied by a friend; the hunter may willingly submit to going with the bear during the winter or may be forced into captivity. The list goes on. But common to all is a bear, a cave, a tree, and the distinctive back-and-forth step learned by a man and practiced in the dance. The setting of the story is in the mountains where Bear oversees its domain. Whether male or female, the bear emerges from hibernation in a den and performs bear actions that foretell the coming of spring. The first rumble of thunder is duplicated by the sound of the bear's jawbone or *morache* (*muuraçi*) in the dance arena and is part of the preparation that makes available the High Country's resources to the Ute people. Some elders believe that the Utes shared direct kinship with bears as their ancestors during the time of creation before they changed into humans, perhaps another reason that they refer to themselves as the Mountain People.¹⁸

The bear plays a prominent role in many Native American cultures, is often referred to as Grandfather, and is admired for its powers in the physical

and the supernatural realms. Anthropologists who have collected Ute teachings that contain stories about bears include Robert Lowie, Anne M. Smith, and Talmy Givon.¹⁹ Linda D. McNeil, a specialist in comparing Ute and Siberian Native beliefs of bear mythology, finds close relationships between these people and their narratives. Among the points she makes about Ute practices are: (1) when bears are killed, they are addressed as Grandfather or Grandmother, (2) in early times, smoke from fires and, more recently, from a group of men smoking *kinnikinnick* (tobacco) during the Bear Dance communicate with dead ancestors and prevent sickness; (3) the bear ancestor returning from hibernation is restored to health and moves from symbolic death to resurrected life; (4) the dancers either use their hands in a motion that reenacts a bear scratching a tree or hug their partner as they move back and forth in the circular enclosure or “cave of sticks”; (5) the women are the ones who choose their partners and are the “aggressive” ones, as is the female bear in her relationship with the hunter; and (6) in the past, those who are sick could be healed by certain events in the dance.²⁰ Forming two lines, the men and women move back and forth, reenacting this male-female dichotomy. The bear holds a variety of powers for the benefit of both genders who in turn respect its role.

During the first three days, dances are held in the daytime, but the one on the last day continues through the night. Before the final or “endurance” dance begins in the evening, there is the event known as “The Coming.” In the past, a man accompanied by a woman dressed in complete bearskins entered the dance arena and interacted with participants.²¹ Another man or woman who assisted may accompany the person imitating the bear. The spectators in the enclosure had special songs to welcome and bless the bear, which confronted people on its “hind legs” with its paws held up. If someone moved, he would advance to that person and make clawing gestures and “attack.” Some accounts suggest that at one point the bear was ceremoniously killed and skinned, symbolic of the sacrifice it was making as the keeper of the mountain domain for the Utes. Other accounts stress that the purpose of the dance was to restore good health to the bear so that it would assist the people in food collection. Following this part of the dance, an elder talked about those who had been at the dance in previous years and had since died and gone to the next world. “The people would cry and mourn for this individual. . . . It was a speech in their memory that this person would talk and of course it was kind of a sad moment there for everyone.”²² Following this, the endurance dance began and continued until sunrise, the start of the new day and the new season.

The circular cave of sticks, or dance arena, represents the place of hibernation from which the bear emerges. Made of green juniper boughs with the branches facing skyward, the enclosure’s opening faces east. For Jack Cantsee

Sr., a Bear Dance Chief at White Mesa, there is a special reason why juniper (locally called cedar) is the vegetation used to build the structure. “That tree has got its own blessing. It has roots that go far into the ground. . . . [My grandfather] taught me that the cedar tree is a very sacred tree that can live anywhere. Before cutting it down, you have to offer a prayer and tell the Creator why you are doing it, and if you cut it good, the prayer goes with it.”²³ Evergreen trees, unlike those that are deciduous, have an “ever green” or not-dying quality that accompanies the coming-back-to-life aspect associated with the bear’s return.

Aldean Ketchum, also a Bear Dance Chief at White Mesa, tells a story of the origin of the corral. A medicine man went to the mountains seeking supernatural assistance. He encountered a bear, which smelled him approaching, but seeing that the man was unarmed, decided to talk to him. The animal stood on its hind legs, faced the sun, and sang a number of healing songs, and then it instructed the man to return to his people and teach them what he had heard. He was also to “build a corral as a symbol of the world and all that is connected to it, point the tops of the cedar trees used in the corral towards the heavens, and at the end of four days, have a feast. The people should dance for health and to bless others in the enclosure. . . . The songs tell of a female bear rustling the bushes and of who is coming because she wants to dance.”²⁴

Other tree symbolism exists. In keeping with the story of the bear dancing back and forth to a tree, both in the past and in some Bear Dances today there has been a single pole or two poles placed in the enclosure—either near the entrance or in the back. These trees serve a number of different functions. McNeil believes that the pole is a conduit between the spirits and powers of the world that restores the natural environment through prayer and dance activities. It also facilitates communication with the dead and allows the bear to serve as a messenger between this world and the Land Beyond.²⁵ Southern Ute Bear Dance enclosures use two trees on the east entrance, one representing males and the other representing females, where prayers and offerings are left. “The people at Ignacio [Colorado] still use them to bless themselves with the branches that come from those trees in the enclosure, just as they do in the Sun Dance,” says Bonnie Mike Lehi.²⁶ Today, the people at White Mesa do not have the two entryway posts, although elder Adoline Eyetoo remembers standing between two posts of a Bear Dance lodge entrance near Joe Hatch’s Trading Post in Allen Canyon while praying to the east.²⁷ Near the entrance of the White Mesa Bear Dance arena, there is also a live cedar tree where people pray and leave offerings today.

A number of rock art petroglyphs in the Four Corners area are of ancient origin and depict a bear dancing toward or climbing a tree. Northern Ute elder and historian Clifford Duncan comments that the tree in these petroglyphs

might be more symbolically important than the bear.²⁸ He says that medicine men could use the power of the tree to heal the sick and that when the first thunder sounded in the spring, a young person's arms would be stretched so that they would grow—all through the power of the bear. Although the cave of sticks is considered more of a female domain—just as the tipi or wickiup is a woman's space—the pole used in the Bear Dance as well as the Sun Dance lodge is male space with male power. Duncan points out that the moving lines of men and women in the Bear Dance “take turns being the tree” before they break into individual pairs.²⁹ In many enclosures today, there is a Bear Dance flagpole with an image of a bear, tree, and dancer in some combination. The staff that supports the flag serves the same function as the pole(s) in the past and is considered male.

Although many people refer to the Bear Dance as solely a social event, it is apparent that, for others, the meaning behind it has not been lost. The generation of power, through its symbols, is real. Jack Cantsee Sr. tells how the beat of the drum, songs, and movement forces the energy out “all over your body. You can feel the song, what they're singing, carrying you off like that. Sometimes you feel like you are floating. You believe in the Bear Dance and yourself; you believe that you can do it, the same way that the Bible tells the white people that they are going to be this way.” His son, Jack Cantsee Jr., agrees. As a singer during the dance, he feels empowered: “I feel that spirit, the bear spirit, going through me. A lot of the [other singers] there feel that bear strength come in. I can feel that strength come in. . . . You can do anything you set your mind to with that spirit of the bear.”³⁰

SUN DANCE CIRCLE AND POLES

Another powerful dance filled with strength and spirituality is the Sun Dance. This ceremony has never been performed at White Mesa, although some of its residents have participated in ones held at Towaoc and Ignacio, Colorado, and in White Rocks, Utah. A brief survey of the teachings and symbols of this dance, however, shows how it has been adapted to reflect the previously discussed Ute values. According to Terry G. Knight, Sun Dance Chief of Towaoc, only men who have received a vision or served in the military are to dance.³¹ Reasons for participating include seeking a vision and guidance in order to gain knowledge, heal someone who is sick, bring good fortune to the people, and rejuvenate the world. Jorgensen, who has studied Ute and Shoshone Sun Dance practices extensively, believes that the Ute Mountain Ute, and perhaps the Northern Ute, hold more closely to the original form as it was first introduced than any of the other groups: “The historical integrity with

which the Ute Mountain dance has been preserved may justify the opinions of the Ute Mountain Ute people who say that theirs is the correct dance.”³²

For three or four days and part of the nights, dancers move forward and backward toward a center pole housed within a cottonwood branch-and-sapling enclosure, open to the sky except for a small arbor and at least four, and often twelve, rafters representing the cardinal directions. These poles radiate out from the center post to the edge of the arena. Around the circumference of the enclosure, known as the “thirst house,” are another twelve poles stuck in the ground and integrated evenly in the structure, equidistant from the center pole. Filling in beside them is the sapling and branch wall surrounding the circumference except for the open east-facing entrance. The arbor covers the eastern half of the corral, where the drummers and spectators sit, while the western portion is open as the sacred dance space.³³ A sacred fire pit is located just east of the center pole outside of the dance area.

Jorgensen summarizes the ideology underlying the Sun Dance ceremony as the accumulation of power as the dancers move between physical and spiritual states characterized as going from “dry to wet” and “hot to cool.” Beyond the abstinence from food and water during the dance, the participants move symbolically from ignorance to enlightenment, receiving a vision and blessings. A man who has participated for twelve years in the dance can “fan” or provide a blessing for someone seeking one. Spiritual empowerment is the motivation and final outcome. The center pole, like the dancer, is a “participant” in that it also has to be dried out before it can attain its full potential of radiating and offering its spiritual power. As with a person’s life, its existence is short: it enters the world (enclosure) through song and prayer, and it will see the fulfillment of its purpose before returning to Mother Earth. It has, however, passed on its legacy, as old people do to the next generation, making the world a better place.

The Utes address this center pole as *Sináwaw*, the Creator. It is known by other names and teachings, which to nonbelievers might be confusing at best and proof of insincerity at worst. Jorgensen points out that the multiplicity of meanings is additive, citing a Northern Ute dancer as saying: “No one knows the true meaning or what the whole dance means. Even the chiefs who have danced for a long time know only parts of it. They are always learning more about it through the dreams that that Man gives them.”³⁴ Movement toward the pole is said to make a person feel good, while movement away, or distancing oneself from the Creator, does not.³⁵

Thus the pole may depict “life, the sacrifice of power so that others may live, a man’s heart, Jesus Christ, Jesus’ crucifixion, God’s brain, power itself, water, [and] *Sinawaf*.”³⁶ The pole, stripped of its bark, is also painted with four colors that represent different aspects of the earth and sky as well as the

number of days that the dance will last. Red represents the ground, yellow the light and sun, white the daylight, and black the night. The pole faces east, as does the Sun Dance Chief in the morning when saying prayers. The pole's forks, one pointing northwest, the other southeast, have cloth scarves attached to them as offerings to the powers of the four directions.³⁷ They are also offerings made to the "old people" who have gone to the Land Beyond, asking them to assist the living and provide good health. A nest of willow branches placed in the crotch of the center pole can represent water, life, Jesus's body, and sacrifice for others.³⁸

Connor Chapoose, a Northern Ute Sun Dancer, believes that the posts and rafters represent the twelve men who work with the Creator and that the rafters radiating out from the center pole are the messages that he is sending to them for the universe.³⁹ The westernmost post is said to symbolize the backbone of the arena personified as a living being, while the others are ribs, Christ's apostles, and the months of the year.⁴⁰ The saplings and branches of cottonwood, willow, and aspen that provide substance to the outer wall also add their power and blessing to those dancing within. The "drying" of the sapling, like that of the dancers, is recognized as part of the renewal process that brings forth new life through sacrifice. Even the dirt that forms an altar at the base of the pole becomes dry while sacrificing for others: "Each year things are born and things die; all of them things get their power from the dirt—that's where life comes from. That's why those doctors take the dirt from around *Sinawaf* [center pole]. It gives good health to everybody and cures the sick people who need new life."⁴¹ Dusting oneself with this dirt is a blessing. Thus the Sun Dance ceremony, from the ground to the sky and everywhere in between, is replete with power.

THE CRY, WORSHIP DANCE, AND THE DEAD

These important qualities are also expressed in the Worship Dance, employing many of the same symbols and teachings found in the Bear Dance and the Sun Dance. Today the ceremony is performed only by the White Mesa Utes under the direction of Jack Cantsee Sr., who has kept its practice alive. Historically, it has been known by another name—Ghost Dance—and has been the topic of a number of significant works that explain its origin and its impact on not only the Numic-speaking peoples of the Great Basin and Colorado Plateau but also on Plains tribes such as the Sioux and Arapaho. Much of this is far beyond what can be discussed here, but a brief overview of its practice corroborates its relationship to what the White Mesa Utes now perform, which they prefer today to call worship dance ceremonies.

The earliest ethnographic reports of Paiute and Ute dances speak of the Great Basin Round Dance in which participants interlocked arms or hands and danced in a circle to give thanks for gathered food, celebrate a war victory, bring rain, cure the sick, or mourn the dead. A related ceremony, the Paiute “Cry” or Mourning Dance, held from three months to a year after a relative passed away, also shared common elements with the later Ghost Dance, such as concern for the dead and dancing in a circle, but it was and is more of a funerary rite to send the deceased on their way with the things that they will need in the Land Beyond.⁴² Destruction of goods may be part of this “send-off”; the Ghost Dance had no such elements and nothing to do with the postburial experience. Palmer described a Cry he attended in 1924, held as part of a funeral rite for Anthony W. Ivins, a white friend of the Paiutes in southwestern Utah.

The Indian Sing begins at sunset and continues until sunrise. They have a string of songs that come in proper sequence through the night. At certain places the chant stops and everyone surrounds the dead person and weeps and wails. They explained to me that the songs were like a string that runs all through the night. Here and there all along there are knots in the string and every time they came to a knot, they must stop and cry—a very apt illustration. . . . Their chants go on for about two hours before they come to the first cry [which lasted about a half hour]. . . . As the chant went on anyone who wanted to say anything about [the deceased] arose and spoke to the song accompaniment, for the chant never stopped until they came to another cry time.⁴³

The Mourning Dance is still practiced today on White Mesa. It starts in the evening and ends at sunrise with a final prayer that sends the departed on his or her way to the Spirit World. The ceremony begins with the Cry performed in the dead person’s house. The ceremonial leader offers the opening prayer, burning sweetgrass or sage and “mountain cedar” (Rocky Mountain juniper) as incense in order to carry the words to the Land Beyond. Aldean Ketchum explained, “Spirits live in a smoky fog and so [these plants] are burned to prevent a spirit from entering a person’s mind and body and possessing it. It keeps them at bay so that the deceased can make the transition from this world to the next, while preventing evil spirits from harming the living.”⁴⁴ Following the Cry, mourners go outside, form a dance circle, hold hands, and move in a clockwise direction around the leader, who stands in the center. Ketchum did not recall a tree in the center, but said that a staff with feathers could be used to tie the people of the earth to the land of the spirits. With the approach of the sun, the deceased begins his or her journey. Thus the Mourning Dance focuses on the departure of a specific individual and, in a sense, is the opposite of the Ghost Dance, which greets a multitude of dead who are coming to assist the living.

GHOST DANCE AND WORSHIP DANCE: ORIGIN AND EARLY PRACTICE

The historical Ghost Dance movements built upon this premise of the return of the dead and the restoration of power. The first Ghost Dance movement, taught and led by Wodziwob, began in 1870; the second, under Wovoka (also known as Jack Wilson), arose in 1888. Both men were Northern Paiutes intimately familiar with the Round Dance, attended Mourning Dances, and held strong beliefs about an afterlife.⁴⁵ What made these ceremonies different from previous expressions were the underlying tenets of the faith. Among the teachings were the Indian dead coming in a glorified, resurrected form to assist the living to return to the old way of life, the white man decreasing in prominence and even disappearing, the earth assuming its earlier pristine state, and accomplishing all this through practices outlined in revelation by these two prophets.

Although some of the more eastern Plains tribes during the late 1880s developed a more militant interpretation, introducing the idea of bulletproof shirts and invincibility, this was not part of the original message. In addition to the revelations of the two prophets, part of the origin of the dance is attributed to the Paiute Round Dance and the influence of Mormon missionaries teaching about the return of the dead, the earth receiving a paradisiacal glory, and during the 1890s Ghost Dance, dancers wearing undergarments with protective powers.⁴⁶ Scholars who have studied both movements generally agree that the major reason for the appearance of these teachings was a result of the tremendous economic and cultural pressures that faced the general Indian population in the West. As the old lifestyle deteriorated and the tribes were exiled to reservation "islands," the people sought a solution to their plight through religious revitalization. A survey of seventy tribes living in the West and Southwest shows that of the forty-five tribes that adopted the dance, most were traditional hunters and gatherers who watched their way of life disappear and their world turn ugly.⁴⁷

Wodziwob's influence over the dances during the 1870s was short lived. His message of "our [deceased] fathers are coming; our mothers are coming; they are coming pretty soon. You had better dance," lasted until 1872.⁴⁸ But during that time, Indian groups that were to include Navajos and Sheberetch, Elk Mountain, and Weenuche Utes headed north to join the Northern Utes, who were sponsoring a gathering near Sanpete, Utah. James Mooney, an ethnographer on the scene for the 1890s dance, received testimony that Paiutes from southwestern Utah also traveled to Nevada, visited the Paiutes living there, and received the new belief that included "a dance performed at night in a circle with no fire in the center, very much like the modern Ghost Dance."⁴⁹ The practice garnered some attention from outsiders, but relatively little of

it made its way into official reports or newspapers when compared with the movement twenty years later.

Wovoka's influence over the Ghost Dance as a widespread phenomenon started in December 1888 and petered out in 1892, although he lived until 1932 and continued to teach until the end.⁵⁰ During the height of the practice, newspapers, government agents, anthropologists, and apologists studied and reported various tribes' adoption of the beliefs, especially after the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. A year before that, many Indian groups sent delegates—reportedly as many as 1,600, which included participants from the Utes, Navajos, and Paiutes—to Nevada to learn the doctrine and dance.⁵¹ Although the Cheyenne and Sioux sent representatives to Wovoka, the Sioux also credit Utah Utes as being the ones who actually taught them. Testimony gathered in 1891 indicates the powerful influence they had upon the Sioux who returned to speak of a Messiah and share the dance they had learned. This included dancing in three or four concentric circles with fingers interlocked, moving clockwise around a thirty-foot pole with a white strip of cloth at the top to represent purity, and wearing shirts of white muslin or painting their skin with Ghost Dance symbols. The dancers would stop briefly as the leader prayed "Great Spirit, look at us now. Grandfather and Grandmother have come," while people prayed, wept, and left offerings at the sacred pole.⁵²

Other tribes, such as the Navajo, rejected the dance and its teachings. The Utes and Utah Paiutes provided the primary impact in the Shiprock-Tohatchi region on the northern part of the Navajo Reservation. But fear of the dead, a major tenet of Navajo beliefs, encouraged leaders like Manuelito to tell his people to avoid this type of practice saying, "We know that ghosts are bad" and "If they do appear we will have to get rid of them."⁵³ Although Numa also avoid the dead, the Messiah had said through Wovoka that they were returning to assist in the approaching millennial state, and so it was a positive blessing. Still, the Navajos refused the teachings.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported in December 1890 that "Utah Has a Ghost Dance" at the same time that Wounded Knee was making national news. The White River Utes "no doubt believe in the coming of *Shin-ob* (Christ) and the resurrection of their dead friends. . . . The dance is performed by the half-naked and painted bucks around a high pole ornamented with wolf scalps and one eagle feather. . . . The dance lasts for days at a time and in many respects is similar to the 'ghost dance' of the Northern Indians."⁵⁴ A week later the paper claimed that there was no Ghost Dance, although specific details in the first report indicate strong familiarity with Ute practices. Elders later said of this era that they were very much involved in the Ghost Dance. Six different informants testified: "My people used to dance the Ghost Dance."⁵⁵ The Utes

called the ceremony the Jesus or God Dance because “they wanted to see *Sinapi* (Wolf, God)” and encourage the dead to come back to life.⁵⁶ Characteristic features of the dance included participants interlocking fingers, moving clockwise in a circle around a tree or stick, and dressing in white. These same features were present in the Ghost Dance practiced by the Utah Paiute and Arizona Pai people. Participants wore white clothing or robes and danced around a center pole with eagle feathers tied at the top, a brush fence enclosed the 150-foot-diameter dance ground, the circle of dancers communicated with the dead, and the ceremony lasted four or five days.⁵⁷ Although there were local inconsistencies with some elements, the general patterns existed throughout.

Moving to southeastern Utah, the record is silent during the early 1890s. Annual reports of the agents make no mention of the Weenuche Utes paying any attention to what was going on to the north (Northern Utes), east (Plains tribes), and west (Paiute and Pai people). Not until 1915, during testimony given at a trial, is mention made of the defendant’s participation in a Worship Dance as a side note. “There was to be a Spirit Dance or ‘Dance to God’ near Sam’s [Ramon] place, and that’s why I [Tse-ne-gat] changed from boots to moccasins and went to the dance and danced all night.”⁵⁸ The report said little more.

As in the case of the Northern Utes, substantive information about the practice surfaced only during later interviews as witnesses spoke of their involvement. Edward Dutchie Sr., a White Mesa elder born in 1918, recalls the practice with detail.⁵⁹ He spoke of attending “what some of them called a Ghost Dance” around 1932. “They took this person over to a place to join in a dance called a Circle Dance, a religious dance they called the Ghost Dance at that time. They secretly called it a Ghost Dance.” This one was held in Allen Canyon west of Blanding; however, other places for this ceremony were at the base of the Bears Ears, the spring at Kigalia Ranger Station, Indian Creek, Camp Jackson, Babylon Pasture, White Mesa, Squaw Creek, the La Sal Mountains, and Montezuma Creek in Utah, as well as Cross Canyon, Mariano Spring, Towaoc, and Ignacio in Colorado. All of these sites have water, enough space for an encampment, and are quiet, but of primary importance was that it “had to be more spiritual” in order to “celebrate spiritual ways.” Mountains were particularly favorable.

Dutchie noted that “the dance was for everything—rain, the people, what Mother Earth gives,” but most importantly “they prayed to the Lord.” A sick person can be healed said Patty, Dutchie’s wife, adding, “It’s like talking to your Creator and his answer you can hear. His answers are what he is saying to his people. There is a main person who knows what the Creator is saying so he tells his people what is going to happen, what is going to be in the future. It was for that purpose.” She later mentioned that “the spirit is always coming to

us when we pray. In our grandparents' time, prayers were always answered. He [her grandfather] would hear a person." Dutchie described the 1932 dance in detail:

They [the White Mesa Utes] went up to the mountain and cut down a pine tree, like a Christmas tree, and stood it in the ground where it is level. People had come on horseback or walked. The people came around and some of them started—maybe four or five of them. They have this certain person who leads off in song after offering a prayer. He said he was going to start this going around with about three or four songs. When he began singing, some people dressed in white blankets came in. When they stopped singing, some more would come in and make a bigger ring than another one had a song.

He made up this song right there. . . . This song he was singing was from a spiritual way. He said that the songs he sang didn't come from him but from around here. "In my sleep," he said, "I dreamed. I dreamed there was a nice place, nice level place, and beyond a hill I saw dust coming up and I walked over that bump and saw lots of people. They were having a dance like this. The people were singing. I joined in." This man was singing that song and was telling the people about it. That is where he said he got that song. "It didn't originate here," he said. "I carried it back here so I could sing it to you." Then he sang.

It mentioned the earth being round and at the end of the earth was a fire still burning. On this side there is a big water—waves coming. That is what the song was about. It was naming these things and then again it tells the story about what has taken place. This man did not talk English. He couldn't write his name, but he translated what those people up there told him to tell these people.

Today we could believe what that song said. The fire started from the edge—from California. Over here [East] it talked about the water down in Florida. So it makes me think back to that song and what it is saying. So that is what the dance is for, to pray for the people. All of us, not just the one that put up that spiritual dance, but to pray for everybody who walks the earth today. That is what he was praying for at that time. I was listening.

There was a lot more to it, but that is what I remember that took place at the beginning of the Circle Dance or Ghost Dance or Round Dance or however you call it. The dancers had white sheet blankets. Some made their blankets out of flour sacks sewn together. I guess it belongs to that spiritual dance. As the years go by, I have not seen it anymore. I do not hear mention about what will take place later, but at that time, I heard it. The song starts the fire going around, high waves over there, tornadoes coming everywhere. That is what the song mentioned. It was going to come later. I guess it was foretold to him up there somewhere; I don't know where. That is what he told all of the people. We listened to him.

The dance was held at night and illuminated by a large fire. When asked the meaning of the tree placed in the center of the dance area, Dutchie insisted that it had to be an evergreen because it never changes and the people "want

to live like that. It might have grown way up towards the Creator because that is the only one that is tall—tallest anywhere, pine. . . . Through that tree they might reach the Creator somehow.” He went on to explain that the “Creator of All Things” should not be confused with Sináwav or Coyote, who performs miracles but also is involved with wrongdoings on earth. “Sináwav is the Coyote and his brother the Wolf. A big wolf. The two make laws and tell how it is going to be. Sináwav is the one who goes ahead and gets everything started, then runs away or steals something.” Dutchie later stated that “the one who created him [Sináwav] and Mother Earth, that’s the Creator. . . . Those old people prayed to the Creator of All Things, wherever he is. He might be right here talking to me. . . . The one who turns this earth, seasons, changes—puts different coats on it, nice things, that is who I am talking to. That is who they used to pray to those old people before the white man brought his paper over—the Bible.”

Elders at White Mesa remembered other Ghost Dances, or as they prefer to call them today, Worship Dance ceremonies, performed until the 1960s. Although there are slight variations in their accounts, they generally corroborate what Dutchie saw. Bonnie Mike Lehi tells of a cedar tree with medicinal healing power erected with prayers in the middle of the dance circle. The tree had the same function and meaning as the Sun Dance pole and is believed to connect the living with the dead. The people danced in a circle, offered prayers for well-being, and sang songs that belonged to families and were passed down to future generations—“they had a song for everything.”⁶⁰ She also recalls hearing of people dressed in white clothing but did not see that. Duncan also heard his mother speak of people wearing white shirts and going to a special place that the spirits knew. There they erected a tree in the center and danced all night. In the morning, “everyone scattered and allowed the sun to purify the place where the dancers had been communicating with the dead.”⁶¹

Stella Eyetoo remembers the dancers wearing white clothing or blankets made of flour sacks. They prayed when they danced: “All night they dreamed the songs and saw them [visions]. They dreamed about it as they danced.”⁶² She recalled one Worship Dance held in McElmo Canyon that drew participants from Montezuma Creek, McElmo, and Towaoc, and that Mancos George used to perform them. Like many of the elders, Stella felt that the last Worship Dance was in the 1960s when soldiers stationed with a missile project on Black Mesa near Blanding attended. During that dance, the participants did not use white blankets. Stella’s aunt, Adoline Eyetoo, said the last Worship Dance was held for her grandfather Anson Cantsee, but it was before the soldiers participated. During the dance, “people felt happy. They were thinking about Jesus who is Sináwav. Everybody was dressed in white in the old days. They put a cedar tree in the middle of the circle because they were thinking

about Jesus."She related the cross, tree of life, and the Sun Dance pole to the tree erected in the circle and explained that "they pray when they put the tree in the ground and then pray to the tree for the people on the earth. It gives us good things to think about. They prayed for those in danger and to do what is right."⁶³ As many as two hundred people may have been in attendance, all praying in unison.

Annie Cantsee said that either a pine or a juniper tree could be used and vaguely remembered that the dancers wore white clothing or blankets with moons and stars painted on the back. They also put red clay on their cheeks, a practice done for the deceased at funerals. "It connects the dead with Sináwaw," she said. The dance is performed for the sick, but the prayers are for everyone. The songs could be either extemporaneous or passed down within the family. "Some of the songs are about birds flying. People feel better when they sing the Worship Songs."⁶⁴ The Utes held the dance in the spring, summer, and fall, but the winter was too cold.

WORSHIP DANCE MYTHOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

In spite of the elders suggesting that the last of the old Worship Dances were held during the 1960s, it is still practiced today under the direction of Jack Cantsee Sr., who has performed it at Towaoc, Ignacio, Roosevelt, and White Mesa. He received his teachings initially from his grandfather, Anson Cantsee (a.k.a. Scotty Ute [1868–1966]). As a young man, he saw the people dancing around a cedar tree all night, singing and praying until morning when his grandfather lined them up to face the rising sun and to fan them off with eagle feathers. Jack did not know how to sing but he watched and listened as the dance unfolded. At one ceremony, some of the people came to him and "put a sheet over me and said 'initiated into the Worship Dance.' I went with them singing all through the night."⁶⁵ He continued to participate until Anson died, taking with him the knowledge and practice of the Worship Dance.

For a while Jack left the ceremony alone. Eventually, however, "all those songs started coming up and coming up, different ones, different ones, singing, singing, and singing those songs by myself." He went to Towaoc and sang, and then again at Ignacio until he realized that he knew enough to perform the ceremony and that there was no one else who would keep the tradition alive. The origin of the dance was as important as the practice, so he "backtracked" based upon what his grandfather had told him. He arrived at the time of creation with Coyote and Wolf. "They were the ones who were the rulers of the world at that time. My Grandfather used to talk about it." He proceeded to tell a story with unmistakable detail that linked it to the Chemehuevi

myth "How Wolf and Coyote Went Away," recorded by Carobeth and George Laird sometime between 1920 and 1940. The antiquity of the story is real, unquestionably connected as the final episode in the Wolf-Coyote Cycle of the Numá's creation stories.⁶⁶

The narrative is long and detailed. Briefly, the plot and characterization follows the same pattern as the other stories, with Wolf being the wise, omniscient older brother and Coyote being the imitator who fails to follow instructions, creates problems, and foreshadows the patterns that man will practice. The story begins with Wolf, "who always spoke in a chant," sending Coyote on an errand to obtain grass seed from their aunt, Bear. Not surprisingly, Coyote meddled with some of Bear's offspring, angered her, and received a grievous wound before escaping. Wolf heals Coyote and sends him with poisoned food to kill Bear and with specific instructions regarding how to destroy her property and kin, but Coyote again fails to follow directions. Bear is killed, but her relatives seek revenge. Wolf and Coyote prepare for war by making arrows and putting on different types of protective armor, defend their cave from the enemy host, and almost succeed in defeating the bears, but Coyote again does not follow instructions and, as he flees, turns around to see how Wolf was winning the battle. Even the armor Wolf wore, said to be so bright that the "light dazzled the eyes of the Bear warriors," was not enough to counteract Coyote's disobedience, causing the enemy to kill and destroy the older brother.

Coyote was devastated. Still, curiosity got the best of him, and he returned to their cave where he went through Wolf's belongings before he burned them as part of the mourning practice. He opened a series of buckskin wrappings, one inside the other, and unintentionally released Night. Only after a number of attempts at restoring daylight did he succeed. He then went to the scene of battle, collected what little scraps of Wolf he could find, and placed them under a basket. Coyote next made a great deal of bows and arrows, as many as "he could possibly carry," and cached them along his route as he searched for the bears with his brother's scalp.

Coyote's supernatural powers allowed him to detach his penis as an alter ego that communicated and thought just as he did. As the two approached the bears' camp, they disguised themselves with paint. Penis advised that they kill two old women carrying wood for the evening's dance, get inside their bodies, and infiltrate the enemy's domain. After learning from them how they should act and what they should say, Coyote and Penis killed the old ladies and succeeded in fooling everyone in the camp so that they could participate in the scalp dance. Each dancer placed Wolf's scalp on their head and then passed it around the circle. Coyote and Penis, still disguised as the old ladies, positioned themselves for a quick escape. Penis received the scalp first and then

gave it to Coyote, who chose the moment and sprinted out of the circle while Penis reattached in the proper place. Coyote fought a delaying action with the bows and arrows he had already positioned and evaded his pursuers by using his supernatural powers. The bears finally gave up but caused a snowstorm to blanket the ground day and night. However, this was to no avail. Coyote was safe and warm in a snug cave.

The next day, Coyote shrank himself to fit into a little puffball that the wind carried back to his home. After regaining his normal size, he placed Wolf's scalp under the basket with the other body parts and left to rest. At midnight he awoke and listened; shortly before the Morning Star arose, he heard his brother's voice and knew that he had returned from the dead. "Coyote listened intently. He was happy, because this time he had done everything exactly right. Now that his brother had come back to life, they would go on living together in the cave, and everything would be as it had always been." But Wolf's howls were heading to the "North, the Storied Land where the Ancient Telling starts and ends," not back to the cave as Coyote had hoped. He began in pursuit, and the two have not been seen since.

This story of resurrection—returning everything to how it had always been—answers questions and raises possibilities not previously explored. For example, an earlier report of a dance of the White River Utes mentioned wolf scalps with one eagle feather tied to the top of a pole in a Ghost Dance arena. Other accounts talk about painting faces and the significance of the pole as a device for communicating with the Land Beyond—which could also be interpreted as Coyote's Penis, why the dance was held at night and ends at daybreak, and most importantly, the connection of the dead with the living. Jack recalled that an old medicine man, who spoke no English and knew nothing of Jesus, "started to sing one song that talked about a stick standing with something on top of it. He said 'thees' [Jesus?] and the blood was dripping down from that. He didn't say Jesus Christ, but he said the blood is dripping from there."⁶⁷ Although Jack did not know what was on the pole, he was sure it was still alive and could communicate.

The wearing of a white blanket or painting a face or body with white clay suggests a number of interpretations. The color white could represent Wolf's armor that shone with dazzling light, and although protective Ghost Dance shirts were a Plains Indian phenomenon, the parallel with protection exists. The snowstorm conjured by the Bears is another possibility, as is Jack's suggestion that the blankets symbolized Christ's robe. The strongest possibility, however, is that it is associated with the Spirit World. As mentioned previously, smoke and incense represent the realm of the spirit. Scholars working on various aspects of the Ghost Dance confirm this belief. Judith Vander quoted Emily Hill, a Shoshone elder, as saying, "The soul is like a fog when it gets out

of the body"; Vander later states, "If we consider the soul's journey out of the body, first as foggy breath and then as dusty whirlwind . . . fog-soul is closest to life either as it leaves or returns to it." She also points out that Great Basin shamans painted patients with white clay or paint as part of healing the sick, following a burial, or after a bad dream. Havasupai Ghost Dancers covered themselves with white clay before dancing.⁶⁸

Mooney, who earlier observed the Shoshone, noted that, at the end of the dance, the "performers shook their blankets in the air, as among the Paiute and other tribes before dispersing." He also cites a description of a Walapai Ghost Dance: "The dancers, to the number of 200, clad in white robes with fancy trimmings, their faces and hair painted white in various decorative designs, moved slowly around in a circle, keeping time with a wild chant, while 200 more stood or crouched around the fires, awaiting their turn to participate."⁶⁹ Michael Hittman, who studied extensively the life of Wovoka, arrived at a highly complex explanation, too lengthy to examine here, of the significance of the color white. He concludes, "Thus, the color white = thunderclap = rifles = Tibóo [white man] = the Prophet's invulnerability = Wovoka's ability to doctor gunshot wounds = the white horse = the prophecy of the white horse = the Messiah = Wolf = God = Our Father = Sun = Thunder = clouds = rain = The Rainmaker = water = eagle feather = shamanic curing = ebe (white paint)."⁷⁰ The many interpretations of the color white and other aspects of the Worship Dance, as with the Sun Dance and Bear Dance, is in keeping with the tendency for Native American symbols to expand in meaning (polysemic) and evoke a variety of responses and teachings (multivocal).

As a dance leader, Jack also explained the importance of the tree and the eagle. The person directing the dance brings a person in need of a blessing to the cedar (juniper) in the center where he prays for the individual. The recipient holds onto the tree and is fanned from head to foot, which brushes away any problems through the power of the Eagle. "He comes out through that tree, the center, and fans him off." Two or three eagle feathers will do, but they must be eagle "because it has more power than anything" and can see and hear things that other creatures cannot. "He has the power to carry a message to the Creator." This same power is transmitted during the Sun Dance through an eagle-bone whistle. When it is blown, the message goes to the Creator, who connects with the person in need of help. Jack's son was in a car accident in Yakima, Washington, and had only a 50 percent chance of living. A phone call to White Mesa to let Jack know of the accident brought him outside of his home with an eagle-bone whistle. He offered a prayer and then blew it four times. Word came that his son would live. Jack drove to his bedside and used an eagle feather to fan him; a few days later the son walked out of the hospital on his own power. "That kind of a miracle can happen."⁷¹

The tree placed in the center of the dance area is “respected just like a person.” The cedar tree “brings out a lot of people singing. You can see the cedar tree moving when the wind blows. It does a lot of different things like move around, and they say that [with] that cedar tree, those Worship Songs get into your head. You see and feel what is there and what it is.” After his explanation of the tree, Jack continued with his thoughts about the Spirit World, connecting the two. Although he did not know where it was located and said that nobody really knew about it, he identified the land of the dead as a “dream land.” “I dream about the people who are gone. I see them at a distance. . . . I see my brothers who are gone. I see my grandmothers who are gone. I see them in the Spirit World, in Dream Land. There is no land around here like that.”⁷²

Jack also suggested that people wore white in the past because spirits can connect and help a person in a positive way if one can be seen and recognized. He felt that the good spirits are present at the dance and ready to assist while the bad ones—the ones usually feared at night—do not attend. The assistance from the Spirit World makes a person feel good, “feeling that something has come over you—the energy comes over you and makes you cry and think of somebody.” Central to obtaining this feeling are the songs. Jack sings many that he heard his grandfather use, but new ones also come to him from the spirits. The songs are revealed but have been present for a long time. “The songs just travel around, travel around with the air. . . . All the songs are nothing but the Creator and the creation of mankind on this earth. The Ute people. So that is a good part of it.”⁷³

CONCLUSION

The Worship Dance, Ghost Dance, Sun Dance, and Bear Dance share many teachings and symbols common to speakers of Numic. Although each ceremony is unique in its own way and is performed for a variety of reasons, the common ground among them cannot be missed. Healing the sick, renewing the necessities of life, connecting spiritually with ancestors for assistance, communicating with the Land Beyond, establishing patterns for man, and sharing symbols that unify religious expression, such as the circle, tree, and animals, characterize the faith of the White Mesa people and are present in each of these ceremonies. Understanding their origins sheds light on the relevancy of practice in Ute culture. Even the Ghost Dance, credited to Wodziwob and Wovoka, uses symbols and has an origin based in many cultural elements whose roots go deeper than these two historic figures. The religious beliefs are not just man-made, based in contemporary revelation. Instead, there is a blending of the past with the present as willed by the gods.

Religion, as a culture's expression of its most treasured values, uses symbols to make the intangible tangible. Passed through generations in order to ensure that tribal values persist, these symbols continue to teach and protect that which is important to cultural survival. The Bear Dance, Sun Dance, and Worship Dance persist as part of that heritage, allowing circles, trees, bears, and other emblems not only to serve as tokens of past teachings but also to empower the Ute universe today.

NOTES

1. Anonymous Northern Ute elder cited in Mary Stephanie Reynolds, "Dance Brings about Everything: Dance Power in the Ideologies of Northern Utes of Uintah and Ouray Reservation and Predominantly Mormon Anglos of an Adjacent Uintah Basin Community," vol. 2 (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 1990), Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 334.

2. See Joseph G. Jorgensen, *The Sun Dance Religion: Power of the Powerless* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Anne M. Smith, *Ethnography of the Northern Utes*, Papers in Anthropology 17 (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974); Julian H. Steward, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups*, Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 120 (1938; repr., Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970); Omer C. Stewart, *Culture Element Distributions: XVIII Ute-Southern Paiute*, Anthropological Records vol. 6, no. 4 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942); Don D. Fowler and Catherine S. Fowler, eds., *Anthropology of the Numa: John Wesley Powell's Manuscripts on the Numic Peoples of Western North America, 1868-1880*, Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology 14 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971); and Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

3. See Pamela A. Bunte and Robert J. Franklin, *From the Sands to the Mountain: Change and Persistence in a Southern Paiute Community* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); Michael Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Martha C. Knack, *Boundaries Between: The Southern Paiutes, 1775-1995* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); and Ronald L. Holt, *Beneath These Red Cliffs: An Ethnohistory of the Utah Paiutes* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006).

4. Joseph G. Jorgensen, "Ghost Dance, Bear Dance, and Sun Dance," *Great Basin*, vol. 11 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Warren L. D'Azevedo and William C. Sturtevant (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 662.

5. William R. Palmer, "San Juan Indians," William R. Palmer Collection, Special Collections, Gerald R. Sherratt Library, Southern Utah University (hereinafter referred to as Palmer Collection), Cedar City, 27-28.

6. William R. Palmer, Field Notes, "San Juan Trip, August 21-26, 1935," Palmer Collection. The Ghost Dance had no destruction of goods and nothing to do with a postburial experience.

7. Palmer, "San Juan Indians," 32.

8. *Ibid.*, 34.

9. *Ibid.*, 37-38.

10. *Ibid.*, 46.

11. Palmer, "Experiences in Gathering Indian Folklore," November 3, 1945, Palmer Collection, 4.

12. For an example of these stories see William R. Palmer, *Why the North Star Stands Still and Other Indian Legends* (1946; repr., Springdale, UT: Zion Natural History Association, 1978).
13. See Carobeth Laird, *The Chemehuevis* (Banning, CA: Malaki Museum Press, 1976); and Laird, *Mirror and Pattern: George Laird's World of Chemehuevi Mythology* (Banning, CA: Malaki Museum Press, 1984).
14. Laird, *The Chemehuevis*, 231.
15. Fowler and Fowler, *Anthropology of the Numa*, 78–91.
16. William R. Palmer, "Indians—Paiutes—Natural Science" notes, n.d., Palmer Collection, 1–2.
17. Bonnie Mike Lehi interview with author, July 20, 2009; Adoline Eyetoo interview with author, July 25, 2009.
18. Lynda D. McNeil, "Recurrence of Bear Restoration Symbolism: Minusinsk Basin Evenki and Basin-Plateau Ute," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8 (2008): 80.
19. Robert H. Lowie, "Shoshonean Tales," *The Journal of American Folklore* 37, no. 143 (January–June 1924): 1–91; Anne M. Smith, *Ute Tales* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992); Talmay Givon, *Ute Traditional Narratives* (Ignacio, CO: Ute Press, 1985).
20. Lynda D. McNeil, "Climbing Bear, Spirit Helper: Companion Petroglyphs at Shalabolino (Siberia) and Shavano Valley (Colorado, USA)," [http://spot.colorado.edu/~lmcneil/Climbing Bear.pdf](http://spot.colorado.edu/~lmcneil/ClimbingBear.pdf) (accessed February 21, 2008); Lynda D. McNeil, "Ute Indian Bear Dance: Related Myths and Bear Glyphs," <http://spot.colorado.edu/~lmcneil/UteBearDance> (accessed February 21, 2008).
21. William F. Hanson, "The Lure of Tam-man Nacup Springtime Festival of the Utes" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1937), Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Provo, UT, 54, 73; Anne M. Smith, *Ethnography of the Northern Utes*, Papers in Anthropology 17 (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1974), 220.
22. Y. T. Witherspoon, ed., *Conversations with Connor Chapoose: A Leader of the Ute Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation*, University of Oregon Anthropological Papers 47 (Eugene: Anthropology Department, University of Oregon, 1993), 50–51.
23. Jack Cantsee Sr. and Jack Cantsee Jr. joint interview with author, September 24, 2009.
24. Aldean Ketchum interview with author, July 30, 2009.
25. McNeil, "Climbing Bear," 3, 6.
26. Lehi interview.
27. Adoline Eyetoo interview.
28. Clifford Duncan, conversation with author, September 11, 2009; Carol Patterson has worked extensively with Duncan in interpreting bear-tree symbols in Shavano Valley, CO, rock art sites. See Carol Patterson, "Shavano Valley Rock Art Site Protection and Interpretive Project," SHF Project #2005-M1-006 (Montrose, CO: Alpine Archaeological Consultants, 2005).
29. Duncan conversation, September 18, 2009.
30. Jack Cantsee Sr. and Jack Cantsee Jr. joint interview.
31. Terry G. Knight interview reproduced in Mary Jane Yazzie, "Life Traditions of the Utes of Avikan," *Blue Mountain Shadows* 7 (Winter 1990): 27–28.
32. Jorgensen, *The Sun Dance Religion*, 201.
33. *Ibid.*, 183.
34. *Ibid.*, 210.
35. Larry Cesspooch, conversation with author, July 15, 2009.
36. Jorgensen, *The Sun Dance Religion*, 210–11.
37. Knight cited in Yazzie, "Life Traditions of the Utes of Avikan," 28.
38. Jorgensen, *The Sun Dance Religion*, 211.
39. Witherspoon, *Conversations with Connor Chapoose*, 55.
40. Jorgensen, *The Sun Dance Religion*, 211.

41. Ibid., 209.
42. Isabel T. Kelly and Catherine S. Fowler, *Great Basin*, vol. 11 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Warren L. D'Azevedo and William C. Sturtevant (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 383–84.
43. William R. Palmer, "Indian Memorial Service for President Anthony W. Ivins," n.d., Palmer Collection.
44. Ketchum interview.
45. Alex K. Carroll, M. Nieves Zedeño, and Richard W. Stoffle, "Landscapes of the Ghost Dance: A Cartography of Numic Ritual," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 11, no. 2 (June 2004): 137.
46. Scholars disagree as to whether there was a Mormon influence in either of the two periods of the Ghost Dance. See John Alton Peterson, *Utah's Black Hawk War* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), 360–63, which purports a connection, and Lawrence G. Coates, "The Mormons and the Ghost Dance," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 89–111, who believes there was no transfer of ideology.
47. Russell Thornton, "Demographic Antecedents of a Revitalization Movement: Population Change, Population Size, and the 1890 Ghost Dance," *American Sociological Review* 46, no. 1 (February 1981): 88–96.
48. Paiute informant cited by Cora DuBois in Michael Hittman, "The 1870 Ghost Dance at the Walker River Reservation: A Reconstruction," *Ethnohistory* 3 (Summer 1973): 250.
49. James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (1896; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 4.
50. Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, 102.
51. Virginia McConnell Simmons, *The Ute Indians of Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 209.
52. "The Indian Movement," *Deseret News*, November 29, 1890, 1; James P. Boyd, *Recent Indian Wars under the Lead of Sitting Bull and Other Chiefs, with a Full Account of the Messiah Craze and Ghost Dances* (New York: Publishers Union, 1891), 176–78, 186–90.
53. W. W. Hill, "The Navaho Indians and the Ghost Dance of 1890," *American Anthropologist* 46, no. 4 (October–December 1944): 523–27.
54. "Utah Has a Ghost Dance," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 12, 1890, 1; "No Ghost Dance at Uintah," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 19, 1890, 1.
55. Smith, *Ethnography of the Northern Utes*, 216–18.
56. Ibid., 217.
57. Henry F. Dobyns and Robert C. Euler, *The Ghost Dance of 1889 among the Pai Indians of Northwestern Arizona* (Tucson, AZ: Prescott College, Press, 1967), 1–18; Steven A. Weber and P. David Seaman, *Havasupai Habitat: A. F. Whiting's Ethnography of a Traditional Indian Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 137–38; Richard W. Stoffle, Lawrence Loendorf, Diane Austin, and Angelita Bullets, "Ghost Dancing the Grand Canyon: Southern Paiute Rock Art, Ceremony, and Cultural Landscapes," *Current Anthropology* 41 (2000): 11–38.
58. Forbes Parkhill, *The Last Indian War* (New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1961), 108.
59. The following information comes from three different interviews with Edward Dutchie Sr. and his wife Patty (Mills) Dutchie, held on May 7, 13, and 21, 1996. Unless otherwise noted, Edward provided the information.
60. Lehi interview.
61. Duncan conversation, September 18, 2009.
62. Stella Eyetoo interview with author, July 11, 2009.
63. Adoline Eyetoo interview.

64. Annie Cantsee interview with author, August 4, 2009.
65. Jack Cantsee Sr. and Jack Cantsee Jr. joint interview. Unless otherwise noted, the remaining discussion about the Worship Dance comes from this interview.
66. What follows is a synopsis of “How Wolf and Coyote Went Away,” Laird, *The Chemehuevis*, 192–207. According to anthropologist Kay Fowler, who specializes in beliefs and practices of Numic people, there are other versions of this story found with the Northern Paiute and Shoshone (personal communication, February 16, 2010).
67. Jack Cantsee Sr. and Jack Cantsee Jr. joint interview.
68. Judith Vander, “The Shoshone Ghost Dance and Numic Myth: Common Heritage, Common Themes,” *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (1995): 184–85.
69. Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 53, 59.
70. Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, 193–94.
71. Jack Cantsee Sr. and Jack Cantsee Jr. joint interview.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.

