

**DINÉ BECOMING BAHÁ'Í:  
THROUGH THE LENS OF ANCIENT PROPHECIES**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts, Religious Studies

By

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May 2011

# **DINÉ BECOMING BAHÁ'Í:**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Most American Indians have remained traditional to their cultural belief systems and have not converted to an outside religious system without prior coercions of some sort, historically embedded in the colonization effect. Yet in 1962 over three hundred Navajos, or, more correctly, Diné Indians, became members of a little known religion that had originated in the East, the Bahá'í Faith. I argue that those Diné became Bahá'í for three primary reasons: 1) the new religion's teachings fulfilled ancient Diné prophecies; 2) its teachings applied through its institutions provided autonomy and empowered Diné Bahá'ís individually and as a people; and 3) through the religion's principle of valuing the diversity of human cultures, Diné Bahá'ís can practice most of their traditional ways without opposition or disapproval from non-Diné Bahá'ís. The Diné have two oral prophecies that Diné Bahá'ís believe are fulfilled by the new religion. I examine those narratives from a religious, psychological, anthropological, and sociological standpoint in the historical context of the impact that the Diné's Long Walk and imprisonment at Bos Redondo (1863-1868) had on the Diné, and subsequent federal mandates on Diné culture that included the boarding school system of education and the failed sheep/land policies—both of which may have provided impetus for consideration of the new religion. Methodology include archival research at the National Bahá'í Archives in Wilmette, Illinois, and ethnographic fieldwork on the Navajo Reservation from 2007-2009.

**KEYWORDS:** Diné, Navajo, becoming Bahá'í, conversion, eschatological narratives

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Martha L. Finch  
Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Missouri State University

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their support during the course of my graduate studies. First and foremost, thank you to my thesis committee for their patience and guidance, especially to Martha Finch as my Chair. Deepest gratitude goes to the Kahn families for allowing me to interview them, providing hospitality, and arranging other interviews, and to Johnny and Rubie Nelson and Jacky Wilson for sharing their time and thoughts. Gratitude goes to the staff at the Native American Bahá'í Institute who shared their community potlucks with us and allowed interviews on campus. A special thank you to Linda Wilson for her insights on Diné traditions and history and for her interview so soon after her mother's passing. In particular, gratitude goes to Ronald P. Maldonado, supervisory archeologist for Cultural Compliance in the Historic Preservation Department of the Navajo Nation, for his kind permission for the Diné interviews to be conducted on the Navajo Reservation, and to John Schmalzbauer, thesis committee member, for his much-needed help with IRB human research forms and requirements. Appreciation goes to Bill and Mary Lou Wright for their astonishingly detailed and fun interviews and to Bruce and Sandy Palmberg for starting this process in the first place many years ago. Special thanks to Nancy F. Browning, Professor of Cultural Diversity at Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri, for her reading of Chapter 1; to psychologist Theo A Cope, Lecturer and Foreign Faculty Coordinator, School of International Business, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, Dalian, Liaoning Province, China, for his reading of Chapter 2; and to my colleagues at Liaoning Normal University-Missouri State University School of International Business, Liaoning Province, Dalian, China, for their listening and support. My deepest gratitude to Joyce Olinga for transcribing interviews, to Roger Dahl and staff at the National Bahá'í Archives office for help with research, to dear friend Marjean Streitmatter who constantly kept me on guard against procrastination, and to my four adult children who supported "Mom doing her thing." Gratitude goes to Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez, Caterpillar Inc. Professor of English at Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois, who teaches Native American literatures, ecocomposition, folklore, and literary criticism and theory. This thesis would be remiss without Susan's extensive insight into the Bahá'í Faith, Native American oral traditions, the spoken word as an instrument of change, and the ability to combine her knowledge into "conversive communication." I am indebted to John Pappan, Omaha Indian Bahá'í, for his inadvertent email introduction of scholars and Bahá'ís Donald Addison and Christopher Buck, who has written profoundly on Native Messengers, myths, and religions; and to fellow traveler Chelsea Horton, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of History, University of British Columbia, for her invaluable help with research issues, friendship, and encouragement. I am deeply indebted to Barbara Brown, editor of Naturegraph Publishing, who provided details for Chapter 5 and for her permission to use Annie Kahn's "Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants" in this thesis. A deep appreciation and love goes to Black Wolf, Sky, Blue Willow, Elk Woman, and Grandfather, a circle of Holy Elders who have encouraged, sustained, and guided me for many years. Lastly, thank you to Jack Llewellyn, thesis committee member, who said to me upon application to graduate school, "I think you will be a credit to us and we will be a credit to you." Yes, you are indeed, and I can only hope the reverse is true.

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## PREFACE AND DEDICATION

Growing up I felt some justifiable pride (or so I thought) to have been born along the Pecos River, renowned in cowboy novels and western legends, in the high-desert village of Fort Sumner, New Mexico. I had become accustomed to the rocky, scrub brush hills in the Ozark region of Missouri where my mother had been sent as a missionary when I was three years old. When I periodically returned to visit New Mexico as a child, the vastness of the blue skies encircling Fort Sumner like an upside-down bowl, with an occasional glimpse of mysterious, flat-topped red mesas, never ceased to hold my attention and amaze me. We traveled back and forth from Missouri to New Mexico enough to know that New Mexico was really my home. I spent much of my early childhood traveling with my maternal grandmother, who was partially blind. Grandmother Snead's most frequent circuit was between her youngest son, who lived in the remotest regions of Texas and New Mexico, ranching and raising horses, and her oldest daughter, who lived in Fort Sumner. Aunt Irene lived in a small white adobe house on a rise coming out of "the valley," three miles or so from the old fort area named Bosque Redondo or *Hwééldi*, "the place of suffering," by the Diné, or Navajo Indians, who had been held at the fort between 1863 and 1868.

Parts of the old fort were partially outlined with low-lying and crumbling rocky foundations as the only sign that buildings once occupied the land. To the side of the old fort area was (and still is) the Billy the Kid Museum and Visitors' Center—Fort Sumner's major claim to fame and tourist attraction. The poignant and painful history of the old fort was seldom acknowledged by local residents or tourists; it was Billy the Kid that visitors from out of town came to see and it was one of the few places where we kids could wile

away a boring Sunday afternoon. Over the years it became a family ritual to visit the Kid museum and gift shop. I often found myself wandering out over the grounds of the old fort, sitting on an accessible part of the crumbling foundations, and carrying on deep questioning conversations with myself about the Indians who had been imprisoned and had died there in large numbers. I often wondered if I would meet any of the descendents of those people who had eked out a less than marginal existence at the old fort before being allowed to return to their homelands. My Pecos River of childhood memories and stories meandered just a hundred yards or so from the old foundations, lined with small trees and tall grasses so that it was inaccessible to exploration. Besides, I'd had my fill of red ants, scorpions, and monster tarantulas as a child playing in the red-sand yard of my auntie's home. Gracing a few yards along the way back to her house were the last of the distinctively large and nearly extinct cottonwood trees that had been planted by the Navajo and Mescalero Apache prisoners.<sup>1</sup>

Years flew by, filled with schooling, family, and other trips. I investigated various religions along the way, choosing to "become" a Bahá'í in February, 1970. In the early 1980s, I became active in my own American Indian heritage. Customarily, in the native way, one introduces oneself by where one's family comes from. My mother's father's family originated from Cherokee, Alabama, where my mother's paternal grandfather had come from the Old Country to take a Cherokee bride by the name of Wind, anglicized to Wynn, and kept as a rather hushed family secret until years after my grandfather's passing. My mother's father, Oscar Snead, in an arranged marriage into a fairly well-to-do and well-known white woman's family in New Mexico, did not openly

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn R. Bailey, *Bosque Redondo: The Navajo Internment at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, 1863-68* (Tucson, AZ: Westernlore Press, 1998), 215. Indian prisoners planted 12,068 cottonwood seedlings between December 1864 and April 1865. Bailey notes only thirty cottonwoods are still living.

acknowledge his Cherokee heritage. My paternal Cherokee grandmother, Cora Merrimen, was born in Texas and moved to Oklahoma after her marriage to my grandfather, Uel Edwards. Grandmother was proud of her Indian heritage and often spoke of her own mother, Dottie Wilson-Merriman, who was given land in Texas by a river, which, according to family stories, later turned out to be downtown Dallas. Grandfather Edwards, known as a kind and patient man, born in Carney and raised near Sayer, Oklahoma, mere miles from the infamous Black Kettle massacre site, was of Southern Cheyenne heritage, although, according to my elderly aunties, he didn't talk about it.

My teenage parents met in Fort Sumner when my father and his parents followed the ripening crops from Oklahoma down into Texas and New Mexico as migrant workers in the cotton and peanut fields. They quickly eloped, much to my maternal Cherokee grandfather's intense dismay, and the ensuing extended family battles on both sides, of disapproval and angst over Indian identities or lack thereof, ended the stress-filled marriage in divorce after only seven years. My two older brothers and I grew up with tales of our paternal Cherokee grandmother, her native remedies, and her hot Cherokee temper, which was not to be outdone by our maternal grandfather's equally hot Cherokee temper. The families split apart and we children lost access to our father and his family until well into our adulthoods. By then it was too late. Father and grandparents had passed away, leaving only two aunties to fill in the blanks of lost family.

As a partial result of my childhood losses over "the Indian question," I co-founded the Heart of America Spiritual Gatherings in 1996, held at a Bahá'í-owned retreat named Temerity Woods, which brought together natives and non-natives in a

place of safety and respect.<sup>2</sup> Bruce and Sandy Palmberg, proprietors, had spoken often of living for a few years on the Navajo reservation and I knew that one of their goals for Temerity Woods was to establish a native-based event there. During a trip in the summer of 1996 to the Navajo reservation in Arizona with a vanload of goods for the Black Mesa area, besieged by the Hopi-Navajo relocation dispute, I made my first visit to the Native American Bahá'í Institute near Pine Springs and briefly met Alfred and Tina Kahn, long-time friends of the Palmbergs.<sup>3</sup> The Kahns came to the spiritual gathering at Temerity a year later with their daughter, Seowah. I knew that Alfred was a full-blood Navajo but I did not connect him personally back to those prisoners at the old fort then or during any of the spiritual gatherings that the Kahns attended over the next four years.

It was Thanksgiving of 2003 when I discovered something wonderful had happened in the old fort area. I had been back to my aunt's home and to Billy the Kid's museum a good number of times over the years but had neglected to venture over to the now-invisible remains of the old fort some distance away to the side of the museum. This visit was different. I had been given a task by my own native Elders to look for a certain small stone along the banks of the Pecos. Sneaking away from the family gathering in my cousin's new modular home, placed near the site of my deceased aunt's crumbling adobe house, I made my way down the valley to the old fort area. As I approached the museum something caught my attention about a small adobe building that I had not noticed on previous visits. Curiosity piqued, I turned down a narrow dirt road to discover an

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<sup>2</sup> For a history of the Spiritual Gatherings, see: <http://www.temeritywoods.org/> (accessed April 4, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See: David M. Brugge, *The Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute: An American Tragedy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).



unassuming Interpretive Center, constructed in 1970 and built in the style of the old fort.<sup>4</sup> “Finally,” I thought, “I’ll find out more about these people.” It was near closing time and sunset in the chilly November evening, but the native ranger on duty allowed me enough time for a brief glance at the disappointing military-focused exhibits and to take the long-anticipated walk down a narrow sandy path by the Pecos. The walk produced a gratifying experience that more than made up for the lack of information in the exhibits. Coming back full circle on the trail to the Interpretive Center I came upon a small rock cairn about three feet high built under a juniper tree. The bronze plaque positioned near the front of the cairn gave more information about the old fort and what had happened there than had all the exhibits in the Center put together. The cairn had been blessed with red prayer ties and other small personal items carefully placed on its stones by its visitors. I offered the “Blessed is the Spot” prayer from the Bahá’í writings and laid my own prayer tie on the cairn.<sup>5</sup> Finally, at long last, what had transpired at the old fort area so many years ago was in plain sight for all to see. Descendents of “those people” had been there—and they would be back. Still, I was not prepared at all for what came next.

Over the years the Kahns and I had become close, with Tina, of Cherokee/Osage heritage, as my sister and Alfred as my brother in the native ways of family. In July of 2005, they invited me to the traditional blessing ceremony for their son’s wedding and to the Kahn extended family reunion. This was my opportunity to visit Fort Sumner again. I knew there had been a new and much larger interpretive center built and dedicated earlier that summer and I was eager to see it. Arriving again just at closing time, I could see a

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<sup>4</sup> Jose Cisneros and Gregory Scott Smith, “The Bosque Redondo Memorial: Long Deserved, Long Overdue,” New Mexico State Monuments, [http://www.nmmonuments.org/publications/elpal\\_bosque.pdf](http://www.nmmonuments.org/publications/elpal_bosque.pdf) (accessed April 26, 2009). The cairn was established on February 14, 1971, with a Blessing Way ceremony led by a Diné singer.

<sup>5</sup> *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 5th ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2002), Front Piece.

tall conical-shaped building behind the Kid museum that dwarfed and overshadowed the museum with its uniqueness.<sup>6</sup> In front of the building lay the long trunk of an old cottonwood tree. Circling to one side of the interpretive center was a partially finished arbor area similar to the arena of the spiritual gatherings' ceremonial grounds at Temerity Woods. I entered through tall glass doors to catch in one sweeping glance all the history that had been missing in the little adobe center in 2003. The significance of the new center and the impact of actually standing in such a beautiful building within sight of the old Kid museum with the smaller interpretive center behind it seemed surreal.

When I arrived at the Kahns' a few days later, I shared with them my emotional experience at the new interpretive center. Alfred and Tina had attended the grand opening on June 4, 2005, and as Alfred shared his story I learned that he is a relative, a descendent of Navajo Chief Manuelito—the same Chief Manuelito whose picture is painted on the outside wall of the Kid museum and whose face I had gazed at countless times since childhood. Later, Alfred's older brother Chester Kahn shared his knowledge of Chief Manuelito:

He was a young man and the solders put up at Fort Defiance and he didn't understand why they were doing that. And of course the whole process was to suppress and change the Navajo from traditional ways to the Christian way of life and to make farmers out of them, and so forth. He was our great grandfather, our great-great grandfather, and my great grandmother's uncle. There were two kinds of leaders in those days. When I say peace chief or leader, that stands for peace, and then the other one is a war chief. He was known as the war chief and he tried to put a stop to what the soldiers were doing. Tried to take them away but wasn't successful because they had all the gun power and cannons and so forth where they tried to take them away one time and they couldn't do it. Ah, and he was a very, very powerful man, very influential. Ah, a lot of the people when they were driven to the Fort Sumner by the soldiers, a lot of people didn't go. They just moved far away from here. And a lot of the people didn't go to the prison but Manuelito came something like two years later, ah, to Fort Sumner to see what was going on and so forth. And then of course General Sherman came to investigate and had the power to do whatever he wished by the federal government to solve the problem of the Navajos who were starving, for four

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<sup>6</sup> See: Cisneros and Smith, "Bosque Redondo Memorial."

years they were starving. Many of them starved. Many of them died over there. Of course many of them got killed, too, in the process.<sup>7</sup>

Looking at Alfred's chiseled Navajo face, I could easily see the family resemblance to Chief Manuelito. The astonishing answer to a lifetime of questioning, "who are these people, and will I ever meet any of their descendents," stood in front of me!

Traditional Navajo singers created the rock cairn on the winding trail near the Pecos River in 1971 through a Diné Blessing Way Ceremony. Nineteen years later a park ranger found a note pinned under a rock on the cairn, handwritten on lined paper torn from a student's notebook and addressed to the staff of the old interpretive center:

We, the young generation of the Diné were here on June 27, 1990, at 7:30 p.m. We find Fort Sumner's historical site discriminating and not telling the true story behind what really happened to our ancestors in 1864–1868. It seems to us there is more information on "Billy the Kid" (which has no significance) than to the years 1864–1868. We therefore demand that the museum show and tell the true history of the Navajos and the United States military. We, the young generation of the Navajos, are concerned for the future.<sup>8</sup>

The note was signed by twenty youth—Herbert Yazzie; Kenny Begay; Rocky Tso; Tommy Bitsui; Fabian Kee; Mat Fry; Jeannie Y. Benally; Wendy C. Begay; Darlene Smith; Sherretta Martinez; Jason Songster; Leonard F.; Marlon Yazzie; Cassandra Ben; Sonja Bahe; Laura Becenti; Petula Shirley; Pauline M. Begay; Evelyn Becenti; and Kidd Louis—of the Navajo Nation who had lost twenty percent of their ancestors over a hundred years ago, before and during their ancestors' Long Walk to imprisonment at Fort Sumner. This thesis is dedicated to them.

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<sup>7</sup> Chester Kahn, interview by author, August 1, 2008, Houck, AZ. Chester clarified that his great-grandmother's uncle was Manuelito, making Manuelito their great great-grandfather in the Diné kinship way.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory Scott Smith, "A Concern for the Future," 19. "Staff members are always careful to avoid disturbing such offerings and we often remind the more casual visitors that the cairn is similar to an altar in a church and should be treated with the same respect and reverence."

## INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE

A major religious change, a becoming, or a form of tradition transition occurred among some Navajos, or more accurately, Diné, in 1962, when members of a large and well-known Diné family, the Kahns, organized the Great Council Fire Unity Conference held near the Pine Springs Chapter House on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. (I use *Diné* out of respect for those scholars and those Navajos who have moved from the Spanish term of Navajo, but I also maintain *Navajo* in some contexts out of respect for the many Navajos who continue to identify themselves as such). Psychologist and theologian Lewis Rambo explains that a tradition transition takes place when an individual or a group of individuals converts “from one major religious tradition to another” and says that if scholars are to be “phenomenologically true to the experiences and the phenomena of conversion, we must: 1) examine the religious ideology that shapes the conversion process, 2) examine the religious imagery that influences the consciousness of the convert, and 3) examine the religious institutions that are the matrix in which conversion takes place.”<sup>9</sup> Rambo defines religious conversion as a “turning from and to new religious groups, ways of life, and systems of belief and modes of relating to a deity or the nature of reality.”<sup>10</sup> While using Rambo’s religious conversion model to explore the Diné conversion experience, I use the term “becoming Bahá’í” to more fully describe the religious change that occurred among some Diné in 1962. My continued usage of Rambo’s term “tradition transition” is a reminder that those Diné who became Bahá’í did convert to a major form of religion completely outside their own

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<sup>9</sup> Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 11-14.

<sup>10</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 3.

traditions, while at the same time maintaining their own belief structure as Dinés. The term “becoming Bahá’í,” which is the term Dine Bahá’ís themselves use, denotes the long process of transition into the new religion and will be explained more fully in the following chapters.

The Kahn family accepted the Bahá’í Faith en masse, with grandparents, parents, and adult children all coming into the new religion within a relatively short period of time in 1961-62. During the Great Council Fire Unity Conference held in June 1962 and attended by more than a thousand people from various reservations, states, and countries (see Appendix C), over three hundred Diné Indians publicly declared their belief in and acceptance of the Bahá’í laws and principles revealed between 1844 and 1892 by the two prophet-founders of the Faith, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.<sup>11</sup>

My thesis presents a case study of the reasons why those three hundred Diné voluntarily embraced this little-known religion that originated in the East in 1962 and why some Diné continue to do so. As documented in multiple ethnographical studies, most American Indians remain traditional to their cultural belief systems and do not readily convert to an outside religious system without some form of coercion. According to Scott Anderson, coercion has historically been used as a certain kind of power for the purpose of gaining advantages over others in some way, whether to bend an individual or a group of people into conformity, or to punish non-compliance with demands for some change in behavior or actions.<sup>12</sup> Anderson explains that imposing of either an individual’s

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<sup>11</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, “The Native American Bahá’í Institute,” *In Service to the Common Good: The American Bahá’í Community’s Commitment to Social Change* (Wilmette, IL: Office of Development Research, Dec 2004), 30. This is a report from the Native American Bahá’í Institute given as a case study.

<sup>12</sup> Scott Anderson, “Coercion,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/coercion/> (accessed May 29, 2010).

will or the will of a group of individuals upon the will of other people limits the imposed-upon group to coercive “free” choices or coercive “unfreely” choices.<sup>13</sup>

More generally, people may be said to live more freely or less freely, depending on facts such as the range and quality of choices open to them, the extent to which they are immune to interference from outside powerful parties, or the extent to which they can pursue options of deep significance to them. *Autonomy* seems to be a special type of freedom which, insofar as it differs from the above types, is used to refer to an inner state of orderly self-directedness. Coercion has been thought to be inimical to at least some of these types of freedom, perhaps all, and also to have deleterious impacts on the special type we call autonomy.<sup>14</sup>

The Diné experienced coercion, along with a loss of autonomy, when they were imprisoned in Bosque Redondo and when their children were, sometimes voluntarily and often involuntarily, placed by the federal government in boarding schools that were run by Christian churches. Milder forms of coercion among the Diné occurred when missionaries held out gifts based on a change in actions or behavior, such as attending church services to receive candy for children or new clothing for adults. Historian of North American religions Catherine L. Albanese uses the more demure term “constrained” to mean the same thing as coercion when she argues that “Indians were constrained by circumstances to convert to Christianity, but they did so on their own terms and for their own needs.”<sup>15</sup> Albanese cites ethnohistorian James Axtell: “By accepting the Christian minister or priest as the functional equivalent of a native shaman and by giving traditional meanings to Christian rites, dogmas, and deities, the Indians ensured the survival of native cultures by taking on the protective coloration of the

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<sup>13</sup> Anderson, “Coercion.” Anderson uses the term “unfreely,” which I have maintained.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, “Coercion.”

<sup>15</sup> Catherine L. Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls: Contact, Combination, and American Religious History,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 204.

invaders' religion."<sup>16</sup> While this was often true regarding natives' conversion to Christianity, my ethnographic research does not show any identifiable forms of coercion as a reason for Diné to become Bahá'í.

Rather, I argue that, based on aspects of Rambo's model of conversion and on the emerging model of "becoming" to describe the Bahá'í conversion experience, some Diné "became Bahá'í" for three primary reasons. Based in part on Rambo's model of conversion and his terminology, the following elements played into Diné becoming Bahá'ís: the belief that the arrival of the Bahá'í Faith to the Navajo reservation fulfilled Diné eschatological prophecies (religious imagery); access to autonomy and empowerment individually and culturally (religious ideology); and, through the Bahá'í concept of the protection of culture through the Bahá'í principle of unity in diversity, Diné Bahá'ís maintain most of their traditional ways without opposition or disapproval from the non-Indian Bahá'í community (religious matrix). Diné Bahá'ís believe that their ancient prophecies contained in the "Return of the Warriors Twins" and in some ancient Navajo chants (see Appendix B) were fulfilled by the coming of the new religion to them. I argue that these important oral traditions shaped the Diné's eschatological expectations and provided a bridge for those Diné who became Bahá'í. I use Rambo's three levels of examination to categorize and describe his seven dimensions of religious conversion among Diné Bahá'ís, which he identifies as context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. In addition, interviews in which several Diné Bahá'ís narrate their conversion experiences add a rich depth to the telling of their stories in this work.

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<sup>16</sup> Albanese, "Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls," 205.

Diné medicine men Jacky Wilson and Johnny Nelson and Johnny's wife Rubie Nelson were among those who became Bahá'ís at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference (see Appendix E-4 and 5). Interviewed in the Nelsons' prayer hogan in June of 2009, Johnny speaks for the three elders when he tells what it was like to be at such a momentous event in the tiny settlement of Pine Springs in 1962:

And oh, you should have seen that! People, especially older people, the medicine men, the wise people. When they heard about the message from Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, they said that is what they had been waiting for. And that's why they accepted, they accepted the Faith right there and then. And that's how they became the Bahá'ís. And I think all the people that were there around Pine Springs area, oh, about maybe all around the Navajo Reservation, the ones that came here, I believed declared themselves [as Bahá'ís]. That's what they were waiting for, to hear that message, to hear the prayers, the nice songs they heard. And where they had their corn pollen, the one they had for the nice songs they heard. And where they had their corn pollen, the one they had for many years, with their blessings and things like that. They, the Bahá'í Faith, didn't say anything against me [using the corn pollen to pray with]; they just went ahead and stayed with their prayers, with their prayers and with their nice firesides. So then the second day, they had a nice dinner and everybody was very happy. And instead of just listening or instead of just pokin' their head from behind a tree, well, they were out there in the open talking to each other with the different tribes. You should have seen them there. Even though I'm a Navajo but somehow the languages were all, practically all the same. You can understand what they were talking about. So there was something there that made us our belief in reality. That's how we became a Bahá'í.<sup>17</sup>

Johnny's comments about "what they were waiting for" and the "message of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh" refer to their recognition and acceptance of the eschatological narrative of the return of the Warriors Twins as being fulfilled in the forms of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and support my argument that this narrative served as a bridge for becoming Bahá'í. Johnny's declaration that he and other Diné could continue to use their corn pollen with their prayers validates my argument that through the Bahá'í concept of the protection of cultural diversity, Diné Bahá'ís can maintain their traditional ways without

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<sup>17</sup> Johnny and Rubie Nelson, Jacky Wilson, interview by author, Pine Springs, Arizona, Navajo Reservation, June, 2009. Alfred Kahn, Sr. translated Jacky Nelson's interview for author.



opposition or disapproval from the non-Indian Bahá'í community. Other traditional activities evidenced at the Great Council Fire included the ceremonial making of a Diné sacred corn cake prepared by Diné women who wrapped it in corn husks and placed the cake in a pit of hot stones in the earth to bake overnight (see Appendix C-12, 13, and 14). The ceremonial cake was served at noon the next day with mutton stew and fry bread to the Dinés' thousand-plus guests (see Appendix C-15 and 16).<sup>18</sup>

Archival material shows that the Bahá'í Faith was first introduced to the reservation in the mid-1950s by non-native Bahá'ís known as “home-front pioneers.”<sup>19</sup> Acknowledged in the *Britannica Book of the Year*, 1988, as the latest in a series of progressive world religions, which is devoid of clergy and based on the grassroots initiative of its members, the Faith's cornerstone principle of the oneness of God, religions, and races calls for the practice of “unity in diversity” between individuals and nations, which inculcates respect for and the protection of diverse cultures while working toward the goal of a unified and peaceful new social order.<sup>20</sup> Diné Bahá'í Linda Wilson (see Appendix E-6) became a Bahá'í in 1970 while working for the federal government in Washington, D.C. Linda expressed her idea of “unity in diversity” as her first sense of connectedness between Diné and the Bahá'í tenets:

We're connected. Chief Joseph said that, “We're all connected. If you remove one strain of cloth, you're disconnecting everybody.” We're all connected like the cloth that is woven into one pattern. And this is the Creation of God, the loving of God, the unity and peace and whatever it is that He thought, was that He thought

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<sup>18</sup> Nancy Phillips, “Bahá'í News,” no. 377 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, August 1962), 10-12.

<sup>19</sup> “Teaching Brochure of the American Indian Service Committee,” American Indian Service/Teaching Committee Records, Subject, Publications and Regional Conference Files, Collection no. M-476/18/23/31 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá'í Archives).

<sup>20</sup> “Bahá'í Faith,” “The World Religious Statistics,” in *Britannica Book of the Year, 1988*, <http://bahai-library.org/> (accessed March 14, 2010); Moojan Momen, *The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 198.

got into this being, it became. And this was the teaching of our people [Diné] also.<sup>21</sup>

Linda Wilson's sense of connectedness between Diné and Bahá'í teachings can be found in the Diné oral story of the Warrior Twins and in the Diné prophecies contained within ancient Navajo chants. First published in 1963 as the "Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants," Vinson Brown notes that Diné Bahá'í Annie Kahn "learned these wonderful chants from her grandfather and the old medicine men of the tribe. No one knows exactly how old these chants are, but it is certain that most of them appeared before the coming of the white man."<sup>22</sup> Annie translated the chants from the oral Navajo to English, added her interpretation to the end of each chant in light of her acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith, and wrote them down for the first time.<sup>23</sup> Using Rambo's three levels of conversion analysis, I examine both oral traditions from a religious, psychological, anthropological, and sociological standpoint to understand how Diné connect those stories to their new religion.

How cultures and their stories are interpreted may be influenced by the *emic* or *etic* position of the researcher. Historian of religions Catherine Bell defines etic as a scholar being on the outside of a culture he or she is studying.<sup>24</sup> Emic, or inside a culture, refers to the understandings and categories of a religious tradition that the scholars themselves are a part of. Bell notes that etic scholars might inappropriately impose interpretive categories on a religion by, for example, labeling prophecies as myths. My

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<sup>21</sup> Linda Wilson, interview by author, Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 2, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Vinson Brown, "Foreword," in *Four Remarkable Indian Prophecies* (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, 1963), 3. According to Barbara Brown, Vinson met Annie for the first time at the Great Council Fire in 1962. Barbara Brown, personal communication, Nov 12, 2010. At the time of the Great Council Fire, Annie had been a Bahá'í for less than a year.

<sup>23</sup> Chester Kahn, Annie's husband for many years, confirmed that the chants had "belonged to Annie" and that Annie had gotten them from her grandfather. Chester Kahn, personal communication, Nov. 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory/Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford, 1992), 70.

point here is that an etic scholar might label the Diné eschatological narratives as myths, while an emic scholar might label them differently. Historian of religions Bruce Lincoln designates myths as a “small class of stories that possess both credibility and authority” for the culture in which those stories arose.<sup>25</sup> Lincoln defines as authoritative a narrative for which successful claims are made not only to the status of truth but to the status of *paradigmatic* truth.<sup>26</sup> This sense of authority in myths is “akin to charters, models, templates, and blueprints, but one can go beyond this formation and recognize that it is also—and perhaps more importantly—akin to that of revolutionary slogans and ancestral invocations, in that through the recitation of myth one may effectively mobilize a social grouping.”<sup>27</sup> The first Diné Bahá’ís effectively mobilized a social grouping through the Great Council Fire Unity Conference, and through the recitation of the Diné mythical stories of the Warrior Twins and the Navajo chants important forms of credibility and authority were provided for those Diné as traditional charters, models, and blueprints that directly or indirectly led to their becoming Bahá’í. Drawing on interviews and archival evidence, I demonstrate that Diné Bahá’ís credit the prophecies contained in their ancient oral stories as significant reasons for becoming Bahá’ís.

Secondly, I argue that the administrative structure of their new religion empowers Diné Bahá’ís individually and as a people. I utilize historical accounts of government policies and research in the literature to build a history of the oppressive and abusive

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<sup>25</sup> Bruce Lincoln, in *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification* (Oxford: University Press, 1992), 24-25.

<sup>26</sup> Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24-25; Moojan Momen, *The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach* (Oxford: Oneworld: Publications, 1999), 149-50, 151-52, 181. Thomas Kuhn first used the term “paradigm shift” in his famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962), to describe the removal of anomalies or common misconceptions by the scientific community. The term has come to apply to other realms of human experience and indicates a major or radical change in thought patterns.

<sup>27</sup> Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 24-25.

practices that potentially set the stage for Diné conversions to the Bahá'í Faith. The Diné's loss of sacred homeland and the severe deprivations they suffered during their enforced Long Walk and imprisonment at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, between 1863 and 1868 and the disapproval or suppression of their traditional ceremonies by the dominant culture surrounding them upon their return to *Dinétaah* stayed strong in Diné cultural memory and influenced their willingness to consider what the religious matrix of the Bahá'í Faith had to offer them.<sup>28</sup> The impact of the federal government's overseer role in the Diné economy, including the well-intended but failed sheep policy, weakened the culture instead of strengthening it.<sup>29</sup> A search of the literature reveals that the government's disastrous assimilation and education of Diné children in faraway boarding schools created a deep scar in the Diné collective psyche that remains generational.<sup>30</sup>

Third, I argue that because the Bahá'í administrative structure and the Bahá'í teachings did not mandate that Diné Bahá'ís had to give up their traditional beliefs in order to become Bahá'í, Dinés were more open to conversion. I document this argument through interviews with Diné Bahá'ís and by an examination of activities at the Native American Bahá'í Institute on the Navajo reservation. Research at the National Archives Office of the Bahá'ís of the United States in Wilmette, Illinois, shows that Bahá'í home-front pioneers began to arrive on the Navajo reservation by the late 1950s. A rich source of newsletters, pamphlets, personal letters, and flyers amply identify what kinds of meetings were held, whether devotional, instructive, or organizational, along with how many Diné attended and who they were. Included in the archival material are informal

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Iverson, *Dine: A History of the Navajos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 49-56.

<sup>29</sup> George A Boyce, *When Navajos Had Too Many Sheep: In the 1940s* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1974), 29-38.

<sup>30</sup> Iverson, *Dine*, 81-83.

listings of who converted to the new religion along with photographs of early Diné Bahá'ís. By 1957 a Bahá'í Center was established in Gallup, New Mexico, while other arriving home-front pioneers scattered out across the Navajo reservation. The Navajo Bahá'í Institute was established by 1977 on the reservation as a meeting place to educate Navajo Bahá'ís on their new religion and to “foster their Bahá'í identity.”<sup>31</sup> Open to all people and with the intention to serve many tribes, the Institute's name was later changed to the more-inclusive Native American Bahá'í Institute (NABI).

While I argue that Diné Bahá'ís experienced some aspects of what Rambo calls a tradition transition when they became Bahá'ís and that important aspects of Rambo's model of conversion best fits the Diné becoming Bahá'í, as opposed to other theories such as Catherine L. Albanese's “combinative religions” model, the assumption should not be made that the Diné abandoned their traditional belief system when they accepted the tenets of the Bahá'í Faith or that by being both traditional Diné and Bahá'í, some form of a Diné/Bahá'í religious hybridity took place.<sup>32</sup> Rather, Diné Bahá'ís saw the new teachings as renewing and re-energizing their ancient traditions, infusing new life, new meaning, and new spirit into them instead of eliminating them or changing them. The term *convert* becomes a stumbling block to the study of either tradition transition or becoming Bahá'í because conversion historically implies the giving up of one set of beliefs for another. This implication does not hold true in the case of a conversion from any other major religion to the Bahá'í Faith because Bahá'ís do not reject their parent-faith or its founder when “becoming Bahá'í” or “being Bahá'í.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “Native American Bahá'í Institute,” 30.

<sup>32</sup> Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 200-26.

<sup>33</sup> Michael McMullen, “Carriers and Converts,” in *The Bahá'í: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 15-17.

As an example, Christians, when “becoming Bahá’í” do not reject the teachings of Christ as the founder of Christianity; neither does “becoming” admit to a combinative effect of Christianity with the Bahá’í Faith. Christianity is one great religious system that divided over the centuries into the two major divisions of Catholicism and Protestantism, with Protestantism in particular further dividing into many different sects and denominations.<sup>34</sup> Catholicism further divided into the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox churches, as well. Accordingly, individual sects and denominations in either division of Catholicism or Protestantism would not be considered new religions apart from their parent-system of Christianity simply because they modified or changed over time due to contact with an otherness that Albanese defines as combinative religions.<sup>35</sup> Rather, Rambo’s second category of “religious intensification” or his fourth category of “institutional transition or movement from one faith community to another within a major religious tradition” may certainly describe Albanese’s combinative, hybrid religious movements within one dominant system.<sup>36</sup> Albanese’s combinative religious model is examined more closely in chapter 7 on the science of religious conversion, and the section on progressive revelation in chapter two explains more thoroughly the Bahá’í concept of the separation of religious identities as a Bahá’í in the act of “becoming,” while yet maintaining or acquiring individual Bahá’í belief in the foundational elements of other religious systems.

I limit this work to those specific Bahá’í principles that more closely fit and explain the Diné becoming Bahá’í conversion experience. My goal as an emic scholar,

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<sup>34</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, comp. and trans. by Laura Clifford Barney, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1987)10; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, comp. by Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 198.

<sup>35</sup> Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 203, 217, 224.

<sup>36</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 11-14.

being both a Bahá'í and of native heritage, albeit not Navajo, is to remain objective while at the same infusing the Diné sense of the mystery, the sacred, and the mystical into the telling of the story. History begins with the telling of the story—for if there were no story, there would be no children of Changing Woman—no *Diné*, as my friend and Navajo/Apache medicine man from Dziłjiiin (Black Mesa) Tom Bedonie Kascoli often reminds me when he corrects my pronunciation of “the people.”<sup>37</sup> Also, the flowing tone and structure of Diné interviewees’ quotes are not changed grammatically but rather are kept as an important part of their personal stories. Older Diné believed stories could not be retold properly if written down because “words on a page were silent and unalive.”<sup>38</sup> The flow and tone inherent in Diné speech help to keep this story about transition and transformation alive.

The historical background of the Diné’s environment and how they were governed by the dominant culture are important to an examination of possible reasons for conversion. The traditional belief system of the Diné cannot be explained without some understanding of their physical environment, sacred to them, within an area guarded by four sacred mountains. Of particular importance is the history of the Diné sheep-based and land-based economy, along with the impact of the federal government’s early overseer role that tended to decimate the culture instead of protecting it. The well-intended but failed sheep policies led to depletion of Diné grazing lands and created a long-lasting economic hardship on the Diné. Another important part of Diné history is the boarding school policy enacted by the federal government and implemented by the

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<sup>37</sup> Brugge, *Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute*, 76. Tom Bedoni-Kascoli’s relative, Hastiin Bedoni, testifies here about the land/water/sheep/coal-mining issues.

<sup>38</sup> Paul G. Zolbrod, *Diné bahané: The Navajo Creation Story* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 21-22, back cover.

churches. This policy, often forcibly, took young children far away from their homes and their culture.

Each of these historical events will be briefly examined in chapter 1 as possible impetuses to Diné becoming Bahá'ís, and sets the stage in which to place Diné Bahá'í conversion. Chapter 2 gives a brief introduction to the Bahá'í Faith, its history, and its founding principles that best relate to Diné becoming Bahá'í and sets the stage in which to place Diné Bahá'í conversion experiences. Chapter 3 introduces the eschatological narrative of the Warrior Twins and their mother, Changing Woman, and sets the narrative within the Bahá'í principles of the education of daughters and the concept of progressive revelation as “return.” Chapter 4 provides background history on the Bahá'í promise or prophecy to the Indian peoples, documents the arrival of Bahá'ís on the Navajo Reservation, and reviews early Bahá'í/Indian-teaching material. Chapter 5 introduces the second eschatological narrative of the ancient Navajo chants, along with two major signs that the chants instruct Diné to look for in a new prophet or divine messenger.<sup>39</sup> Both signs, one of the nine-pointed star and the other of a chief with twelve feathers who comes from the east, Diné Bahá'ís believe are fulfilled within the symbolism and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

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<sup>39</sup> The eighth chant in the set of nine chants is titled as the “Unity Chant,” which sets it apart from the other lower-cased chants. A search of the Web found numerous sites quoting the eighth chant as the “Navajo Unity Chant”; some sites gave Annie Kahn (and Naturegraph) credit for the Unity Chant—most did not but simply included this chant in with other native prophecies. For examples see: [http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/profecias/esp\\_profecia01h2.htm](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/profecias/esp_profecia01h2.htm); <http://bci.org/prophecy-fulfilled/navajo.htm> (accessed Dec 3 2010); <http://www.teengirlstreatment.com/2010/03/the-definition-of-beauty/> (accessed Dec 5, 2010). Also see: *Navajo Sand Painting: A Healing Tradition, A Jordon-Bastow Production*, ed. Wendy Hyman (Eureka, CA: Shenandoah Film Productions, 1998). This Bahá'í-produced documentary combines Diné Bahá'í Mitchell Silas's creation of the Whirling Logs sand painting with the story of the Warrior Twins, the Beauty Way chant, and the Diné expectation of a “new day,” interspersed with supporting quotes from the Bahá'í writings. Shenandoah advertises its products as “educational videos from the Native American perspective,” and says that Silas “takes the viewer on an historic journey into the ancient world of the Navajo healer,” <http://www.shenandoahfilms.com/availabledvd.aspx?page=5> (accessed Dec 4, 2010). DVD courtesy of Gretchen Jordon-Bastow.



Chapter 6 examines the Bahá'í administrative structure (Rambo's religious matrix) in which Diné Bahá'ís found autonomy, empowerment, and religious self-governance and describes how the Native American Bahá'í Institute (NABI) came about, including the building of a traditional prayer hogan on its campus grounds (see Appendix D). The building of a traditional prayer hogan within the religious matrix of NABI lends weight to my argument that Diné Bahá'ís can freely keep and practice their traditional customs while being Bahá'í. Of note is that the use of peyote or any other hallucinogenic drug is strictly forbidden in the Bahá'í tenets and Diné Bahá'ís are expected to refrain from the use of peyote. Bahá'ís are exhorted to “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship”; however, Bahá'ís do not join or enroll as members in other churches or religions once they have “declared” themselves to be Bahá'í.<sup>40</sup> Peyote, used by those Diné who are members of the Native American Church, is more fully discussed in chapter 7.

Chapter 7 examines conversion theories, most notably Albanese's and Rambo's, from a psychological point of view, along with how conversion has historically been defined or described by psychology and introduces the beginnings of a new theory for becoming Bahá'í. I also examine the Bahá'í principle that science and religion must agree in the context of Diné Bahá'í belief as a form of rational thought, in which the two eschatological narratives found completion for Diné adherents. Chapter 8 describes the two eschatological narratives as sacred symbols within the Diné concept of sacred sound as sacred language and gives the Bahá'í explanation of the importance of language as a

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<sup>40</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), 94.

source for transformation. Chapter 9 provides closure with my final argument that some Dinés became Bahá'í because of their belief that two of their important eschatological prophecies were fulfilled by the coming of the Bahá'í Faith to them, both on and off the Navajo reservation, and that components of the Faith's principles fulfilled such needs for Diné Bahá'ís as autonomy, empowerment, and personal growth both individually and socially, and as a renewal in spirit of their sacred traditions, while, at the same time, bringing Diné Bahá'ís more fully into the wider, more inclusive circle of humanity on an international scale.

## CHAPTER ONE

### BETWEEN THE FOUR SACRED MOUNTAINS

In order to understand Diné mythology or ideology, some understanding is needed of the all-important land space that gave birth to Diné culture. Within this space between the four sacred mountains, the Diné creation story takes place, in which the creation story or eschatological narrative of the Warrior Twins arose. Multiple centuries and generations later, loss of land, loss of self-governance, imprisonment, and ongoing attempts at assimilation into the conquering culture of the colonial period also arose within the Diné's land. Looking at these events in light of the later tradition transition of Diné Bahá'ís clarifies another important component of how and why some Dinés chose to enter the Bahá'í Faith. The story begins with a description of sacred land, sacred mountains.

The Navajo Nation occupies the largest land area among Native American reservations in the United States. The Four Corners area of the reservation straddles the intersection of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah. Stretching outward in all directions from Four Corners and with approximately 290,000 residents, the reservation occupies some 27,000 square miles although—like its people—it extends well beyond those identifiable boundaries.<sup>41</sup> Historian Peter Iverson succinctly sums up Diné history as “long and complicated.”<sup>42</sup> Iverson, a former educator at Navajo Community College, brings together a comprehensive history of the Diné, from their “emergence upon the

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<sup>41</sup> “NABI,” 30; History, Official Site of the Navajo Nation, <http://www.navajo.org/history.htm> (accessed April 16, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, 1.

land” through to the twenty-first century, while “telling the story from the inside out rather than from the outside in.”<sup>43</sup>

Iverson’s thorough sections include the Diné’s Long Walk to imprisonment at the Bosque Redondo reservation (Fort Sumner, New Mexico) in 1863, and their return from exile to their beloved sacred mountains in 1868. Iverson begins his book *Diné* with a concise explanation of the origins of Áłtsé Hastiin (First Man) and Áłtsé Asdazáá (First Woman) in the First or Black World, which contained quarreling Insect Beings, through their difficult but progressive journey in the Second World (the Blue World where Blue Birds of various kinds dwelled with Insect Beings and different animals), before quarreling forced them to enter the Third World (the Yellow World characterized by deceit and a global flood), and ends when everyone is swept away by a global flood to the Fourth or Glittering World surrounded by four mountains.<sup>44</sup> Intriguingly, when Linda Wilson was investigating the Bahá’í Faith, she showed a picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, son of the founder of the new religion, to her father, who connected ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the original twelve *Diyin Dine’ē* (Holy People) of Diné origin from the four worlds:

I said to my father, I showed him the picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Have you seen this man ever?” And they talked about it. And, any of the talks they used to have during the wintertime, because all the talks, you talk about religion, deep into the translation of mind. We have certain ways. Who was born? Why was I born? What was said? Everything that was told to us. I said, “Was this man ever introduced?” and my father said, “Yes, he was one of the people like the *Diyin Dine’ē*. [He was] one of the major twelve people that was before the beginning of the world. This first world, second world, third world, they enter each world. We’re to the fifth world. It’s called the Glittering world.” My dad says, “Look around and look outside, you’re going look through the Glittering world, the glass, the different shining.” He says, “You’re going to see the different glitters. We’re in the fifth world.” He says, “We went through them all together. Their whole spiritual being is still with us.” He said that, “Yeah, we’re all walking the same path from the very beginning.” Then I knew the connection. I knew what the

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<sup>43</sup> Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, 8-11.

Bahá'í Faith is teaching. I knew what the Navajo teaching was. I know what the Bible is. I knew what Buddha was teaching, Mohammed, the Koran. They are teaching the same teaching. So if the people have been taught like the way I was taught by my parents, the good way that everybody is. That everybody whose prayer that you say is to help them.<sup>45</sup>

Following her story of showing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s picture to her father, Linda Wilson related that this second connection (Linda first connected Bahá’u’lláh’s exiles to the Long Walk) of Diné to Bahá’í led her to become Bahá’í along with her parents and other relatives who all then entered the new religion. The Glittering World, identified as the fifth world of the *Diyin Dine’ē*, nestled in the sacred bosoms of *Sis Naajini* (Blanca Peak to the east in Colorado), *Toodizil* (Mt. Taylor to the south in New Mexico), *Dook’o’oosliid* (San Francisco Peaks to the west in Arizona), and *Dibé Nitsaa* (Hesperus Peak to the north in Colorado), gave birth to the Diné. The Diné consider *Dinétah* (the original Navajo land between the four sacred mountains) as a vital member of their collective social body, just as indispensable as *Nilch’i*, the “holy wind” or breath that gave them life in the first place.<sup>46</sup> Navajo Chief Barboncito told General Sherman in 1868, “When the Navajos were first created, four mountains and four rivers were pointed out to us, inside of which we should live, that was to be our country and was given to us by the first woman of the Navajo tribe.”<sup>47</sup> Professor of English Paul Zolbrod, in his poetic translation of *Diné bahanié: The Navajo Creation Story*, writes that when traveling in his car with his Diné passengers, in a rather gossipy and conversational fashion, they often referenced their unquestioned belief in the sentient features of the four sacred mountains and other landscape features: “If Navajos relate to their landscape in a special way it is

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<sup>45</sup> Wilson, interview.

<sup>46</sup> James Kale McNeley, *Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>47</sup> “NABI,” 30.

because one version or another of the creation cycle is immediate and familiar to them, whether they are young or old, modern or traditional.”<sup>48</sup>

## **The Long Walk**

The years between 1846, when the United States’ covetous eye laid claim to the Navajo lands as its own, and 1868, when the Long Walk began out of Dinétah, were a period of great agitation, turmoil, persecution, and warring for the Diné. By the 1840s the federal government had adopted the idea of reservations. The federal attitude of control and domination, incorporated into policy or treaties, entailed a forced migration of Indian peoples all over the United States onto these remote and unknown lands considered worthless by the federal government at the time. James Carleton, governor and commander of New Mexico, reinforced and justified this action in Washington when he declared,

By the subjugation and colonization of the Navajo tribe we gain for civilization their whole country, which is much larger in extent than the state of Ohio, and besides being the best pastoral region between two oceans, is said to abound in the precious as well as the useful metals. . . . The exodus of this whole group of people from the land of their fathers is not only an interesting but a touching sight. . . . They have defended their mountains and their stupendous canyons with a heroism which any people would be proud to emulate . . . [knowing it is] their destiny to give way to the insatiable progress of our race.<sup>49</sup>

It was in the unsuitable bottomlands of the small and winding Rio Pecos River in New Mexico—wrongly identified to be as fertile as the Missouri Bottoms—that Carleton chose to create his forty-acre military fort, named after his former commanding officer, Edward Vose Sumner, and centered in the million-acre reservation known as Bosque Redondo or *Hwééldi* by the Diné, “the place of suffering.” Carleton expected that his

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<sup>48</sup> Zolbrod, *Diné bahané*, 22-23.

<sup>49</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 48-49.

vision for the new Navajo reservation would transform the Diné into readers and writers, where they could learn “the art of peace” and “the truths of Christianity, [and] acquire new habits, new values, and new modes of life.”<sup>50</sup> Carleton’s goals for the Diné coincided with the opinion of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, William P. Dole, whose annual report of November 1861 recommended that the “savages” be removed immediately. Removal to “suitable reservations” would protect the lives and goods of white residents and provide a punishment to the Diné for the “barbarous atrocities they are continually committing” in their “wild and predatory life.”<sup>51</sup>

The Long Walk, led by the notorious Indian fighter Kit Carson, encompassed fifty-three different episodes of forced marches for thousands of Diné and hundreds of Mescalero Apaches from August, 1863, through December, 1866, over four hundred miles of torturous terrain in the ice and snow of winter and the intense heat of the dry New Mexico summer.<sup>52</sup> Beginning in 1863, Carson waged his own war against the Diné when he marched through Dinétah destroying crops, livestock, and orchards. Diné stories abound of the inhumane treatment from the military, both before and during the Long Walk, of their starvation, freezing due to exposure without adequate clothing, rampant illnesses, separation from family members, and a host of atrocities committed by the military that included being shot on the spot for such infractions as delivering a baby on the trail.<sup>53</sup> Diné Bahá’í Chester Kahn remembers his great-grandmother’s story of her Long Walk:

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<sup>50</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 50-52.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné*, 50-52.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné*, 52. Iverson credits Neal Ackerley with documentation of fifty-three different episodes of removal of the Diné out of their homeland.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné*, 49. Iverson cites Diné scholar and poet Luci Tapahonso’s account of the shooting incident.

She was very old and when I was little, she would tell us her story, she says, “This is an awful story. I don’t want to talk about it. It was a horrible experience,” she would say. My great-grandmother told us her experience during that time. Ah, she was about maybe 13 years old, maybe 15. They were living near Shiprock along the mountains over there along the Shiprock mountains and the family was really happy, and taking care of their own business by raising sheep, raising cattle, horses and taking care of their own foods supplies by planting every year. And then all of a sudden they heard the soldiers were going around killing the people, killing their horses, burning their homes and destroying everything, their crops. So in order to survive, they moved into the mountains to carry whatever they could carry. And one day they were near Wheatfield’s Lake and they didn’t expect anything, and they were having breakfast in the morning. The soldiers had found them without them knowing about it. All of a sudden the shooting started. She said, “My father jumped up. He got shot; fell down. My mother got shot. My other family members, brothers and sisters got killed.” And everybody except for herself and one of her aunts, apparently they ran and hid. But they were found later but they were not killed. But she saw that and went through that process of atrocity that she saw when she was at that age.

The story that Chester heard his great-grandmother tell at such a young age, and before he was sent off to boarding school, surely made a deep and lasting impression upon him, one that must have indelibly imprinted upon his mind a distrust of the culture he later found himself unwillingly ensconced in at boarding schools. Chester, already in his late sixties at the time of our interview, told his grandmother’s story with emotion and indignation cracking in his voice:

And they were being taken to Fort Defiance. On the way they stopped at the canyon, apparently along Canyon De Chelly. Her aunt walked to the edge of the canyon. She was so struck by the, ah, the experience, the atrocity that took place, she just jumped over the canyon, committed suicide. She didn’t want to go through the process. She was the sole survivor, my great-grandmother was the only survivor of that family, was taken to Fort Defiance. And from there she walked with the rest of the group in the spring of 1864. She said it was a storm with snow so deep that people were forced to walk in it. If the people didn’t keep up with the process of being driven—like the elderly and some people who were sick, they were just shot, were just left behind for coyotes to eat them. This was the experience she had. For four years she spent there at Fort Sumner. There was nothing to eat. They lived under what they called rations. They tried to plant every year in the spring but the ground and the water was no good. They couldn’t drink that water; it was so awful, the river that went through there. And there was just totally no freedom; [they] just didn’t do anything all day long except some were



asked to work for the soldiers. People died, and starvation, and from disease whatever. Finally, they were released and she walked back [to Dinétah] again.<sup>54</sup>

After the Diné's removal, the military cut down over thirty-five hundred of their peach trees in *tseghi*, Canyon de Chelly—the place-where-two-sides-of-the-canyon-fit-together—and destroyed acres of their corn and bean crops in an attempt to erase the Diné environment.<sup>55</sup>

When the Diné finally arrived at Fort Sumner, they found a low, flat, barren plain with few trees for shelter or firewood for cooking. The brackish Pecos River was nearly undrinkable. The military post, located miles from any source of material supplies and lying in a low valley, regularly flooded with the spring rains and made the soil too alkaline even for the accomplished Diné farmers—and there were no mountains, only low, flat-topped mesas partially visible in the far distance.<sup>56</sup> More than three thousand Diné and over four hundred Mescalero Apaches died at Fort Sumner of starvation, sweeping diseases, exposure to the elements, attacks from their Comanche enemies, and even attacks from marauding wolves and other wild animals that invaded the fort.<sup>57</sup> After five long years of suffering, the historic Treaty between the United States of America and the Navajo Nation, signed on June 1, 1868, was finally reached, which allowed the Diné to return to their beloved mountains.<sup>58</sup> Some seven thousand surviving Navajos retraced their footsteps on the Long Walk with what little remained of their once-great herds of sheep, goats, and horses.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Chester Kahn, interview by author, Houck, Arizona, Navajo Reservation, August 1, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 51-56.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné*, 50, 78.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné*, 52.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné*, 58.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné*, 78; Bailey, *Bosque Redondo*, 140. Bailey documents only 1,550 horses, twenty mules, 950 sheep, and 1,025 goats remained of the Navajo herds that had come to Bosque Redondo with the Diné out of the quarter million sheep and 60,000 horses that the Diné once possessed.

Going home was, and continues to be, a defining moment in the collective conscious of the Diné, celebrated in poems and songs: “It is said /When the Diné people were released, /It was a great day. /The Diné saw and recognized the peak /Mount Taylor and they wept. /I can hear the words of the ancient ones: /Be strong. It is said /Remember the Diné way.”<sup>60</sup> Iverson writes that revisionists’ accounts of Diné history have tended to surface with the arrival of new Navajo historians who strive to soften the horror of what actually happened or to vindicate those who carried it out, but a return to the primary sources reaffirms already well-established conclusions. First, the non-Indians in the Southwest did have reason for grievances against the Diné for their continual pattern of raiding, even if not all the Diné participated in such ventures. Secondly, the Carson campaign and the Long Walk to Fort Sumner inflicted enormous suffering and trauma on the Diné. Third, the years spent by some Dinés at Hwééldi and the years spent by other Dinés (those who had evaded capture) apart from Hwééldi had a powerful effect on their collective identity and on the Diné’s future. Finally, the ability of the Diné leadership to succeed in their negotiations with the American commissioners so that the Diné were able to return to a portion of their homeland marked a major turning point in Diné history.<sup>61</sup>

### **Federal Mandates: The Economics of Land and Sheep**

The Diné had returned with few, if any, material goods, but with a profound sense of their identity as *Diné*—the people who had fought for their mountains and won. One of the first means of survival was to increase their livestock, especially their sheep. George

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<sup>60</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 59. Iverson quotes the poem by Marilyn Help, “It Is Said.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné*, 63-64, 66-67. Chief Manuelito was largely responsible for the release of the Diné.

A. Boyce served as a teacher and school administrator on the Navajo reservation for over thirty years in the first half of the 1900s. Boyce recorded what he observed when he visited the district chapters and on-reservation boarding schools. His classic work, *When Navajos Had Too Many Sheep: In the 1940s*, documents the Diné struggle to survive and adapt after the Long Walk, when the federal government issued rations and sheep to the returning Diné in an attempt to jump-start life again on the reservation.<sup>62</sup> Sheep proliferated over the following years when poor land management policies encouraged Navajos to raise more sheep than their rangelands could possibly sustain. The solution, to take their beloved sheep away from Navajo families, created a social, economic, and cultural tragedy parallel in the Diné collective mind to the Long Walk.

Sheep had been a vital part of Diné life ever since the Spaniards introduced them from Mexico in 1582, along with horses and goats.<sup>63</sup> It was Spanish livestock, specifically the Spanish *churro* (sheep) that became unique to Diné culture and caused a revolution in their lifestyles every bit as much as the domestication of herd animals had millennia earlier in ancient Mesopotamia.<sup>64</sup> The “good life” of raising sheep and owning large herds of horses had continued to prosper and grow uninterrupted for three centuries until Kit Carson drove out the Diné in 1864. After the exiled Diné arrived back on their now much smaller reservation, which the federal government had created out of their original vast homelands, ironically the same military responsible for their removal provided them with “seed stock” to start all over again. If the Diné’s population had

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<sup>62</sup> George A. Boyce, *When Navajos Had Too Many Sheep: in the 1940’s* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1974), xii-ix, x, 156.

<sup>63</sup> Philip Reno. *Mother Earth, Father Sky, and Economic Development: Navajo Resources and Their Use* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 15-18.

<sup>64</sup> Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, 24; Carl Waldman, *Atlas of the North American Indian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Checkmark Books, 2009), 180-82.

remained stable, the reservation would have been large enough to allow each family to “earn a modest living” with a small flock of sheep and a few horses. What happened instead was an influx of traders, missionaries, and government officials onto the reservation, who encouraged the Navajo families to increase their flocks and, in addition, the Diné’s population had increased from 10,000 in 1864 to 120,000 by 1970.<sup>65</sup> Philip Reno was a “well-known Marxist humanist and pragmatic” economist who taught at Navajo Community College for over twenty-two years.<sup>66</sup> His work, still considered the classic on Diné economics, provides a fascinating glimpse into how Diné spirituality and economics interweave and act one upon the other. Raising sheep and weaving blankets from wool had created a means of income among Diné women that provided for family needs, supplied a surplus of blankets that could be traded to Spanish merchants for goods, and in later years became an important source of artistic pride and identity.<sup>67</sup> However, the Diné, once the wealthiest of Indian tribes for its immense herds of horses, cattle, and sheep, was described in the federally-mandated sweeping and scathing Meriam Report of February 21, 1928, as “extremely poor.”<sup>68</sup> The Brookings Institute, an independent research organization based in Washington, D.C., undertook the national survey of the “Indian situation” at the behest of the federal government, for the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior, and produced the Meriam Report.

By the late 1930s the sharp increase in population and livestock had decimated the Navajo rangelands and its “scrawny sheep and starving horses” that were overgrazing it. It was, as Reno noted, a sudden recognition of the looming economic and conservation

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<sup>65</sup> Reno, *Father Sky, Mother Earth*, 15; 28-31.

<sup>66</sup> See: Hunter Gray, comment on “BearsWithoutBorders,” comment posted March 6, 2005, <https://lists.mayfirst.org/pipermail/bearwithoutborders/2005-March/000485.html> (accessed April 18, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Reno, *Father Sky, Mother Earth*, 15-16.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, *Father Sky, Mother Earth*, 18; Boyce, *When Navajos Had Too Many Sheep*, 1-2.

crises by government agronomists and soil conservationists that came too late.<sup>69</sup> In 1933, despite the “New Deal” from the federal government intended to improve the quality of Diné life, livestock reduction was “forced upon the agonized and angry Navajo stockmen” who realized that range improvement was needed but did not understand the solutions proposed by the government.<sup>70</sup> The solutions made no sense to the stockmen and resulted in a “chaotic situation lasting for years” that affected all aspects of Diné life, including education of children, boarding schools, hunger, progress, and change. Boyce noted that “one complaint of the Diné stockmen in regard to sheep reduction was their utter confusion; under the Republicans they were encouraged to increase stock and penalized if they did not do so while under the Democrats they were penalized for excesses; they expressed a sentiment that they were ‘inclined to mark time until after election day in 1944.’”<sup>71</sup>

Social anthropologist Louise Lamphere wrote *Weaving Women’s Lives* about Diné Eva Price’s multigenerational family. Lamphere puts a human face on the federal Sheep Reduction Policy tragedy in “I Used To Herd Sheep All Around Here: Eva’s Childhood, Sheep Herding, and the Trauma of Stock Reduction” that encapsulates the role of sheep in Diné culture.<sup>72</sup> Lamphere writes that “Navajo women are often associated with their sheep through the notion of motherhood,” and they were still responsible up through the period of the 1950s for the herding, birthing of lambs, and general care of the flocks—Navajos say, “Those called the field are your mother, those called sheep are your

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<sup>69</sup> Reno, *Father Sky, Mother Earth*, 26- 31.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, *Father Sky, Mother Earth*, 4, 19, 29, 83, 84.

<sup>71</sup> Boyce, *Too Many Sheep*, 29-38; Reno, *Father Sky, Mother Earth*, 29; Iverson, *Diné*, 137-79.

<sup>72</sup> Louise Lamphere, *Weaving Women’s Lives: Three Generations in a Navajo Family* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 67.

mother, sheep are life.”<sup>73</sup> It was during this time of economic crises and emotional stress that Bahá’í home-front pioneers first arrived on the reservation in the late 1950s.

**Boarding Schools.** Boyce notes that the 1927 Meriam Report to the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior, revolutionary in its scope and recommendations in regard to Indians on reservations, led “circuitously to events affecting the Navajo in the decade of the 1940s.”<sup>74</sup> Boyce writes that the strongest criticism in the Meriam Report was levied against the quality and character of the Indian boarding schools, which the U.S. government began establishing in 1879, as being “grossly inadequate.” The diet was severely deficient, Indian children were below normal health, dormitories were overcrowded, toilet facilities were not maintained or conveniently located, soap and towels were in short supply, medical service was superficial, and child labor supported the boarding schools. The Meriam Committee wrote,

Some years ago the Indian service adopted a uniform curriculum for all Indian schools. The uniform curriculum works badly because it does not permit of relating teaching to the needs of the particular Indian children being taught. The discipline in the schools is restrictive rather than developmental. Routine institutionalization is almost the inevitable characteristic of the Indian Boarding school. Several of the industries taught may be called vanishing trades and others are taught in such a way that the Indian students cannot apply what they have learned in their own homes and they are not advanced far enough to follow their trade in a white community. . . . An understanding of modern, less formal methods of teaching is greatly needed. Nearly every boarding school furnished disquieting illustrations of failure to understand the underlying principles of human behavior. . . . Punishments of the most harmful sort are bestowed in sheer ignorance. Routinization is the one method used for everything.<sup>75</sup>

Ending with its strongest statement, the Meriam Committee said that “the first and foremost need in Indian education is an approach that is less concerned with a

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<sup>73</sup> Lamphere, *Weaving Women’s Lives*, 47.

<sup>74</sup> Boyce, *Too Many Sheep*, 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, *Too Many Sheep*, 7-9.

conventional school system and more with the understanding of human beings; the teacher must be free to gather material from the life of the local Indians about her or at least within the scope of the child's experience."<sup>76</sup> Boyce adds that

the educational techniques were to keep Indian youths segregated from their homes and all things Indian. Thus the ways of the dominant society were to replace the "inferior Indian ways." This was the kind of program that prevailed when the Meriam Survey was made in 1927. "Going back to the blanket" had become a popular phrase of reference to Indian school graduates, as though Indian youths were incapable of being educated, or as though choosing to remain Indian had some sort of subhuman connotation.<sup>77</sup>

When a Navajo family "gave" a child to the government to go to boarding school, the child was to attend school for one year, then return home to herd sheep and let a brother or sister go the following year. Often, Boyce says, it was the unhealthy or crippled child who was given to a school; thus, poverty dictated the economics of schooling.<sup>78</sup> Reservations were vast and the only means of some education was to send children to boarding schools far away from their families for years at a time. Bruce and Sandy Palmberg were Bahá'í home-front pioneers at Pine Springs from 1969 to 1971. In talking about how difficult it was to live on the reservation, Bruce cryptically remembered with some humor a question he had asked: "I asked [a Navajo father] why all the hogans had three driveways? Answer was, 'One into the hogan, one out of the hogan, and one when Mormon missionaries come to steal our children!' They'd take them to boarding schools or place them with a white family." Sandy added, "The

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<sup>76</sup> Iverson, *Diné*, 80-93, 117-25. Iverson's documentation of Navajo school history is extensive and current.

<sup>77</sup> Boyce, *Too Many Sheep*, 25; Iverson, *Diné*, 81-93. Carlisle Indian School near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, famous for its football team and one of the world's greatest athletes, Jim Thorpe (a Sac and Fox from Oklahoma), was the model for off-reservation schools purposefully built far from Indian homes: Haskell Institute in Lawrence, KS; Phoenix Indian School in AZ; Sherman Institute, Riverside, CA; Santa Fe Indian School, NM; and others in Colorado, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Oregon, and Oklahoma.

<sup>78</sup> Boyce, *Too Many Sheep*, 42.

boarding school in Pine Springs was run by a Baptist couple, the Stahls. She was a teacher; he was an educational specialist, teacher, and minister at the same time.”<sup>79</sup>

Children often were forcibly removed by school personnel who came to pick them up in school buses, but just as often were sent by their parents, who, bound by poverty, thought that, at the very least, their children would be fed, clothed, and given good health care. Besides, native parents recognized that their children needed to learn the language of the whites as a matter of survival in their forever-changed world. However, there is no excuse for the atrocities that occurred in boarding schools. Chester Kahn spoke softly about his boarding school experience with an aura of emotional pain, practiced detachment, briefly noticeable anger when his voice rose, and lots of paused “ahs”:

Back in about 1956 we were living in Indian School just outside Carson City, Nevada, where I went to school at Stuart Indian School. And I was working there after I finished my school there and because there were a lot of Navajo children being sent over there from here at the age of six on up. And they had never been to any school or didn't know anything about English. So we were, ah, some of us were asked to go there, I mean hired at this school to be a translator in the classrooms for the teachers and the children because we had been, I had been away for many years, several years since 1948, when I was only a child when I was sent off to boarding school over there. And I didn't know very much about my own culture and was forgetting about language and so forth because we were not allowed to speak our language at school. Nobody ever talked about our culture or history. We were being taught only, ah, it was good to learn about the English, writing and arithmetic and all that kind of stuff, but, ah, we were in an institution where it was like being in a, ah, not having any communication with our parents or relatives back home.<sup>80</sup>

Chester's nephew, Alfred Kahn, Jr., implies that he, too, lost access to some of his traditional ways because of boarding schools: “I'm half Navajo. I was raised on the reservation and I was raised with a lot of ceremonies, but I think a lot of the traditional ways have been stripped away by materialism and problems with the boarding schools on

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<sup>79</sup> Bruce and Sandy Palmberg, interview by author, Temerity Woods, Rolla, MO, April 10, 2009.

<sup>80</sup> Chester Kahn, interview.



the reservation. So I lived half Navajo, half urban life.”<sup>81</sup> Linda Wilson places the blame on boarding schools for alcoholism and “wiping” traditional ways “off the children.”<sup>82</sup> In her interview, Wilson said her family had over a thousand sheep on the reservation after they had reclaimed their land when they returned from imprisonment at Ft. Sumner:

After the Long Walk, they came back and reclaimed their land and restored some of the traditional ceremony, traditional way of living back. They instilled that into the children. And my father’s mother was married to one of the chiefs, so when they came back, they started teaching about the unity, how to live the traditional life, the old ways. So they instilled that into all the children before the boarding school start[ed] taking over. So during our early age this is how we got introduced to life.

Wilson blames the boarding school system for many problems among the Diné and gives credit to her parents for instilling traditional values into them in spite of the boarding school experience. After the boarding schools opened, Wilson explains,

It was a total, I guess, elimination of your tradition, totally integrating into the white man’s way of living. So, they really started wiping absent any traditional doings from any thoughts or any kind of opinions, ideas, the way of life we had before. They wiped it off the children. So these children start[ed] having problems and fourth and fifth generations. That’s how come we have so much alcoholism on that part. So having that teaching and my father would say and my mother would say, “Now you’re going to boarding school. But boarding school will teach you academic, but home living, spiritual living is from us. They will not change it. They will tell you, but you cannot listen to that life. Spiritual living belongs to us.” So, we always took that into heart and we’ve always mentioned that to any of the religions that would be teaching. We mention that to them. I can listen but I’m not going to take it to heart because my father is a traditional teacher and so is my mother. So, ah, they’d say, okay.<sup>83</sup>

Wilson first attended a Catholic boarding school and identified herself as a former Catholic who had not left the Church prior to becoming a Bahá’í. She gave the credit for her commitment to the Church to a Catholic priest who helped her older relatives interpret the Bible from a Navajo point of view. Her parents’ instructions that academics

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<sup>81</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview by author, Albuquerque, New Mexico, August, 1, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Linda Wilson, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., interview.

belonged to the boarding schools, but spiritual training belonged to her parents, obviously created a lasting mindset in Wilson and her siblings, even though they attended different churches over the years as children. Wilson said that in boarding school every other child was told to take a number. According to Wilson, if a child's number was one, that child was a Catholic, number two was a Presbyterian, and so it went until number four, which was the new church of choice being introduced on the reservation at the time. According to the child's number, that was the church he or she attended, Wilson said, but "a lot of children were very traditional like us and they would say, and we would ask, 'Do they serve candy over there?' 'Yeh, well, we'll go to that church then.' And if they served good stuff, we belong to that church!"<sup>84</sup>

**Churches.** The Catholic Church was the first point of contact between the Diné and Christianity, first documented in 1626 and again in 1630, when Alonzo Benavides sent his report to the King of Spain on "the providence of the Apaches of Navajo" who are "very great farmers, for that is what Navajo signifies—great planted fields."<sup>85</sup> The term Navajo may be derived from *nava*, Spanish for plain or field. The Catholic attempt to Christianize the Diné in 1630 was unsuccessful, as were two more attempts in 1746 and 1749. Chester Kahn related that in boarding school he had to attend a church of his choice so he chose the Catholic Church and became interested in the history behind it. Chester's mild voice rose in indignation as he spoke:

And at the same time I was also interested in the Christian history, how they came about here and what they have done and so forth. And I was very, very appalled by the history of our people when the Catholic train came with the Spanish back in the 1500s and 1600s and how they treated the Native Americans in the Southwest. Ah, like ah, they would whip, especially the Pueblo Indians, if they

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<sup>84</sup> Linda Wilson, interview.

<sup>85</sup> Anselm Weber, "Navajo Indians," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10720a.htm> (accessed May 9, 2009).

did not become a Christian, they would whip them and so forth. And in one area [there were] all kinds of crazy things, making them slaves and all kinds of stuff by the Spaniards and by the Church. I was so appalled at that and I said, “What kind of church is that? What kind of religion is that?”<sup>86</sup>

The Franciscans of Cincinnati, Ohio, accepted the challenge of Christianization in 1897, taking charge of the Catholic mission that became St. Michael’s industrial boarding school. Later acknowledged as “one of the finest old-school scholars among students of the Navaho,” Franciscan missionary Father Berard Haile arrived in 1900 to help build the school: “For decades he traveled the barren reservation by buckboard and horseback, preaching and studying and helping St. Michael's [Mission] build up a network of schools, clinics and churches to care for some 11,500 baptized Catholics.”<sup>87</sup> The 1910 Catholic Encyclopedia provided this description of Diné theology with a note on the lack of their Protestant competitors’ success at the time:

The elaborate system of pagan worship, expressed in chants, sacrifices, sand paintings, dances, ceremonies, some of which last nine days, make the Navajo appear very religious. Though they have no conception of one Supreme Being, their anthropomorphous deities are numerous and strikingly democratic; firm believers in witchcraft and charms, their pathology is largely mythological with superstitions, ceremonies, and customs diligently kept alive by an extraordinarily large numbers of medicine men who wield a powerful influence. Though Protestant missionaries have been among the Navajo since the early [1880s] and have at present (1910) eleven different missions, a hospital and three small schools, the number of their adherents is very insignificant.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Chester Kahn, interview; Jennifer Nez Denetdale, *Reclaiming Dine History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 55-56, 141.

<sup>87</sup>“Religion: St. Michael’s 50<sup>th</sup>,” *Time*, October 24, 1949, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,805166,00.html> (accessed May 9, 2009). Nearly every source quoted Berard Haile’s 1908 classic work, *Upward Moving and Emergence Way*, v. 7, *American Tribal Religions*, gen. ed. Karl W. Luckert (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981). *Upward Moving* is one of the central healing ceremonials related to emergence origins and the early Diné struggles with neighboring Pueblo farmers.

<sup>88</sup> Weber, “Navajo Indians,” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, n.p.

By the time St. Michael's Mission observed its fiftieth anniversary in October, 1949, about half of the Navajo Nation's 65,000 Diné belonged to Protestant denominations, with about a third of its members still considered "pagan."<sup>89</sup>

Boyce was quite brief and to the point in his assessment of the role of churches on the Navajo reservation. He noted that problems involving missionary activities and who was responsible for what between churches and the Indian Service necessitated their own chapter in the Meriam Report. Boyce edited the Report with an astute observation at the end of each point:

1. Both the government and the missionaries have often failed to study, understand, and take a sympathetic attitude toward Indian ways, Indian ethics, and Indian religion. Rivalry between the many religious sects and their missionaries was observed to be disruptive in many ways in Indian communities and in Indian family life.
2. In the Grant Administration (1869-1877), an experiment to apportion the Indian jurisdictions among the several denominations was tried, partly in an effort to reduce denominational conflicts. This wasn't successful, and in 1881 a ruling of the Secretary of the Interior permitted ministers of any denomination to engage in mission work on the various reservations.
3. The need for cooperation in this field must be apparent to anyone who studies the missionary activities among the Indians. Whether councils of representatives of the different denominations could make any progress in an effort to agree on a limited number of very simple essentials in Christian life, separated insofar as possible from doctrinal matters, is, of course, open to grave question. The existence of missionary activities in the several Indian jurisdictions gives rise also to many difficult problems in the administration of Indian affairs by the government.
4. The outstanding need in the field of missionary activities among the Indians is cooperation. Cooperation is needed both in the relationships between the government and the missionaries and in the relationship among the churches and the missionaries themselves.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> "Religion: "St. Michael's 50<sup>th</sup>."

<sup>90</sup> Boyce, *Too Many Sheep*, 10.

Both the Meriam Report and Boyce pulled no punches when they addressed the problems of disunity and lack of cooperation with each other among the churches and missionaries, and between the churches' and the federal government's attempts to reduce conflict. Inherent in the conflict between denominations was an inability to agree on even the "simple elements" of Christian life, which included schooling of Diné children. Even more so than their parents, it was the Diné children who suffered the brunt of this disunity. In the 1868 treaty, the federal government had provided for a teacher and classroom for "every thirty children who could be induced or compelled to enroll," while abrogating its responsibility for implementation to the churches.<sup>91</sup> A missionary for the Presbyterian Church provided the first classroom in 1869, but soon gave up, unable to control "such unruly children." Other teachers followed to no avail. Diné parents resisted placing their children in boarding schools—they needed their help with the livestock, but most of all they missed their children and feared that the institutions were a "death trap" from which their children would not return.<sup>92</sup>

The Mormons arrived in the 1860s, followed by the Christian Reformed Church in 1912, the Episcopalians in 1917, and the American Baptists in the 1930s.<sup>93</sup> The Navajo Mission School was established at Farmington, Arizona, by the Church of Christ in 1947. Missionaries at the school increasingly spent their energies and resources caring for up to seventy "disaffected and abandoned" Diné children at a time, left at the mission by families unable to care for them. As a result, the Church of Christ moved the Navajo

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<sup>91</sup> Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, 81-83. Iverson notes that the "peace policy" shifted considerable responsibility for Indian education to the churches.

<sup>92</sup> Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, 81, 83, 86, 90-91. Manuelito embraced the importance of education and sent his two sons and a nephew to Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. All three boys died there of tuberculosis.

<sup>93</sup> Steve Pavlik, "Of Saints and Lamanites: An Analysis of Navajo Mormonism," *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 21-30; "Navajo Ministries," <http://www.navajoministries.org/the-navajo/dine-history.html> (accessed May 9, 2009).

Mission School to Gallup, New Mexico, in the late 1950s, renaming it the Manuelito Navajo Children's Home and reorganizing it as a twenty-four-hour residential care facility with a program for single mothers and a school with kindergarten through grade twelve.<sup>94</sup> In 1965, historian and native activist Vine Deloria documented twenty-six different churches at Farmington serving a population of 250 Navajos. He cryptically added that each denominational congregation had fewer than ten Indians per denomination and estimated the total mission budget that year as exceeding \$250,000: "Christianity, not tourism, was Farmington's most profitable industry in 1965."<sup>95</sup>

## Summary

It has long been my contention that American Indians, as a body of people, suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of five hundred years of invasion and constant attempts at assimilation.<sup>96</sup> Five hundred years is a mere blink of the eye in the timeline of a people. Historical examples are replete that show whole societies of people continue to struggle, resist, and suffer for centuries after conquest has come to an end. PTSD manifests itself in American Indian culture through high rates of alcoholism, domestic violence, child abuse, suicides, broken families, and the loss of dignity, culture, traditions, and languages—in short, a crisis of loss. PTSD is most often identified in

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<sup>94</sup> Manuelito Navajo Children's Home, Gallup Church of Christ, <http://www.gallupcofc.org/> (accessed May 9, 2009).

<sup>95</sup> Vine, Deloria, Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1999), 29.

<sup>96</sup> My "contention" arose when I was doing doctoral work in clinical psychology at Forest Institute of Professional Psychology, Springfield, Missouri (1986-90). Also see: Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). PTSD is listed on Axis IV, 309.81 in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III, under psychosocial and environmental factors contributing to the disorder, <http://www.mental-health-today.com/ptsd/dsm.htm> (accessed May 3, 2009). Other mental health professionals have recognized PTSD in the native population, as well, although I am uncertain that anyone has diagnosed it as culture-wide.

individuals following the aftermath of wars, natural disasters, and other traumatic, uncontrollable events that deeply impact the individual psyche. In the case of Native America, the shared trauma of conquest and assimilation has continued for decades after the last Indian war (1918) was fought less than a hundred years ago—still recent in their collective consciousness.<sup>97</sup> I contend that the collective psyche of Native America has suffered from and continues to suffer from culture-wide PTSD in varying degrees.

Imagine a whole continent of people whose way of life had vanished, whose ability to control or gain their most basic needs was precarious, whose sacred sites were disrespected and destroyed by their conquerors, and who had little to no control over the future of their children and grandchildren—then one can catch a glimpse of the depth of PTSD in the American Indian community. By the early 1970s Indian newspapers and magazines began to report a spiritual awakening, a “silent revival” of renewed pride in traditional ways that arose and swept across reservations in the United States and Canada. Steps were taken, some of them quite loudly, to retrieve and save as much as possible of the North American Indian identity, to demand equal rights under the law, to return to traditions that were being usurped by the 1960s’ back-to-nature flower children, to *become* again.<sup>98</sup> However, no trauma has been greater, more difficult to recover from, or more destructive than the on-reservation and off-reservation boarding school systems. The Meriam Report openly stated that “the belief has apparently been that the shortest

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<sup>97</sup> The Second Battle of Bear Valley was the last documented battle, between the U.S. Calvary and a band of Yaquis Indians camped on a ridge. Historians consider the Nez Perce War of 1877 as the last great conflict, but ample evidence of “skirmishes” show that solitary bands of Indians who suddenly found themselves in battle with the U.S. Calvary certainly considered it as war. A timeline of federal acts shows how immediate the resolutions have been in an attempt to assuage the trauma: Indian Reorganization Act, 1834; American Citizenship Act, 1924; Indian Civil Rights Act, 1968; Indian Education Act, 1972; American Indian Religious Freedom Act, 1978; and the Indian Child Welfare Act, 1978.

<sup>98</sup> Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 208. Albanese writes that Indians “could protest in vain about cooptation of their religious practices by New Age Indian ‘wannabes’ as white Americans signaled their search for closeness to the land and for spiritual transformation” (208).

road to civilization is to take children away from their parents and insofar as possible to stamp out the old Indian life.”<sup>99</sup>

It did not work. What it did was create generational PTSD on a massive scale. The double tragedy of Indian children’s boarding school experiences and missionaries’ work on the Navajo reservation cannot be separated. It is important to remember that Diné and non-Diné were both traveling in the same impending boat of PTSD. Moving onto a reservation can be likened to the culture shock of moving to another country with its unfamiliar customs and language. The difference is that the non-Diné could get out of the boat at will and go home. The Diné had to stay and deal with the tidal wave of destruction created by governmental policies and forced Christianization, regardless of good intentions on either part. A case in point is the Church of Christ’s Manuelito Navajo Children’s Home, which morphed from a mission into a vitally needed service of survival for mothers and their children. In a double-bind, teachers and ministers were mandated both by the federal government and by their respective religious institutions to remake in their own image an entire culture of people.<sup>100</sup> Some teachers and ministers were kind and well-meaning, but far too many were lacking in aptitudes and abilities to cope with the enormity of their assigned task. When stressors reached a breaking point and there was no real oversight by a just authority or accountability, it was the Diné children and their parents who suffered the consequences.<sup>101</sup> The dichotomist double standard of American manifest destiny, “born from the minds of Christian men,” had decided it was God’s Will that Christian civilization should extend from “sea to shining sea,” regardless of the original claims on the land by its native citizens—separation of church and state on

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<sup>99</sup> Boyce, *Too Many Sheep*, 5.

<sup>100</sup> Deloria, *For This Land*, 78-79.

<sup>101</sup> Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, 82.



the Navajo reservation displayed a tragic irony of disunified and forced togetherness instead of equalitarian separateness, instituted by the government of a country that built its entire system of governance on the founding principle of separation of church and state.<sup>102</sup>

From the perspective of the Bahá'í teachings, the disunity among the different Christian churches on the Navajo reservation that Boyce was so dismayed about and that the Meriam Report so clearly documented as a source of competitive strife would be acknowledged as an expected part of the process included in the “rolling up” of the old world order announced by Bahá'u'lláh: “By My Self! The day is approaching when We will have rolled up the world and all that is therein, and spread out a new order in its stead. He [God], verily, is powerful over all things.”<sup>103</sup> Speaking about this process from the perspective of the last century and a half, the Bahá'í writings tell of an “observable acceleration” between the two processes of the “disintegration of the old order and the progress and consolidation of the new world order” initiated by the coming of the Bahá'í Faith, a process that “may well come to be regarded by future historians as one of the most remarkable features of this period.”<sup>104</sup> According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in this new order “religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind. . . . If it be the cause of discord and hostility, if it leads to separation and creates conflict, the absence of religion would be preferable in the world.”<sup>105</sup> Another statement by ‘Abdu’l-

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<sup>102</sup> Deloria, *For This Land*, 167. Also see: Denetdale, *Reclaiming*, 53, 63, 90.

<sup>103</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), 313.

<sup>104</sup> Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon, Selected Letters 1983-1992*, comp. Paul Lample (Fort Scott, FL: Palabra Publishers, 1992), 3.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 454.

Bahá emphasizes that “prejudice and fanaticism, whether sectarian, denominational, patriotic or political, are destructive to the foundation of human solidarity.”<sup>106</sup>

Having said this, the Bahá’í teachings paint an encouraging picture of the destiny of the American continent as having “signs and evidences of very great advancement; its future is even more promising, for its influence and illumination are far-reaching, and it will lead all nations spiritually. The flag of freedom and banner of liberty have been unfurled here, but the prosperity and advancement of a city, the happiness and greatness of a country depend upon its hearing and obeying the call of God.”<sup>107</sup> These Bahá’í statements decry disunity among religions, such as observed on the Navajo reservation after differing churches were established there, while at the same time while providing their own vision of a destined new world order.

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<sup>106</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 455.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 104.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXAMINING RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY: THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í FAITHS

Rambo wrote that religious ideology “shapes the conversion process,” which is “mediated through people, institutions, communities, and groups.”<sup>108</sup> Conversion becomes an ongoing process that occurs over time through the beliefs and principles embedded in a religion’s institutional organization, even though one single event, such as the Great Council Fire Unity Conference of 1962 for some Diné Bahá’ís, may have initiated that process. Understanding the history of a religion and its institutions is important to understanding its religious ideology. This chapter introduces the history of the Bahá’í Faith, with its two founder-prophets, who are believed by Diné Bahá’ís to be the return of the Navajo Warrior Twins, and specific Bahá’í teachings that may have led to acceptance of the religion by Diné Bahá’ís.

Bahá’ís date the origins of their religion to May 23, 1844, when the first of two founding prophets, Siyyid ‘Alí-Muḥammad, made a startling announcement in Shiraz, Persia, that he was the long-expected Imam Mahdi, the “Promised One” whose mission was to prepare the way for the appearance of “Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest.”<sup>109</sup> Taking the title of the Báb (the Gate), the new prophet, at the age of twenty-five, changed existing Islamic religious practices of the time, instituted a new calendar, revealed new laws that were to be supplanted by the greater prophet to come, and wrote the *Bayán*,

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<sup>108</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 1, 11.

<sup>109</sup> Amatúl-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 138; William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá’í Faith: The Emerging Global World Religion* 4th ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2002), 6-7. The “Imam Mahdi” was to be the appointed deliverer and successor of Muhammad.

accepted as a holy book by his followers. Following six years of persecution by the leading Muslim clerics for his progressive teachings and after the deaths of over one thousand Bábí followers, the Báb was publicly executed at noon in the windswept barracks square of Tabriz on July 9, 1850.<sup>110</sup>

According to Bahá'í accounts along with other sources, the first attempt to execute the Báb, led by an Armenian Christian military regiment with 750 rifles that filled the air with dense smoke, left the Báb's seventeen-year-old disciple, who had been suspended leaning against his chest and had begged to die with the Báb, standing alone and unharmed against the barrack wall. A frantic search by the guards found the Báb back in his barrack cell calmly completing his last instructions to his secretary. A Muslim regiment was hastily assembled. The new regiment fired upon the Báb and his companion, re-suspended against the barrack wall, riddling their bodies with bullets but leaving their faces unmarked.<sup>111</sup> Their deaths were witnessed by a crowd of thousands. Western scholars, journalists, and artists, such as Comte de Gobineau, Sarah Bernhardt, Leo Tolstoy, A.L.M. Nicolas, and Ernest Renan, "captivated by the tragic history of the youthful Báb and his band of heroes," left a small legacy of reports, studies, poems, artistic depictions, and writings for "future generations to ponder upon."<sup>112</sup> Diné Bahá'í Linda Wilson retells the story in her words:

Someone told me a story about the Báb, on His martyrdom and on the second time when they brought out the regiment to shoot and kill Him at mid-day on July 9. He said, "I have not finished yet." The first time that they shot, they didn't shoot Him. They had just shot the rope that was around His neck and He was free. He was back in the cell that he was in. And he was finished the second time they

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<sup>110</sup> Robert L. Gulick, Jr., "Preface," in *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys by Baha'u'llah*, trans. Marzieh Gail, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), vii-viii.

<sup>111</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), 47-52; Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 18-20.

<sup>112</sup> Gulick, Jr., "Preface," *Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, viii.

brought [Him], they took Him out. They were looking for Him and they found Him still writing. He says, “Now you can take me I’m finished.”

Wilson goes on to relate the death of the Báb to the Diné creation story of the Warrior Twins and to the Blessing Way Chant:

There is a prayer that He [the Báb] did; it is the Protection Way prayer. At the very end of that Protection Way prayer is “immeasurably exalted art Thou” and it goes that you will be protected to our right and to our left, to the front, to the back, below our feet and above our heads and all around. This is the Navajo Blessing Way Chant. Before our Twins left, this is the prayer that you say when you finish all the other prayers. It’s the prayer you say. It’s the prayer I’m introducing to you. They [the Twins] left back to Their Father. Before the Báb left to His father, this is the prayer He said.<sup>113</sup>

Linda Wilson makes yet her third connection between Diné traditions and Bahá’í principles when she sees similarities between the two prayers for protection. As previously described, Wilson’s first connection between Diné and the Bahá’í Faith links the Bahá’í principle of unity in diversity with Chief Joseph’s statement that all people are connected, and her second connection links the picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ to the Diné Holy People. Wilson first refers to the Báb’s prayer for protection, which native Bahá’ís recognize as a protection-way prayer because it calls for protection from the seven directions, important in native traditions as the four directions of east, west, north, and south, and the upward direction of Father Sky with the downward direction of Mother Earth. The seventh direction is toward the direction of the Creator, found in human hearts and signified by putting one’s hand over one’s heart. The Báb’s prayer calls upon God, “the Lord of over-powering majesty, the All-Compelling,” for protection “from what lieth in front of us and behind us, above our heads, on our right, on our left, below our feet, and every other side to which we are exposed,” and acknowledges that “Verily Thy

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<sup>113</sup> Linda Wilson, interview.

protection over all things is unfailing.”<sup>114</sup> The Báb’s prayer is also unique because it was “written in the Báb’s own hand, in the form of a pentacle,” instead of having his secretary write it down while the Báb was revealing it.<sup>115</sup> Wilson identifies the Báb’s prayer for protection as “the Navajo Blessing Way Chant” and says, “Before our Twins left, this is the prayer that you say when you finish all other prayers.”<sup>116</sup> Using a differently-worded variation of the seven directions, the Blessing Way Chant, central to Diné origin stories and described as “the main beam in the chantway house,” instructs one to go with blessing before, blessing behind, blessing below, blessing above, blessing around, with blessing in one’s speech, and to “go with happiness and long life; to go mysteriously.”<sup>117</sup> The Blessing Way, “not concerned with the healing of a specific disease but rather with the establishment of peace and harmony,” began on the Rim of Emergence from the underworld and contains all the important events that followed in Diné cosmology, including the inauguration of a new cycle or era by the Warrior Twins.<sup>118</sup>

By the end of the Bábí Era (1844-1863), twenty thousand followers of the Báb had been put to death “with such barbarous cruelty as to invoke the warm sympathy and unqualified admiration” of the Westerners who witnessed and recorded “these abominable outrages” in their books and diaries.<sup>119</sup> The remains of the Báb were preserved and concealed for 65 years by faithful believers until they were finally transferred to a mausoleum on Mt. Carmel in Haifa in 1909.

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<sup>114</sup> *Bahá’í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2002), 151-153.

<sup>115</sup> *Bahá’í Prayers*, 151-53.

<sup>116</sup> Wilson, interview.

<sup>117</sup> Donald Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing: A Jungian Exploration of Ritual, Image, and Medicine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 43, 211, front matter. Sandner took Blessing Way from *The Emergence Myth*, Wheelwright and Haile (1949).

<sup>118</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*.

<sup>119</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1973), 4-7.

## **Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892)**

A well-known and highly-respected young nobleman whom the Báb had never met but with whom he had corresponded by letter, Mírzá Husayn-`Alí, titled Bahá'u'lláh (the Glory of God), was imprisoned in 1852 with other prominent Bábís in the Síyáh-Chál (Black Pit), a subterranean dungeon in Tehran that had once served as a reservoir for public baths.<sup>120</sup> Bahá'u'lláh recorded that during his time of imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál a vision came to him with full cognition of his prophethood as “Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest”:<sup>121</sup>

One night in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: “Verily We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy pen. Grieve not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Ere long will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him.” During the days I lay in the prison of Ṭíhrán, though the galling weight of the chain and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from a summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.<sup>122</sup>

After four months Bahá'u'lláh was released from the Síyáh-Chál and banished from his native land of Persia to Baghdad. While in Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh composed the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude), which laid out God's world-embracing plan for the redemption of humanity, among other theological teachings.<sup>123</sup> Bahá'u'lláh and his family lived nine years in Baghdad before his growing influence led the Ottoman government to move the exiles again, this time to Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). Before leaving Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh retreated on April 21, 1863, for twelve days with

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<sup>120</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 100; Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'i Faith*, 30-32.

<sup>121</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow*, 11-12.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, *God Passes By*, 101; Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'i Faith*, 34.

<sup>123</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'i Faith*, 37-39.

his closest followers to an island in the middle of the Tigris River, subsequently named by his followers the Garden of Ridvan (Paradise), where he announced to them that he was “the One foretold by the Báb.”<sup>124</sup> Shoghi Effendi’s historical accounting of the Bábí and Bahá’í Faiths in *God Passes By* captures the scene of departure from the island garden:

The departure of Bahá’u’lláh from the Garden of Ridvan, at noon, on the 14th of Dhi'l-Qa'dih 1279 A.H. (May 3, 1863), witnessed scenes of tumultuous enthusiasm no less spectacular, and even more touching, than those which greeted Him when leaving His Most Great House in Baghdad. “The great tumult,” wrote an eyewitness, “associated in our minds with the Day of Gathering, the Day of Judgment, we beheld on that occasion. Believers and unbelievers alike sobbed and lamented. The chiefs and notables who had congregated were struck with wonder. Emotions were stirred to such depths as no tongue can describe, nor could any observer escape their contagion.”<sup>125</sup>

The band of exiles arrived in Constantinople on August 16, 1863, after an arduous three-month journey, only to be banished again four months later suddenly and without warning in the dead of winter to Adrianople in the remotest regions of the Ottoman Empire. In the early fall of 1867, Bahá’u’lláh announced his mission through letters to the kings and rulers of Persia, Turkey, Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Britain, to the Pope along with the entire Christian sacerdotal order, and with letters to the Caliph and leaders of Shí‘ih and Sunní Islám, and to the high priest of the Zoroastrian religion.<sup>126</sup> In these letters, Bahá’u’lláh warned of a world torn apart in the nineteenth century that would give birth to a new world civilization based on the oneness of all humanity.<sup>127</sup> He called upon

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<sup>124</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*, 37-38, 72.

<sup>125</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 155.

<sup>126</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*; Shoghi Effendi, *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow*, 5-6; Bahá’í World News Service, “Media Information: Statistics”:<http://news.bahai.org/media-information/statistics/> (accessed July 21, 2010).

<sup>127</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*, 40.



the rulers, kings, and religious leaders to champion his cause and to work toward achieving world unity. Bahá'u'lláh wrote in his letters,

The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. . . . The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God's holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife. The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquility of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among its principles and ordinances of God. . . . It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.<sup>128</sup>

The Ottoman Empire was crumbling and its skittish Turkish authorities considered Bahá'u'lláh, highly esteemed and respected even in exile, a political threat as well as a religious threat. An imperial order with no hope of recourse was issued. Bahá'u'lláh's final exile, in August, 1868, with nearly eighty members of his family and closest companions, led them from Adrianople to the notoriously foul prison-city of 'Akká, Palestine—so named after St. Jean d'Acre of the Crusaders.<sup>129</sup> The final years of Bahá'u'lláh's life, although he was still a prisoner, were spent outside the confines of the walled prison-city in a countryside residence a short distance from 'Akká, where he died

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<sup>128</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939; 1<sup>st</sup> pocket-size ed. 1983), 249; Bahá'u'lláh, cited in "The Greater Covenant," in *The Covenant: Daily Readings from the Bahá'í Teachings*, comp. by Enoch N. Tanyi (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1989), 5.

<sup>129</sup> Gulick, "Preface," vii-x. A Bahá'í magazine said that "Acre [Akká] was the end of the world, the final destination for the worst of murderers, highway robbers and political dissidents. A walled city of filthy streets and damp, desolate houses, Acre had no source of fresh water, and the air was popularly described as being so foul that overflying birds would fall dead out of the sky" (Baha'í International Community, 1992, "The Baha'is"), 298.

in 1892.<sup>130</sup> Bahá'u'lláh wrote the equivalent of over one hundred volumes during his ministry, including the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Book of Laws).<sup>131</sup>

During his interview, Diné Bahá'í Alfred Kahn, Jr. drew an important parallel between Bahá'u'lláh's exiles and the Diné's history of exile and imprisonment:

Bahá'u'lláh's message came 140 years ago. By that time Bahá'u'lláh was exiled in Akká. He had to go on a long journey and He was exiled from His homeland and He was taken to a different place. At the same time, the Navajos were rounded up and 8,000 Navajos were forced to go to Fort Sumner. It took a long walk and many of them died and suffered in that journey. There is a chronological parallel to Baha'u'llah and His own sufferings. We have a link to Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>132</sup>

Well over a century after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Akká, Alfred Kahn, Jr. establishes historical links between the Diné and Bahá'í similarities of removal, imprisonment, and “long walks” that occurred in the same time period of the mid-to late-1800s half a world apart, separated not only by distance but by a world of differences in customs and languages. By Diné Bahá'ís recognizing these mutual links of removal, imprisonment, and tortuous long walks between their own ancestors and Bahá'u'lláh, his family, and followers, a strong sense of kinship and of mutual survivorship becomes established emotionally and cognitively. This strong sense of ownership could lead Diné Bahá'ís to an even greater belief or acceptance that the Bahá'í Faith came intentionally to them.

**‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844-1921).** Bahá'u'lláh appointed his eldest son, ‘Abbás Effendi, known as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (the Servant of Bahá), as the “Centre” of Bahá'u'lláh's new covenant and the authorized interpreter of his writings in his Will and Testament. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had shared his father's exiles and his imprisonment in Akká and was still a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire at the time of his father's passing. After the Young Turk

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<sup>130</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, “Preface,” in *The Secret of Divine Civilization by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (1875), trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007), vii-ix.

<sup>131</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 46-49; 153-55.

<sup>132</sup> Alfred Kahn Jr., interview.

revolution of 1908 freed the political and religious prisoners of the Ottoman Empire, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá traveled in Africa, Europe, Canada, and the United States from 1910 to 1913.<sup>133</sup> His talks, given in universities, halls, churches, trade unions, and peace societies to capacity audiences, were widely covered by the press of the time. During his administration, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote over 27,000 documents and oversaw the affairs of the fledging religion on an international scale. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was knighted on April 27, 1920, by an agent for the King of England in recognition of his humanitarian services to the Palestinian people during the famine created in the wake of World War I.<sup>134</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s funeral in Palestine, attended by over ten thousand people, included “dignitaries of the Muslim, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and Druze communities, as well as the British High Commissioner and the governors of Jerusalem and Phoenicia.”<sup>135</sup>

**Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957).** ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appointed his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, who had also been a prisoner for the first eleven years of his life in Akká with his family, as his successor. Designated by his grandfather as the “Guardian of the Cause of God” and educated at Oxford, Shoghi Effendi authoritatively translated into English the major writings of the “Three Central Figures” of the religion before his sudden death in London of an Asian flu-induced heart attack.<sup>136</sup> Before his untimely passing, Shoghi Effendi had developed the basic structure of the religion’s administrative order as ordained by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and spread its message to the rest of the world through successive and globally encompassing teaching campaigns. His own

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<sup>133</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*, 56-59.

<sup>134</sup> W. Smith Murray, “A Consideration of the Bahá’í religion, its Tenets, the Character of its Followers, and the Possibility of its Spread,” [http://bahai-library.com/?file=imbrie\\_consideration\\_bahai\\_religion.html](http://bahai-library.com/?file=imbrie_consideration_bahai_religion.html) (accessed June 4, 2010).

<sup>135</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*, 61.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, *Bahá’í Faith*, 59, 71, 134.

writings include over 30,000 letters providing guidance on a wide range of matters related to the growth and development of the Bahá'í community worldwide, with many of his letters compiled into books considered invaluable to Bahá'í administration and practice. Shoghi Effendi wrote *God Passes By* (1944) as an interpretive history of the “Heroic or the Apostolic Age” to commemorate the first one hundred years of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions.<sup>137</sup>

**Universal House of Justice.** Those adherents appointed as “Hands of the Cause of God” by Shoghi Effendi took up the reins of leadership following his death in 1957.<sup>138</sup> The Hands called for the first election of the permanent institution of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Its nine members were elected by all of the members of the fifty-six National Spiritual Assemblies already in place around the world. The members of the first Universal House of Justice came from four continents, three major religious backgrounds (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim), and a variety of ethnic origins.<sup>139</sup> The House of Justice, seated in a Parthenon-style white marble building on the side of Mount Carmel and reelected by secret ballot every five years, administers all the affairs of the Faith with an unchallenged authority that its adherents accept as divinely guided.

This necessarily brief overview of the historical origins of the Bahá'í Faith demonstrates the parallels Diné Bahá'ís see between the Diné Warrior Twins and the Twin Manifestations of the new religion, between Diné Bahá'ís' ancestors' experiences

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<sup>137</sup>Moojan Momen, *The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 15-16; Robert H. Stockman and Jonah Winters, “The Bahá'í Faith: A Short Introduction,” in *A Resource Guide for the Scholarly Study of the Bahá'í Faith* (Wilmette, IL: USBNC Research Office, 1997), <http://bahai-library.com/books/rg/rg.curricula.html#1> (accessed April 17, 2009); Rabbáni, *Pearl*, 439.

<sup>138</sup>Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 70-73; Michael Woodward, *The Unforgettable Hands of the Cause: Times with the Chief Stewards of Baha'u'llah's Embryonic World Commonwealth* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2008), 183.

<sup>139</sup>Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 72; Shoghi Effendi, *Guidance*, 8-9.

during their exile and imprisonment at Bosque Redondo and the exiles and hardships endured by Bahá'u'lláh, the holy family, and his followers on their Long Walks during the same time period. The Bahá'í World Centre, situated on the slopes of the sacred Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, where the Báb, still accompanied by his youthful disciple who was executed with him in the Square of Tabriz, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá are buried in a golden domed shrine. Bahá'u'lláh's near the Mansion of Bahjí near Akká, enclosed by extensive gardens and considered the most sacred site on earth for Bahá'ís, has thousands of pilgrims and visitors every year. Bahá'ís of indigenous backgrounds from around the world make up a good percentage of the 700 volunteers who live and work at the World Centre. In 2008 the World Heritage Centre designated the Bahá'í Holy Places in Haifa and the Western Galilee as a World Heritage Site of “outstanding universal value.”<sup>140</sup>

### **Shaping Religious Ideology: Unity in Diversity**

The Bahá'í principle of inclusion, of bringing all people together as equal participants in the global community, provides autonomy and empowerment that especially validates native peoples who have often been left out of the global equation. The concept of *unity in diversity*, with the recognition of the oneness of humanity, the oneness of a Creator, and the oneness of religion, is the cornerstone principle of the Bahá'í teachings. Shoghi Effendi restated his great-grandfather's teaching of unity in diversity, upheld and reinforced by his grandfather, that humanity, after a long and turbulent adolescence, has now reached its first stages of maturity when its organic unity

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<sup>140</sup> Bahá'í Holy Places in Haifa and the Western Galilee, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1220> (accessed April 28, 2009).

in a just and global society can finally be established.<sup>141</sup> Shoghi Effendi outlined this goal of inclusion when he said,

The unification of the whole of mankind is the hallmark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, tribe, city-state, and nation has been successfully attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal toward which a harassed humanity is striving in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded.<sup>142</sup>

The Universal House of Justice states that Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or Book of Laws, known as the "Most Holy Book," is "of unique importance" because it is the "Charter" of the future world civilization that Bahá'u'lláh has come to raise up" and its "provisions rest squarely on the foundations established by past religions."<sup>143</sup> "Concepts of the past are brought to a new level of understanding" in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, and Bahá'u'lláh's new social laws, addressed to the entire "human family," are designed to last for centuries. Some laws, "directed primarily to . . . a specific section of humanity," are readily understood by them but not by those of a different culture. Laws govern "the individual's relationship to God, physical and spiritual matters which benefit the individual directly, and relations among individuals and between the individual and society." The "society for which certain of the laws of the *Aqdas* are designed will come only come gradually into being," and Bahá'u'lláh has thus provided for the "progressive application" of Bahá'í law.<sup>144</sup> The Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information statement on the "Prosperity of Humankind" acknowledges "the wealth of all the genetic and cultural diversity that has evolved through the past ages" and says now

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<sup>141</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), 202.

<sup>142</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, 202-203.

<sup>143</sup> The Universal House of Justice, "Introduction," in Bahá'u'lláh's *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: UHJ, 1992), 1-3. Also known as the "Book of Laws."

<sup>144</sup> Universal House of Justice, "Introduction," *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 4-5.

the task of the peoples of the earth is to “draw on their collective inheritance” and become responsible “for the design of their future.”<sup>145</sup> A materialistic approach to social and economic development that “reflects a profound error of conception about human nature itself” must be rejected, and “spiritual dimensions of life and motivation that transcend a constantly changing economic landscape and an artificially imposed division of human societies into developed and undeveloped societies must be sought.”<sup>146</sup>

For Diné Bahá’ís, these points of universal inclusiveness, with specific mention of tribal peoples, provide a much-needed renewal of empowerment, acknowledgement, and autonomy. During his interview, an elderly Diné Bahá’í remembers becoming a Bahá’í in 1962 as one of the first members of his family to embrace the new religion. Elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States in 1969, he traveled to Haifa to participate in the 1973 election of the Universal House of Justice. He talks about the differences in economics:

And when we met with all the different races in Haifa, Israel, it was like, ah, 133 different races there, the first time I went there. And each one of them, they want to talk with me in particular. And I explain myself about life and what native people are doing in the United States. They want to know everything. So many things they want to know. So, I began to tell them really how important economics was, how important that they spread their economic and what’s in their, ah, in their economics. And that’s one of the hardest lessons anybody can learn around the world. Everybody has a different kind of money. Everyone has a different idea. Everybody has their own opinion about life. And it was really exciting.<sup>147</sup>

This Diné Bahá’í was able to experience and see firsthand the principle of universal inclusiveness when he attended the election of the House of Justice in Haifa, Israel.

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<sup>145</sup> “The Prosperity of Humankind: A statement prepared by the Bahá’í International Community Office of Public Information (BICOPI), Haifa,” first distributed at the United Nations World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen, Denmark (Baha’i International Community, March 3 1995), 1.

<sup>146</sup> BICOPI, “Prosperity,” 2.

<sup>147</sup> Diné Bahá’í elder, interview by author, April 4, 2009. Name withheld by mutual agreement.

Bahá'u'lláh's principles of the elimination of economic prejudices and the elimination of extremes between wealth and poverty that leave many people in abject misery while other people accumulate exorbitant wealth appealed to this Diné businessman.<sup>148</sup>

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the welfare of all nations will be assured "whenever the ties between nations become strengthened and the exchange of commodities accelerated."<sup>149</sup>

In the future new world order to come, the "inequality of portion and privilege," one of the "deep and vital problems of human society," will be remedied through "an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life," both through "legislative readjustment of conditions" and voluntary giving from the rich to the poor.<sup>150</sup> This equalization and apportionment process will thus provide the assurance that the "composure of the world by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind" will be effected.<sup>151</sup> Coming from the poverty-stricken Navajo reservation as this Diné Bahá'í did, and remembering the harsh times that the Diné experienced after returning from Ft. Sumner, these principles espousing an balance within the world's economics must have impressed and inspired him. When other Bahá'í attendees at the election of the Universal House of Justice asked the Diné Bahá'í questions about his life and culture, the potential for unity of economics among the diverse nations of the world was his topic of choice.

The Diné were already familiar with the Bahá'í concept of "unity in diversity" from their oral tradition of Holy Wind, a "deity formed as it were of component Winds

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<sup>148</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Divine Art of Living: Selections from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, The Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, comp. Mabel Hyde Paine, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1944 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005), 301. Interview with author, confidential.

<sup>149</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 107.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 107.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 107.



which exist all about and within the living things of the world.”<sup>152</sup> Psychological anthropologist James McNeley sought to understand the Diné ethnopsychology of singers in *Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy*. Singers are Diné medicine men who create sandpaintings and perform healing ceremonies through singing, or chants. Singing, based on wind, air, and atmosphere, is central to understanding Diné theology, cosmology, and personality.<sup>153</sup> Wind, McNeley writes, has many different names and attributes in Navajo cosmology but still, “it is the unitary Wind which bears different names and has diverse characteristics; naming particular aspects of Wind does not differentiate it from the whole, just as our naming of a sea does not imply that the waters referred to are distinct from the great body of water encompassing the whole Earth.”<sup>154</sup> Holy Wind is the teacher of qualities and attributes “standing within us” that give direction to Diné life.<sup>155</sup> Diné Bahá’ís recognized this same allegorical concept when, speaking as the “Voice of the Creator,” Bahá’u’lláh said,

O Son of Spirit! I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone besides Me? Out of the clay of love I moulded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.<sup>156</sup>

The concept of wind as life-producing, life-giving, and teacher standing within both Diné oral traditions and Bahá’í ideology as Spirit standing within one forms yet another powerful bonding and connection for Diné Bahá’ís.

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<sup>152</sup> James McNeley, *Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 17.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., *Holy Wind* 1-3.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., *Holy Wind*, 18.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., *Holy Wind*, 14-16.

<sup>156</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004), 14. *Hidden Words* is a “meditational collection of verses exploring the eternal relationship between God and man” composed around 1858. Back Cover.

## Education as Religious Ideology

Education, obligatory and highly valued in Bahá'í teachings, provides the primary means to true and permanent progress on all levels of human activity, with the other principles of the Faith placed within the auspices of global education.<sup>157</sup> According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “education is of three kinds: material, human, and spiritual.”<sup>158</sup> Material education, common to humans and animals, focuses on the physical body’s progress and development through attainment of its substance, comfort, and ease. Human education can be achieved through the civilizing forces of government and administration, charitable works and trades, an elevation of the arts and crafts, and the sciences that lead to great inventions and discoveries of physical laws.<sup>159</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote that these complementary activities of education are what distinguish humans from animals and are seen as vitally essential to the progress of humanity:<sup>160</sup>

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of almighty God. To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the Friends of God. . . . Through education savage nations become civilized, and even the animals become domesticated. Education must be considered as most important, for as diseases in the world of bodies are extremely contagious, so, in the same way, qualities of spirit and heart are extremely contagious. Education has a universal influence, and the differences caused by it are very great.<sup>161</sup>

In Bahá'í teachings a difference applies between sons and daughters if parents can only afford to educate one child. If a choice has to be made, daughters should be educated first because daughters “will one day be mothers, and the mother is the first teacher of the

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<sup>157</sup> I use “global” in this context to refer to the wider scope of human knowledge.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. L. C. Barney 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1987), 9.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, *Some Answered Questions*, 249.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, *Some Answered Questions*, 12.

<sup>161</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Divine Art of Living*, 72; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 9, 249.

child.”<sup>162</sup> Those mothers who are themselves uneducated cannot educate their children, thereby setting up a situation difficult for the child to remedy later in life. The Bahá’í injunction to first educate girls reinforces and validates Diné Bahá’ís’ views of their own matrilineal social structure, formed through the Diné creation stories of First Woman and First Man, and later through Changing Woman.

## Summary

In this chapter I have looked briefly at the basic history of the Bahá’í Faith, its founders and succession of leadership, and at two of its foundational principles of unity in diversity and universal education. Some of the religious ideology or principal teachings of the Bahá’í Faith were briefly examined, especially those teachings that fit with Diné cosmology and may have served as one of the catalysts moving some Dinés toward being Baha’i. The two principles of unity in diversity and the education of children, especially daughters, fit the Diné need for inclusion in the larger world community and for validation of their matrilineal culture. The voice of an elderly Diné Bahá’í was heard who traveled the world after his becoming Bahá’í, and how excited he was to talk with others about the need for a “spiritual solution to the economic problems” at an international Bahá’í conference composed of a wide diversity of people. The Diné creation story of Changing Woman was set within the context of the education of daughters, in particular, which validates the Diné matrilineal culture. Chapter three allows for further exploration of Changing Woman and her role in Diné cosmology.

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<sup>162</sup> Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Divine Art of Living*, 121; *Nature: An Emanation of God’s Will, A Statement Issued by the Bahá’í International Community*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2005), 39.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHANGING WOMAN AND THE WARRIOR TWINS

The Bahá'í injunction to first educate girls reinforces and validates Diné Bahá'ís' views of their own matrilineal and matrilocal social structure, formed through the Diné creation stories of First Woman and First Man and later through stories about Changing Woman. The holy spirit Talking God found Changing Woman as an infant, "lying under a dark cloud with a rainbow and soft, falling rain" and "strapped into a cradle made of rainbow, lightning, and sunbeams."<sup>163</sup> The infant was given to First Man and First Woman who, under the tutelage of *Diyin Dine'ē*, the Holy People, raised her in a "miracle way" with "sunray pollen, pollen from clouds, pollen from plants and flower dew so that she matured miraculously, coming into womanhood, or menarche, within twelve days."<sup>164</sup> It was the event of Changing Woman's coming into womanhood that established the all-important Blessing Way ceremony, the *Kinaaldā*. Changing Woman gave birth to the Warrior Twins named Monster Slayer and Born For Water who were fathered by the Sun, constituting the "holy family" of Diné theology.<sup>165</sup> Later, Changing Woman decided to create humans, the *Nihookáá Diné*, brought to life by her breath and the Holy Winds entering into their bodies.<sup>166</sup>

As young men, the Warrior Twins saved the world by slaying all Monsters except for Death, Disease, Hunger, Poverty, and Old Age, and they gave the Diné the weapons

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<sup>163</sup>Maureen Trudelle Schwarz, *Molded in the Image of Changing Woman: Navajo Views on the Human Body and Personhood* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 23-24, 26, 45.

<sup>164</sup>Schwarz, *Molded in the Image*, 23.

<sup>165</sup>Donald Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing: A Jungian Exploration of Ritual, Image, and Medicine* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 74.

<sup>166</sup>Schwarz, *Molded in the Image*, 24.

of sacred ceremonies and prayers to use for healing and the good life.<sup>167</sup> Without Changing Woman and her sons, there may not have been any Diné Bahá'ís two millennia later. Every major religious system has an expectation of a spiritual return of their spiritual leader, including the Diné traditional belief of the return of the Warrior Twins. The Diné Bahá'ís who were interviewed based a great part of their acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith on their understanding that the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh fulfill their ancient prophecy of this expected return.

### **Progressive Revelation: Return of the Warrior Twins**

The Bahá'í principle of progressive revelation explains why Diné Bahá'ís consider the “Twin Manifestations” of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as the *return* of the Diné Warrior Twins. “Return” in Bahá'í theology is much like grades in a school that continually build one upon the other: humanity progresses from the return of a great teacher or prophet from age to age. Each great teacher, designated in the Bahá'í texts as a “Manifestation of God,” reviews and renews the teachings of the prior great teachers and brings new knowledge.<sup>168</sup> Referring to all the great teachers, Bahá'u'lláh explained,

Every Prophet Whom the Almighty and Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message, and charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirement of the age in which He appeared. God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and to guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquility of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established. . . . These Divine Messengers have been sent down and their Books were revealed for

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<sup>167</sup> Schwarz, *Molded in the Image*, 24.

<sup>168</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 100-29.

the purpose of promoting the knowledge of God, and of furthering unity and fellowship amongst men.<sup>169</sup>

The Warrior Twins, titled the “Monster Slayers,” are seen by the Diné as their ancient divine messengers. Archival material written by an anonymous Diné Bahá’í explained that the Monster Slayers were expected to return to the Diné, “reborn by the iniquities of all humankind,” and give to all humankind “the spiritual weapons to battle and slay all the Monsters.”<sup>170</sup> The anonymous Diné Bahá’í spoke of the return of the Warrior Twins as the “New Day” that would be signaled by “terrible trials for the Diné,” but the “Wise Ones” [Holy People] knew that they would see “the death throes of the Old Era” and the birth of the “New Era.”<sup>171</sup> The anonymous Diné Bahá’í’s terminology parallels that of Bahá’u’lláh’s when Bahá’u’lláh described the old era as a rolling up of the old world order and the new era as spreading out of the new world order: “By My Self! The day is approaching when We will have rolled up the world and all that is therein, and spread out a new order in its stead. He, verily, is powerful over all things.”<sup>172</sup>

Intriguingly, historian of religions Karl Luckert unexpectedly came across a reference to “a new age” when he was documenting a soon-to-be extinct Navajo *Ajilee* ceremony in 1976.<sup>173</sup> His informant, eighty-year-old Claus Chee Sonny, was relating ceremonial knowledge from Lava Butte and the different kinds of snakes in many colors, stripes, and spots that the traveling Deer People saw there. Sonny says, “And we see all of these kinds today. Information was given to them [the Holy Deer People]: ‘When a

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<sup>169</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 79-80; *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 1941. 1<sup>st</sup> ps ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 12.

<sup>170</sup> “Navajo Prophecy and its Fulfillment in the Bahá’í Faith” (private collection, n.d.), 1. “Reborn by” indicates that the iniquities of humanity necessitated the return or rebirth of the Warrior Twins.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>172</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 313.

<sup>173</sup> Karl W. Luckert, ed., *A Navajo Bringing-Home Ceremony: The Claus Chee Sonny Version of Deerway Ajilee* (Flagstaff, AZ: Museum of Arizona Press, 1978), 126.

new age begins, these snakes will appear at various places—different ones who have never been seen before.”<sup>174</sup> Luckert did not know what to make of Sonny’s statement, noting that it “seems somewhat out of place,” and he was “inclined to interpret it as a spark from the ancient Middle American ideology.”<sup>175</sup> Sonny’s impromptu disclosure to Luckert in the middle of documenting the *Ajilee* ceremony takes on new meaning when examined in the context of the eschatological return of the Warrior Twins.

Snakes are sacred symbols of healing to the Diné and represent “the power to return to the Center of Mother Earth from whence all living things spring.”<sup>176</sup> The Holy Deer People’s statement that in a new age new snakes will appear in various places would have been interpreted by Diné Bahá’ís as a signal that the new age had arrived with the spiritual return of the Warrior Twins in the forms of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, who, Diné Bahá’ís believe, brought new weapons for healing the iniquities of all humankind through their updated sociological and spiritual teachings. Here, the analogy of new snakes never seen before is another return or renewal, symbolic of the return of a new springtime or new age. What the anonymous Diné Bahá’í wrote about the healing of humankind’s iniquities and what Sonny said about snakes (symbols of healing) appearing in a new age parallel each other in Diné expectations of the return of the Warrior Twins. The return is a renewal that brings new life and a new creation. Sandner quotes Mircea Eliade: “We get the impression that for archaic societies life cannot be *repaired*; it can

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<sup>174</sup> Luckert, *Bringing Home Ceremony*, 126.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, *Bringing Home Ceremony*, 126.

<sup>176</sup> David Villaseñor, *Tapestries in Sand: The Spirit of Indian Sandpainting*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1963 (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, 2008), 47; Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 33, 177-80.

only be *re-created* by a return to sources. And the ‘source of sources’ is the prodigious outpouring of energy, life, and fecundity that occurred at the Creation of the world.”<sup>177</sup>

Diné Alfred Kahn, Jr., a twenty-three-year-old architect (Appendix E-7), was asked how and why he became a Bahá’í. He said he had been raised as a Bahá’í his entire life because his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were Bahá’ís, but he was still required to make a choice: “When you turn fifteen in the Faith everyone has to make the decision what religion you’re going to be in and I chose to be Baha’i.”<sup>178</sup> Alfred, Jr.’s answer lies in his understanding of the eschatological *returning* of the Warrior Twins:

As I understand it there are Navajo prophesies of Messengers coming from the east. And the way I understand the story is that two Navajo children were born a long time ago, [and] during that time they were born there was hardship that was going on among the Navajo people. The Navajo people were oppressed by greed, materialism, disunity, hatred, and envy. All this oppression came in the form of monsters that were attacking the Navajo people. They were the symbol of the spiritual afflictions that was happening to the Navajos. So the Navajo people were asking for help and they needed assistance and so they prayed for it. The prayer was answered through these two youth. The Two Youth, knowing the afflictions that were caused against the Navajo people, went on this journey towards the Sun, their Father. On their journey they went through a series of trials and through those trials they learned how to sort of rise above the afflictions. As they passed through the series of trials and they finished, they received weapons from the Father Sun and they came back to the Navajo people armed with a bow and arrow, which represent the way to overcome those challenges; the discipline and spiritual qualities that [it] would take to overcome those spiritual afflictions. So when the Navajo received that blessing of the Twin Manifestations for that time they said, there would be a time when you will be afflicted by spiritual afflictions and the Monsters will return and look for Us to come from the east. As a Navajo, it’s a continuation of Navajo culture to wait for those Twin Manifestations to come—those Two Youth to help with the afflictions. Because right now it is obvious that the Navajo are going through so many afflictions, materialism has spread across the whole reservation. The reservation is really split, is disunified. So much of the reservation is affected by alcoholism and greed and materialism and envy. All the same monsters, they were afflicting the reservation from before.

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<sup>177</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 111. Sandner quotes Eliade in *Myth and Reality* (1968).

<sup>178</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.



Zolbrod relates that Navajos old enough to remember World War II could grasp the evilness of Hitler by relating him to the fearsome monster *Yé'íitsoh*, the Big Giant who eats the people (an affliction) and who led the other monsters in eating people.<sup>179</sup> While Alfred, Jr. does not remember World War II per se, he knows about the effect that World War II had on his Diné homeland and culture due to the number of Diné soldiers who served in the war, and because of the famous Navajo code talkers who were instrumental in turning the tide of the war against Hitler. A monument to the Code Talkers stands in front of the Navajo Nation's geological landmark, Window Rock. Alfred, Jr. continues with his reasoning of the return of the Warrior Twins:

And so clearly we need to be waiting for the Twin Manifestations to come. The Monster Slayers came again in the form of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. And the ways we overcome the afflictions, the spiritual afflictions, are the Writings. They are the weapons that we face the spiritual afflictions with. They are the ways we defeat the monsters that are afflicting the Navajo right now. There is a divine remedy that has been given to us. It's not really like the Twin Monsters Slayers came and slay[ed] them for us, but that the Monster Slayers have come and given us the tools to do it. There is a quote in the Bahá'í Faith that says, "The native people, when properly trained and educated will be so enlightened as to illumine the whole earth." There is a special station for native people. And it's always been referenced by this understanding that when properly trained and educated, which means that through that proper education and training, we can arm ourselves with the weapons of the Twin Manifestations. So we can become the monster slayers but we need them to bring us these tools and weapons.

The promise or special station that Alfred, Jr. refers to was made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in regard to the capacities of the indigenous peoples of the American continent, which includes Canada and South America in addition to the United States. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement or promise, examined in chapter 4, validates the Bahá'í principle of both unity in diversity and the protection of cultures, made possible through the "proper training and education," noted by Alfred, Jr. Through this training, Diné Bahá'ís can "arm" themselves

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<sup>179</sup> Paul G. Zolbrod, *Diné bahané: The Navajo Creation Story* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 22.

with the weapons of the Twin Manifestations/Monster Slayers, which include the new spiritual and social principles and new religious laws instituted by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. The Twin Messengers, like the Warrior Twins before them, go directly to God. Alfred, Jr. uses the analogy of a divine sun to link the Twin Monster Slayers with God:

When the Twin Monster Slayers came, they went directly to God. There was no intermediary. They brought to us a direct connection to the Sun, to God. And they brought the remedy straight from the Sun. A medicine man doesn't have that direct link. The medicine man goes through those Holy Ones to reach the Sun. And those Holy Ones, those Manifestations, They didn't go through anybody else. They went to the Sun [God] with a direct connection. We turn to Them when we pray. Medicine men turn to Them. They are like perfect mirrors. They are the Ones that show us the Teachings and it is a special station, and I think medicine men receive guidance from Them; have this pure source but they [the medicine men] aren't the source.<sup>180</sup>

Alfred Kahn, Jr. sees the present day “afflictions” on the Navajo reservation as reflective of the “monsters” remembered from earliest Diné narratives. He sees the tools and weapons needed to counteract these afflictions as the prayers and meditations needed for healing, protection, and spiritual education that are essential daily requirements in both Diné traditional belief and in tenets of the Bahá'í Faith.

Prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh as a “means for individual discipline,” Bahá'ís have an injunction “from the age of maturity” (fifteen) to choose one of the three revealed obligatory prayers and to say it each day in accordance with any instructions that accompany it.<sup>181</sup> For example, the short obligatory prayer said between noon and sunset, simple but profound in its content, offers a reason for being: “I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify at this moment to

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<sup>180</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

<sup>181</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 159.

my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.”<sup>182</sup>

As demonstrated in the noonday prayer, Bahá’ís direct their prayers to God, the Creator, and not to the Twin Manifestations as Alfred, Jr. appeared to indicate. However, according to Bahá’í teachings, since the Manifestations of God are “the highest form of creation,” and since the Creator/Sun/God will always remain “the unknowable essence” to his creation (humanity) except through the Manifestations, Bahá’ís can “turn to them” as intermediaries when praying, as explained by Alfred, Jr. in his interview.<sup>183</sup>

A small typed inscription by the artist of a sandpainting that has been in Alfred, Jr.’s parents’ home for many years informs its viewers that the figures (*Yé’is*) represented in sandpaintings are supernatural beings from Navajo tradition considered as intermediaries between the Diné (People) and the “Most Sacred Diné God.” Appearing in many ceremonial sandpaintings, the male *Yé’is* usually have square heads while the females have round heads. The colorful male *Yé’i* shown in the Kahn sandpainting encloses the calligraphic Bahá’í symbol of the “Greatest Name” of God within its boundaries.<sup>184</sup> Zolbrod identified *Yé’is* as representing different aspects of nature, both positive and negative, in the ancestral covenant between the *Nihookāā Dine’ē* (First Navajos) and the *Diyin Dine’ē* (Holy People).<sup>185</sup> Talking God, in the narrative of Changing Woman, and *Yé’iitsoh*, the Big Giant in Zolbrod’s account, are examples of *Yé’is*. The concept of *Yé’is*, already familiar to the Diné Bahá’ís from their Diné mythology, gave them the understanding of the need for an intermediary between

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<sup>182</sup> *Bahá’í Prayers*, 4.

<sup>183</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 230-31.

<sup>184</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 210. See chapter 5 for a fuller explanation of the “Greatest Name.”

<sup>185</sup> Zolbrod, *Diné bahané*, 25-26.

humanity and the “Most Sacred Diné God.” Assigning the role of intermediary to the Twin Manifestations would have come naturally, as it did for Alfred, Jr.

### **Spiritual Tools: New Covenants**

Zolbrod writes that when responsibility for the world was given to the Nihookāā Dine’ē, Changing Woman and the other Diyin Dine’ē gave the Nihookāā Dine’ē components of their ancestral knowledge in songs, prayers, ceremonies, and stories.<sup>186</sup> These together formed a charter for life, a contract or covenant between the Nihookāā Dine’ē and the Diyin Dine’ē, who gave the Nihookāā Dine’ē the right to live within Dinétah. The Diné would be under the special protection of the Diyin Dine’ē as long as they stayed within the guidelines or boundaries of the covenant. Zolbrod quotes Diné historian Harry Walters when he talks about origin stories containing the knowledge needed to guide the people of today:

Origin stories offer guidance to contemporary people because they compress historical knowledge and human experience into vivid narratives that can illuminate and educate. . . . All components of Navajo culture are based on four main levels of knowledge, each of which can be subdivided into three additional levels of abstraction; twelve distinct levels of knowledge are encoded into each episode of the origin stories. Navajo educators draw upon these levels of abstraction to illuminate ancestral teachings.<sup>187</sup>

Zolbrod gives an outline of the four main levels of knowledge that Walters refers to as encoded in the Diné origin stories. The Diné’s twelve levels of ascending knowledge echo the Bahá’í concept of the progression of the world of humanity through stages of education before arriving at the present collective stage of adulthood. The first or elementary level of Diné knowledge, *hózhǫ́ǫ́ji hane’*, instructs young children. The

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<sup>186</sup> Zolbrod, *Diné bahané*, 22-23.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné bahané*, 24-25. Harry Walters is Chairman of Dine Studies and Director of the Ned Hatathli Cultural Center Museum at Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona.

second level, *diyin k'ehjí hane* ', expands knowledge by incorporating information about the twelve Holy People who represent different principles of nature and are found in all Diné stories and ceremonies. The third level, *hatāāl k'ehjí hane* ', incorporates the songs and prayers associated with each episode in the origin stories. The fourth level, *naayée'jí hane* ', concerns Naayée'jí, or Protection Way, and is limited to those adults who hold specialized knowledge of ceremonies.<sup>188</sup> Donald Sandner, a Jungian psychiatrist, studied Diné healing symbols and ceremonies to learn how Diné healers created harmony within their patients. Saunder identified four central principles basic to protection and healing in Diné cosmology: a return to the origins; confrontation and manipulation of evil; death and rebirth; and a restoration of the universe.<sup>189</sup>

The principles that Sandner identified, along with Zolbrod's explanation of the Diné's covenant with their Holy People, correlate with Alfred, Jr.'s conversion narrative statement and parallel the eschatological story of the return of the Warrior Twins. This correlation includes the expectations that Diné Bahá'ís hold for the rebirth and restoration of their universe through the Twin Messengers of the Bahá'í Faith—and through the renewal of the two ancient covenants found in some form in all major religious systems, according to Baha'i Udo Schaefer.<sup>190</sup> According to Bahá'í teachings, these ancient covenants connect the past with the present. In 1992, designated as a “Holy Year,” the Universal House of Justice held a worldwide commemoration in New York City, which also commemorated the “inception” of Bahá'u'lláh's covenant.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Zolbrod, *Diné bahané*, 25-26. It takes many years for a Diné to learn these ceremonies properly.

<sup>189</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 74.

<sup>190</sup> Udo Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash of Religions: The Emergence of a New Paradigm*, trans. Geraldine Schuckelt (Hofheim, Germany: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2002), 20, 44, 49, 125.

<sup>191</sup> Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon, Selected Letters 1983-1992*, comp. Paul Lample (Fort Scott, FL: Palabra Publishers, 1992), 48.

It is fitting, then, that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, which links the past and the future with the progressive stages towards the fulfillment of God's ancient Promise . . . hailed as the promise and crowning glory of past ages and centuries, as the consummation of all the Dispensations within the Adamic Cycle, inaugurating an era of at least a thousand years' duration, and a cycle destined to last no less than five thousand centuries, signaling the end of the Prophetic Era and the beginning of the Era of Fulfillment.<sup>192</sup>

According to Bahá'í belief, the "Greater Covenant" between God and humanity has promised in each of the recorded histories of all the great religious systems of the world that God will continue to send a succession of divine Messengers to guide and instruct humanity.<sup>193</sup> Humanity must recognize and accept the new Messenger when he comes and must strive to put into practice the new teachings he brings. For this reason, "being Bahá'í" carries with it the obligation to recognize not only the current Messenger but to recognize and acknowledge the succession of previous Messengers.<sup>194</sup> Thus, Diné who "become Bahá'í" find themselves learning about and accepting the essence of the teachings of such diverse Messengers as Zoroaster, Krishna, the Buddha, and Muhammad, in addition to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. While the teachings of each Messenger differ according to time and place, and over time the followers of each system have modified and reinterpreted the original teachings of their Messenger, the essence or essential message remains unchanged. According to Schaefer, a "distinguishing epithet" has been historically attached to each religion.<sup>195</sup> As an example, the essence of Zoroastrianism is purity; the essence of Judaism is justice; the essence of Buddhism is detachment; the essence of Christianity is love; the essence of Islam is absolute

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., *A Wider Horizon*, 48.

<sup>193</sup> The Universal House of Justice, Preface, in *The Covenant: Daily Readings from the Bahá'í Teachings*, comp. Enoch N. Tanyi (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1989); Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 130-134.

<sup>194</sup> McMullen, "Carriers and Converts," 15-17; Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 130-134.

<sup>195</sup> Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash of Religions*, 56.

submission; and the essence of the Bahá'í Faith is unity.<sup>196</sup> Perhaps as important to North, South, and Central American Bahá'ís, the Creator's system of providing guidance to humanity through progressive divine messengers validates their belief in their own indigenous messengers such as Deganawida for the Iroquois, Quetzalcoatl for the Toltec, Chilam Balam for the Itza-Maya of Yucatan, White Buffalo Calf Woman for the Sioux, and the Warrior Twins for the Diné.<sup>197</sup> According to Bahá'í teachings, there have always been Manifestations of God, but many of their names have been “lost in the mists of ancient history.”<sup>198</sup>

In order to accomplish the ongoing task of moving humanity forward, the “Lesser Covenant” between the Manifestation and humanity changes according to the needs of each new age. In the Bahá'í teachings, each Manifestation has made a new covenant with those followers who recognize his station and has provided them with the means to accomplish the task of the age, with the understanding that they will accept his appointed successor after him. If the followers accept the appointed successor, the religion can remain united and pure—if not, the religion becomes divisive and its force for good dissipated. In each age, the Lesser Covenant, not lesser in importance but rather as an auxiliary to the Greater Covenant, functions within the framework of the goals and purposes of the Greater Covenant for the re-unification of humanity. Using Sandner's

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, *Beyond the Clash of Religions*, 56.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, *Beyond the Clash of Religions*, 125, 145. For extensive discussions regarding native messengers, see: Christopher Buck, “Native Messengers of God in Canada?: A Test Case for Bahá'í Universalism,” *Bahá'í Studies*, Review 6 (London: Association for Bahá'í Studies English-Speaking Europe, 1996), 97-133; Seena Fazel and John Danesh, eds., *Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Bahá'í Thought* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2002); and Christopher Buck, *Religious Myths and Visions of America: How Minority Faiths Redefined America's World Role* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009).

<sup>198</sup> Shoghi Effendi, letter dated Oct. 4, 1950, in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. I, p. 22.

identified principles of healing, I argue that Dine Bahá'ís could see their new covenants as the rebirth and restoration of their universe.<sup>199</sup>

### Springtime as Return

Ábdu'l-Bahá likened the repeating cycles of the seasons to progressive revelation or return; each new spring puts forth signs of its imminent appearance, but no spring arrives exactly in the order or appearance of its preceding season. He explained,

Springtime is springtime, no matter when or how often it comes. The divine Prophets are as the coming of spring, each renewing and quickening the teachings of the Prophet Who came before Him. Just as all seasons of spring are essentially one as to the newness of life, vernal showers and beauty, so the essence of the mission and accomplishment of all the Prophets is one and the same.<sup>200</sup>

A two-page Naw Ruz (New Year) greeting from the American Indian Teaching Committee (AITC) in March, 1976, quotes a talk given by Diné Bahá'í Alice Steffes to a gathering of some 300 Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í Indians in Los Angeles. Steffes, an Oneida Indian and the first American Indian to tradition-transition into Bahá'í, compared the *return* to the “extensive ceremonials of prayers and chanting before, during and after the planting of seeds” and informed her audience that “this rhythmic pattern, the Bahá'ís are already aware of. . . . The Bahá'ís are ready and willing to join you in learning the new Teachings from the new Messenger to bring new meaning through which Indian people will enlighten the world.”<sup>201</sup> Prior to Steffes's talk, a one-page tract developed for the 1972 Bahá'í Unity Conference had already reinforced the expectation of the restoration of the universe for Diné Bahá'ís through progressive revelation. Titled “The Straight

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<sup>199</sup>Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 130-34, n. 5; Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 74.

<sup>200</sup> ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 126.

<sup>201</sup> Nancy Phillips, “Flaming Arrow Newsletter,” April, 1976, American Indian Service/Teaching Committee Records, Publications and Regional Files, box 1, Mss. Collection No: M-476/18/23/31, 1974-1977 (National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, Illinois).



Path,” with Diné symbols of Father Sky and Mother Earth decorating its cover, the tract resonates with Diné theology.<sup>202</sup>

The All-Wise Creator of earth and heaven has from the beginning which has no beginning sent to His peoples Divine Messengers to guide them to the Straight Path. These Wise Ones have come to establish the unity of the Kingdom in human hearts. This evolutionary process of building the organic unity of the human race has entered a new stage with this mighty message of Bahá’u’lláh. His voice is the voice of the Great Spirit. His love for humankind is the voice of the New Age. He who sends the rain, who causes the sun and the stars to shine, the rivers to flow, the winds to blow and the earth to give forth her bounties has in this Great Day sent to all mankind Bahá’u’lláh. It is this Great One who has opened the door of divine knowledge to every soul. It is His teachings that will establish world unity and bring about universal peace.<sup>203</sup>

A blending of religious imagery from Bahá’í statements, such as found in this Bahá’í tract, melds with Diné oral stories and is replete with metaphorical images of nature that lead into religious ideology. The origin story of the Warrior Twins, also replete with metaphorical images of nature that parallel such Bahá’í statements, are examples of Rambo’s idea that religious imagery “influences the consciousness” of the convert. In this case, Diné Bahá’í converts may be influenced by the imagery from nature found in the Bahá’í writings.<sup>204</sup> The Diné, like most tribal societies and regardless of any other religious affiliations, continue to incorporate nature into their cosmology and look to its manifestations for a significant part of their interpretations of how the Creator works. Tribal societies have looked to natural phenomena as a “mythopoeic doorway” for their understanding of the divine throughout the long history of nature-based cultures such as the Diné’s.<sup>205</sup> In his interview, Alfred Kahn, Jr. uses aspects of the natural world

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<sup>202</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 206, Figure F8#4. Symbols on the tract match the Mother Earth and Father Sky sandpainting from the Male Shooting Chant.

<sup>203</sup> “The Straight Path,” developed by the LSA of Ganado, Arizona, was based on a letter from the UHJ, private collection. The Unity Conference was held “for the friends in Navajoland,” June 2-4, 1972.

<sup>204</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 11-14.

<sup>205</sup> Moojan Momen, *Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 357.

common to Diné culture, such as the coyote and the sun, as mythopoeic doorways to understand metaphorically the sun as a teacher of the attributes of God:

Nature is a perfect example of the spiritual. We understand about coyote and the Monster Slayers, the Sun, the Weapons. When you really meditate on the meaning of those, the true meaning of those terms, we understand the spiritual things have to find a link physically. We use the words, the terms to link to the spiritual aspect. The sun has a lot of qualities that resemble our understanding of God. God is the life-giver. Without the sun, we would be destroyed. The sun shines on all human beings. We receive life and sustenance through the sun. We rely on the sun. That's why all the Navajos' hogans are facing east. It's toward the rising sun. It's obviously through that metaphor we realize we can't take it literally because we believe that animals can talk. Navajos believe in a coyote that was a trickster and he taught us many different things. They are all stories we use to understand the deeper meaning.<sup>206</sup>

Images of nature, as spoken or visual representations of religious imagery and used as a tool to influence the consciousness, have the power to inspire, motivate, spiritualize, and change an adherent's or a potential adherent's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

**Nature as Religious Ideology.** Significant statements within the Bahá'í writings on nature are replete with images and analogies of nature as a way to illumine and elevate high spiritual ideals, with which Diné Bahá'ís readily identify. In September, 1996, the Bahá'í Faith became the sixth major religion to join the World Wide Fund for Nature's Network on Conservation and Religion (WWF). A compilation issued by the Research Department of the UHJ for the WWF's conference in Assisi, Italy, offered the Bahá'í position on nature in this statement from Bahá'u'lláh: "Nature, in its essence, is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world."<sup>207</sup> The UHJ

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<sup>206</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

<sup>207</sup> *Nature: An Emanation of God's Will*, Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005), 39.

explains that Bahá'u'lláh's words "outline the essential relationship between man and the environment: that the grandeur and diversity of the natural world are purposeful reflections of the majesty and bounty of God. For Bahá'ís, there follows an implicit understanding that nature is to be respected and protected as a divine trust for which we are answerable."<sup>208</sup> Animals are included in this divine trust, with an injunction from Bahá'u'lláh to "not look upon the creatures of God except with the eye of kindness and of mercy."<sup>209</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, known for his love and appreciation of nature, said, "The country is the world of the soul; the city is the world of bodies."<sup>210</sup> An elderly Diné medicine man and Bahá'í expressed the connection between Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on nature and his Diné traditions in this way:

It is the same Faith renewed because [in]our traditional way of life, people are forgetting, and they are going to a new one that are waiting for talking to hear about our traditional ways. Bahá'ís have it. Bahá'u'lláh expressed Himself just like our prophecy. He revealed the same story, very, very much the same story about culture, about life, about nature, about water, air, about Mother Earth and Father Sky. Yeh, so Mother Nature supports us in every way just like Bahá'í Faith does, from nature.<sup>211</sup>

This Diné elder continued to express in his interview that he most often linked the Bahá'í teachings to nature during his many public talks. Nature, so essential to the life and spirit of Diné people, cannot be separated from their traditional belief system or separated from their belief as Bahá'ís in nature's manifestations as a spiritual teacher.

## Summary

I am reminded of the sandpaintings used in many colors, spread out on the red of the Arizona earth in a hogan, carefully created over long hours during a healing

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., *An Emanation of God's Will*, 39, 46.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., *An Emanation of God's Will*, 50-51.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., *An Emanation of God's Will*, 46.

<sup>211</sup> Interview by author, confidential by mutual agreement.

ceremony, only to be swept away, hours later, when they have served their purpose. Those same images can now be permanently held on boards and mounted on one's wall, such as the sandpainting that is in the Kahn home. Does the purpose of the religious or healing imagery lose its power when the form of the image and its use are changed? The images of Mother Earth and Father Sky from the Male Shooting Chant, chosen to decorate the front of the Bahá'í tract discussed earlier, denotes safety, warmth, home, security, and peace. Do Diné symbols carry the same power on a piece of board as they do on the floor in the hogan? While the beauty of the images remains intact, the ceremonies needed to convey the images' healing powers are absent. The permanent sandpainting becomes a work of art instead of a tool for healing. Perhaps, though, the presence of a permanent sandpainting in a Diné home provides a sense of comfort and an honored reminder of cultural traditions. Sandner said he was struck by the "intensity" and "vividness" of the Diné sacred symbols when he first saw Diné sandpaintings. As a psychiatrist, Sandner was searching for the "ancient roots" of his own healing discipline. "For the Navajo," Sandner writes, "healing is not directed toward specific symptoms or bodily organs, but toward bringing the psyche into harmony with the whole gamut of natural and supernatural forces. . . . Religion, medicine, and art are inextricably intertwined in an astonishing unity of purpose."<sup>212</sup> Words, too, have power, in the form of myths, stories, and narratives—or promises.

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<sup>212</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 3-4.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A SPECIAL PROMISE TO THE INDIAN PEOPLE

Not long after his release in 1908 from years of imprisonment in Palestine, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made an important statement, interpreted as a promise or a prophecy, regarding all indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. In his “Tablet Addressed to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada” (1916), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “You must attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. . . . Should these Indians be educated and properly guided, there can be no doubt that through the Divine teachings they will become so enlightened that the whole earth will be illumined.”<sup>213</sup> Shoghi Effendi reinforced his grandfather’s admonition with a reminder from his secretary to adherents in an early Bahá’í newsletter:

He [Shoghi Effendi] has always been very anxious to have the Indians taught and enlisted under the banner of the Faith, in view of the Master’s [Ábdul-Bahá’] remarkable statements about the possibilities of their future and that they represent the aboriginal American population. He attaches the greatest importance to teaching the original inhabitants of the Americas the Faith. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself has stated how great are their potentialities, and it is their right, and the duty of the non-Indian Bahá’ís, to see that they receive the Message of God for this Day.<sup>214</sup>

In a 1996 letter to the “Bahá’ís of the World,” the Universal House of Justice reminded the “firmly rooted” indigenous Bahá’ís of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s promise to them, urging them to “strive to make their own distinctive contribution” to the work of the Faith and “through word and deed” to help those indigenous believers who were not yet so

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<sup>213</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Tablet Addressed to the Baha’ís of the United States and Canada,” in *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1993), 30-32; “NABI,” 30.

<sup>214</sup> Helen Bassett Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, comp., 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Delhi, India: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994), 528.

firmly rooted to “progress along the path to their destiny.”<sup>215</sup> The wife of Shoghi Effendi, a Canadian who came to be known as Amatúl-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum and who also served as a “Hand of the Cause” in her own right, traveled through 185 countries to “raise the Divine call.”<sup>216</sup> As an author, poetess, lecturer, and film producer, Rúhíyyih Khánum “worked tirelessly for the realization of the oneness of humanity, focusing in particular on the environment and indigenous cultures.”<sup>217</sup>

In “A Message to the Indians and Eskimo Bahá’is of the Western Hemisphere,” Rúhíyyih Khánum recalled her visits to the Diné, Hopi, and other tribes, promising them that “the day will come when the Redman will study and know the history of his people.”<sup>218</sup> The white man has studied the Indians for many years, Rúhíyyih Khánum said, collecting the Indians’ way of life and their “ornaments,” putting them in houses “where thousands of people pay to enter and look at them.”<sup>219</sup> Rúhíyyih Khánum informed her indigenous audience that three calls had come to them—one each from the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—and reminded her readers that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said to them during his 1912 visit to North America, “Your mission is unspeakably glorious.”<sup>220</sup> Rúhíyyih Khánum acknowledged the problems of poverty, injustice, and lack of education among the indigenous tribes and stated that if they “could only see with the eye of the spirit” they would see that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s promise “is like a rope” put in the hand of a drowning person in deep water. If the indigenous peoples will only “hold

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<sup>215</sup>“Teaching and Consolidation,” in *Developing Distinctive Baha’i Communities*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1996), 1, 19-20.

<sup>216</sup> UHJ, Back Cover, in Amatúl-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, “A Message to the Indians and Eskimo Baha’is of the Western Hemisphere” (Houck, AZ: Native American Bahá’í Institute, 2002).

<sup>217</sup> BICOPI, Foreword, in “A Message,” 2-3.

<sup>218</sup> Amatúl-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, “A Message to the Indians and Eskimo Baha’is of the Western Hemisphere” (Houck, Arizona: Native American Bahá’í Institute, 2002), 6-7. “A Message” is a letter reprinted as a booklet with permission from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’is of Canada.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., “Message to the Indians,” 6-7.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., “Message to the Indians,” 9.

onto ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s promise,” it will pull them, their children, and their grandchildren “out of the water to safety.”<sup>221</sup> Non-Indian Bahá’ís took ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s injunction about service to indigenous populations to heart as a justifiable reason to move onto or travel to American Indian reservations, Canadian reserves, and South American indigenous populations. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urged all people to “take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and basement and poverty” and to devote themselves to the “service of the masses,” forgetting their own “worldly advantage” while working only to “serve the general good.”<sup>222</sup>

### **Bahá’ís Arrive on the Navajo Reservation**

The first Bahá’í home-front pioneers to the Diné, James Stone and Grace Dean, arrived in Gallup, New Mexico, in 1957. Tony and Josie Madonia arrived next, pioneering to Gallup in mid-1958 before moving to Ft. Defiance for Tony’s work as a supervisor with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Amos and Mary Gibson, an interracial couple also arriving in 1958 who taught in the government-run schools, lived far out on the reservation. Two years later, in 1960, Tony Madonia died suddenly of a heart attack, just six days after the formation of the first Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) of Ft. Defiance. The Navajo Tribal Chairman gave special permission to bury him in a small cemetery between Window Rock and Ft. Defiance. Diné Leon Benally’s father made the remark, “The Indians loved Tony because Tony loved the Indians.”<sup>223</sup> Only

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<sup>221</sup> Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Message to the Indians,” 10.

<sup>222</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. from the Persian by Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 2007), 134; Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*, 79-80.

<sup>223</sup> Nancy Phillips, “Talking Leaves Newsletter,” May 23, 1960, 2-5, American Indian Service Committee (National Bahá’í Library, Wilmette, Illinois). Phillips, the secretary for the American Indian Service Committee, composed the newsletters.

three other non-Indians were buried in this cemetery at the time, all long-time residents of the reservation.<sup>224</sup>

Dick and Mary Lou Wright with their two small children from Peoria, Illinois, were among the earliest Bahá'í home-front pioneers to arrive in Gallup in 1958. The Wrights occupied the Bahá'í Center, procured by James Stone in 1957, which had been vacated by a departing pioneer. Mary Lou described it as an old storefront building with high rent that quickly ate up their meager savings after Dick's job with the government vanished during a hiring freeze.<sup>225</sup> Chester Kahn recalls meeting Stone after Chester returned to the reservation from working at the Stewart Indian School outside Carson City, Nevada. Chester had met a few Bahá'ís in Nevada in 1956 and related that he thought they were a "different kind of white people" than he had ever known, respectful of and interested in the Diné culture. Chester makes a clear connection between his traditional way of life and the new Bahá'í teachings that he became familiar with from the Bahá'í home-front pioneers when he shared his experience of becoming Bahá'í:

I returned back to the reservation, and found out that there were Bahá'ís, some Bahá'ís, few, very few Bahá'ís in those days here on our reservation. One of the Bahá'ís was the first person I met here that lived in Gallup, New Mexico, was Jim Stone. He was a very beautiful Bahá'í and [there were] two or three other Bahá'ís in the area. Another couple that I met at that time, his name was Amos Gibson and his wife Mary, who were teachers way out in Pinon, Arizona, a remote area of our reservation. So I became close friends with them and that really opened my mind about what the Bahá'í Faith is all about. You know it was a faith that was so beautiful; it was like it was because it was close to our way of life, our traditional way of life. And I began to read. I began to study the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and some history. Our ancestors, our traditional people always believed that, those kinds of teachings. So that's when I became a Bahá'í in 1962, one of the very first Navajo Bahá'ís.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Phillips, "Talking Leaves," Nov., 1958, 6 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá'í Library).

<sup>225</sup> Dick and Mary Lou Wright, interview by author, Peoria, IL, May 18, 2009.

<sup>226</sup> Chester Kahn, interview.



Chester had met the Wrights at the Bahá'í Center in Gallup. The Wrights partitioned the old storefront into small bedrooms with one larger room for meetings. Mary Lou remembers that Navajo men came in from the reservation to the Bahá'í Center to “take showers and get cleaned up from their dusty trip into town.”<sup>227</sup> Word of mouth had gotten around that they were not expected to give anything of themselves such as attendance at religious services, or take anything in the form of gifts based on attendance; the Center was there for them to use. The Wrights served as witnesses for the first Bahá'í marriage performed in the Bahá'í Center, for Sayde Joe, the first Diné to convert to the new religion. Before the Wrights left, moving due to health issues caused by Gallup's high altitude, they made sure the Center had other home-front pioneers to occupy it. An elderly couple, Walter and Emma Jones from San Leandro, California, home-front pioneered to Gallup, bought the Center, and deeded it back to the Bahá'ís of Gallup.<sup>228</sup>

The number of home-front pioneers on the Navajo reservation had reached twelve by November, 1958, with four registered groups within the boundaries of the civil areas that coincided with the electoral districts for the Navajo Tribal Council.<sup>229</sup> Marilyn and Floyd Heaton, school teachers, along with Peter Terry, who worked as a census clerk, formed the Bahá'í group at Tuba City. James and Jean Ginnett, Roberta Wilson, and Tony and Josie Madonia formed the group at Window Rock. Amos and Mary Gibson with Sadye Joe formed the group at Pinon. Isabel and Hayward Camper formed the group at Indian Wells. By April 21, 1959, there were enough Bahá'ís in Gallup to elect and

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<sup>227</sup> Wright, interview.

<sup>228</sup> Wright, interview.

<sup>229</sup> A “registered group” is two or more adult Bahá'ís, aged 21 or over, registered with the NSA as a means of tracking where Bahá'ís reside and which civil boundaries have been “opened” to the Faith.

institute Gallup's first Local Spiritual Assembly; the foundational nucleus of Bahá'í administration.

The "Talking Leaves" newsletters of the mid-1950s, written by Nancy Phillips, secretary of the American Indian Service Committee (AISC), and filled with fascinating glimpses and vignettes of life on the reservation by arriving home-front pioneers, document those early days of Bahá'í activity across reservations nation-wide.<sup>230</sup> It was a far-flung community of only thirty home-front pioneers in the entire "Indian teaching field" by late 1958.<sup>231</sup> Bahá'í pioneers found a different situation from the well-established Catholic and Protestant institutions with their trained theologians and staffs that had been on the reservations since the late 1800s. The Christian missionaries were financially supported by their respective religious institutions and, in addition to having a building for services, they were provided with a parish, mission, or parsonage to live in plus a salary or stipend. The Bahá'í home-front pioneers were expected to fend entirely for themselves and provide for their own needs. This often led to make-or-break situations of too-short terms of service to fully establish well-developed native Bahá'í communities that could survive on their own when the pioneers left the reservations. Bahá'í pioneers came from a grassroots and individual-initiative perspective. Any Bahá'í who had a goal of teaching American Indians the new religion was free to relocate to a reservation. This, too, was different from Christian missionaries, who were directed to their posts and were provided with prior training in the field. Home-front pioneers had to support themselves financially, which meant choosing a location where jobs and housing could be found—or creating one's own job as Ted and Lynn Claus did.

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<sup>230</sup> Phillips, "Talking Leaves," AISC, Nov. 12, 1959 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá'í Library). The phrase, "talking leaves," Phillips said, was taken from the Cherokee language for "pages of writing."

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., "Talking Leaves," 6, AISC, Nov. 1958, May 23, 1959 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá'í Library).

The Clauses arrived in the fall of 1959 on the Navajo reservation to help establish the first LSA at Window Rock before they moved on to Ft. Defiance. Ted Claus wrote to the “Talking Leaves” newsletter,

I have secured a peddler’s permit to operate a ‘mobile canteen’ in Ft. Defiance. We converted our Volkswagen camper, put in a large 50-cup coffee-maker, serving board and ice chest, and I am now selling sandwiches, coffee, pop, doughnuts and candy. This gives me a chance to meet and slowly get friendly with hundreds of Navajos and at first teach by deed and example. We try to sell at minimum profit and are now in the third week of operation. The rounds include the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the jail, Navajo police, the road gang, baseball games, etc. It is most heart-warming to have the occupants of about every third car on the road waving greetings to us already. The venture has been approved and designated as a community service not otherwise obtainable and has the endorsement of the Navajo councilman from Ft. Defiance, the Navajo police chief inspector, the sub-agency superintendent as well as the Tribe, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Public Health. The major problem remaining is housing. We are sure that if all this is sincere and right, our prayers to ever serve in the best possible way will be answered and solve that problem as well.<sup>232</sup>

While the home-front pioneers had the support and encouragement of Bahá’í institutions on all administrative levels, each individual or family was expected to be self-sufficient and independent. However, Bahá’ís who could not themselves “go pioneering” but had the financial means to do so, could “deputize” others to go in their stead.<sup>233</sup> The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States appointed the American Indian Service Committee (AISC) in 1953 to support home-front pioneers with limited training, advice, printed materials, planning and carrying out of activities, and traveling speakers. Later, Area Teaching Committees (ATCs) composed of five to nine individuals were appointed by the NSA. The small group of Bahá’ís appointed to the ATC for the

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<sup>232</sup> Phillips, “Talking Leaves Newsletter,” AISC, May 23, 1960 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Library).

<sup>233</sup> “Teaching Brochure of the American Indian Service Committee,” American Indian Service/Teaching Committee Records, Publications and Regional Files, box 1, Mss. Collection No: M-476/18/23/31, 1952-1956 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Library).

southwestern states was responsible for all of Arizona, California, and Nevada.<sup>234</sup>

Pioneers “opening an area to the Faith” meant not only becoming an integrated member of one’s local community, but it also meant “raising” a Local Spiritual Assembly of local inhabitants who could be self-sufficient enough and “deepened” enough in the administrative functions of the Faith to run their own religious affairs without the pioneers.<sup>235</sup>

Bruce and Sandy Palmberg arrived on the reservation in 1969. Bruce worked as a plant quarantine inspector at the Sanders agricultural inspection station. About three months after arriving, the couple moved to the backyard of the trading post in Pine Springs. Bruce said the Mormon trader needed people to keep an eye on the trading post when the Mormon trader was gone. Two other Bahá’í pioneers had lived there previously. Bruce said this couple had “lived in a manner that didn’t work” (in a traditional hogan). Bruce’s idea was to assist the Diné to live in a more modern way, but he and Sandy wanted to *model* modern living. Sandy remembered,

We had forty to fifty Navajos come [to the Palmberg home]. Kids would come and turn on and off the electric lights and the water. At that time, only two or three Navajo families lived at Pine Springs. Johnny and Ruby Nelson were taught at the Council Fires. We had a Navajo Teaching Committee from 1970-1971. Ruby was the only Navajo on it. The NTC was a subcommittee of the National Teaching Committee. We were there almost three years on the reservation, two years at Pine Springs, and then we moved to Houck at Fort Courage. We moved because of sheer overwhelming demands of the people. Their needs were tremendous for rides, medical care, buying groceries, hauling water.<sup>236</sup>

The Universal House of Justice had only been elected in 1963, seven years prior to the Palmbergs arriving on the Navajo reservation in 1970. Resources of the new religion

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<sup>234</sup> “Teaching Brochure,” AISC Records, 1952-1956 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Library).

<sup>235</sup> Amatúl-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm, *Quickeners of Mankind: Pioneering in a World Community*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of Canada (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), 98.

<sup>236</sup> Sandy Palmberg, interview.

were limited in members and funding. In addition, only members contribute to the Bahá'í funds. Funds collected at the local level supported the local communities' expenses, such as a Bahá'í Center, children's classes, library expenses, and sending contributions to the national level. Individual or "isolated believers" such as the Palmbergs supported themselves and their Bahá'í activities entirely by themselves. Bruce felt that the information coming from the House of Justice statements deemphasized humanitarian efforts because the "numbers [of Bahá'ís] were too small to have an impact on society. We were in agreement; we just didn't have the resources to deal with all the problems."<sup>237</sup> Sandy addressed the need to "deepen," or inform, the new Diné Bahá'ís about their new teachings:

We got the idea that Navajo Bahá'ís were not particularly deepened; we felt like we were supposed to do that. We would get asked, 'Are you the Bahá'í missionaries? What are you going to give?' Our standard answer was, 'Nothing but the love of God.' It was different to them. We wanted them to help themselves. Bahá'ís from outside the reservation didn't know and brought material goods. There was lots of jealousy between the Navajo Bahá'ís then, lots of alcoholism and peyote—it was stratified. Navajos didn't like to associate, lots of "superstitions".<sup>238</sup>

The Palmbergs related in their interview feeling discouraged and wanting to give up.

After the Palmbergs had moved their mobile home away from Pine Springs and really felt like they had accomplished little, Bruce said they got a knock on the door:

It was a positive thing when we finally moved the trailer. One day a nice-looking traditional lady knocked on the door and asked where were all the Bahá'ís? Alice Burnside, a Navajo Bahá'í. We thought we were beat up. Alice wanted us to come and say prayers, to bless her new house like the ministers did.<sup>239</sup>

Rúhíyyih Khánum wrote to the pioneers that there were two points to always keep in mind; one was that pioneering should be done "for the sake of God" alone and that to

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<sup>237</sup> Bruce Palmberg, interview.

<sup>238</sup> Sandy Palmberg, interview.

<sup>239</sup> Bruce Palmberg, interview.

do it for any other reason was to invite disappointment.<sup>240</sup> Second, pioneers should teach the new converts that their relationship was a direct one to Bahá'u'lláh as their own messenger from God and that their connection to him was not through the pioneer. The relationship new converts had established with “the Cause of God” was an independent one. Rúhiyyih Khánum, known for her outspokenness and directness, likened the pioneer’s position to that of a spiritual parent:

It is really all remarkably like a family: the child grows up, begins to assert its freedom and the loving parents see it getting hurt and making mistakes which, if only it would listen, it would not happen! But the child will not always listen and the parents cannot live its life for it. The Bahá'í pioneer who is a spiritual parent must just resign himself to the same thing. . . . At least 80 per cent of everything that seems wrong in the beginning will sort itself out within say a year, if the pioneer will be *patient, loving, understanding, and will persevere*.<sup>241</sup>

In addition to finding one’s own home and job, adherents were explicitly forbidden to proselytize, while at the same time teaching the faith was an important part of “living the life” that defines being Bahá'í. Bahá'u'lláh exhorted his followers:

If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindness and goodwill. If it be accepted, if it fulfills its purpose, your object is obtained. If anyone should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him.<sup>242</sup>

Thus, home-front pioneers had the challenge of how to share the new religion on the Navajo reservation without proselytizing. In so doing, they had to befriend without hypocrisy, to share their beliefs in such a way as not to infringe on the privacy or rights of their Diné friends and neighbors or to offend the traditional customs of the Diné.<sup>243</sup> A good portion of the problem in maintaining their Local Spiritual Assemblies was the

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<sup>240</sup> Khánum, “Manual,” in *Quickeners of Mankind*, 98.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, “Manual,” in *Quickeners of Mankind*, 98.

<sup>242</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 289.

<sup>243</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 178.

difficulties of life on the reservation. Home-front pioneers moved elsewhere when circumstances became too difficult due to finances, health, or other factors, leaving the Diné Bahá'ís who were not deepened enough in their new religion to struggle with becoming a Bahá'í on their own.

## **Pioneering Literature**

The most important piece of training material for home-front pioneers to reservations was the *Teaching Brochure of the American Indian Service Committee*, published under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly sometime around 1952-1953.<sup>244</sup> This simple manual, divided into sections by topic, is surprising in its scope and depth of information. The brochure contains goals given to potential pioneers from the National Assembly with directives from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to support those goals.<sup>245</sup> The question and answer section covers a wide range of cultural, legal, and religious topics. Another section encourages Bahá'í youth to live on or near reservations and provides a breakdown of schools, colleges, and universities close to Indian populations both on reservations and in urban areas.<sup>246</sup> The final section gives a thumbnail sketch of Indian tribes classified into “six main stalks” of Algonquin, Athapascan, Iroquois, Muskogean, Shoshonean, and Sioux. Each tribe is grouped into a cultural area, with the Navajos placed in the category of Athapascan shepherds of northeastern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico, and southeastern Utah. Listing the Diné

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<sup>244</sup> “Teaching Brochure of the American Indian Service Committee,” American Indian Service/Teaching Committee Records, Publications and Regional Files, box 1, Mss. Collection No: M-476/18/23/31, 1952-1956 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá'í Archives).

<sup>245</sup> This information comes from a supplement to the Teaching Brochure manual, included in the manual “to replace section A,” that outlines “The Guardian’s Ten-Year Crusade Goals for American Indians” section of the manual. “Teaching Brochure,” AISC Records, 1952-56 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá'í Archives Office).

<sup>246</sup> Bahá'í youth are encouraged to give a “year of service” sometime between the ages of 18 and 25.

population at about 50,000 and increasing, the manual says that “these people possess great adaptability and have absorbed elements from all the other cultures they have encountered. Their crafts include weaving, silversmithing, and the famous sandpainting.”<sup>247</sup> The manual condenses the history of the Diné into six brief but fully descriptive paragraphs. It concludes with the advice that potential home-front pioneers should contact the Chamber of Commerce in the principal towns of Gallup and Farmington, New Mexico, and Holbrook, Winslow, and Flagstaff, Arizona, to seek possible employment. Other than teaching in a government school or agency, employment “is impossible.”<sup>248</sup>

The next most important publication of teaching material was a booklet in the Cherokee language (1954).<sup>249</sup> The English version was published in 1955 under the title of *The New Day*, and the 32-page Navajo version, *Lahgo ‘Áhoot’ Éego Hanááhoolzhllzh*, with English translations, was published in 1956. *Lahgo* provided an introduction to the new religion and excerpts from its writings. A note in the AISC’s November 12, 1958, “Talking Leaves” newsletter said that Willie Morgan, who lived in Ft. Defiance, translated the Bahá’í writings into Navajo.<sup>250</sup> In addition, an Oneida version was published at the same time as the Navajo version.<sup>251</sup>

**Newsletters.** The AISC’s chart of Bahá’í teaching activities among American Indians on reservations in 1957 showed only two Diné Bahá’ís. Who these two Diné

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<sup>247</sup> “Teaching Brochure,” AISC Records, 1952-1956 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Archives).

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, AISC Records, 1952-1956 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Archives).

<sup>249</sup> *‘Áhoot’ Éego Hanááhoolzhllzh*, American Indian Service/Teaching Committee Records, Publications and Regional Files, box 1, Mss. Collection No: M-476/18/23/31, 1956 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Archives).

<sup>250</sup> Phillips, “Talking Leaves” AISC, Nov. 12, 1958 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Library). Phillips does not indicate whether Morgan was a Diné Bahá’í or not. However, Mary Lou Wright said in her interview that she thought he was.

<sup>251</sup> This information is not included in *Lahgo* but is referenced in the updated Section A of the “Teaching Brochure.”



Bahá'ís were or on what part of the vast Navajo reservation they lived is not documented; however, archival material and interviews indicate that Sadye Joe was the first Diné Bahá'í.<sup>252</sup> The number of resident home-front pioneers documented in 1957 shows six in Flagstaff with one Diné Bahá'í and two home-front pioneers in Gallup with no Diné Bahá'ís. Off-reservation Diné Bahá'ís were listed at two. AISC's monthly "Talking Leaves" newsletter began to be distributed sometime after 1953; library copies begin in 1958 and end in 1960. These early issues appear to be the most important and consistent means of communication nation-wide among home-front pioneers to Indians, both on reservations and in urban areas. Composed by Nancy Phillips, the secretary of the American Indian Service Committee, her warm, welcoming, and supportive tone conveys the image of good friends corresponding with each other. Issues give information about arriving and departing pioneers, their activities, and who converted, where, and how, notices of gatherings, and potential job openings that inadvertently provided a window into the progress on the reservations:

New schools now under construction on a number of Indian reservations are opening many more positions for school teachers. There are also abundant opportunities for employment on Indian reservations open to nurses and doctors. Bahá'ís who can qualify for such positions and who are interested in serving the Faith in places where they are critically needed should contact the American Indian Service Committee, indicating the area of the country which is their preference. Information as to where to apply will be sent by return mail.<sup>253</sup>

A flurry of letters between committees and the national administration show lots of Indian teaching activities between the last "Talking Leaves" newsletter in 1960 and the next set of newsletters that began in the summer of 1963. Directed toward native

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<sup>252</sup> Wright, interview.

<sup>253</sup> American Indian Service/Teaching Committee Records, Publications and Regional Files, box 1, Mss. Collection No: M-476/18/23/31, n.d. (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá'í Archives). Companion materials place this announcement in the early to mid-1960s.

adherents and simply titled “Bahá’í Letter,” this newsletter, more formal in its format yet simplistic in its wording and intended for adherents who may not read English well or understand it, served as an instrument of instruction on the teachings and laws of the new religion. The newsletter’s headings range from Bahá’í holy days to marriage laws and understanding how the Bahá’í religious administration works. The “Flaming Arrow” newsletter arrived in April, 1974, still instructive in content as was its predecessor but more newsy, inclusive, and native-oriented in tone and subject. The American Indian Service Committee changed its name to the American Indian Teaching Committee (AITC), which boasted several native names on its roster of committee members. In October, 1980, the monthly “A.I.T.C. News” replaced “Flaming Arrow” due to increased expenses and time constraints and dropped its mailing to over 1,600 recipients. The A.I.T.C. newsletter was distributed only to LSAs on reservations, certain District Teaching Committees (DTCs), and those individuals closely involved with reservation teaching.<sup>254</sup>

## **Summary**

Home-front pioneers, taking the promise of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá into hand, moved onto the Navajo reservation and established small communities across the reservation, sometimes in isolated areas. Supporting themselves, the national “Bahá’í News” and newsletters from the American Indian Teaching Service were the home-front pioneers’ primary means of information. After the creation of the Native American Bahá’í Institute (NABI) at Burntwater near Pine Springs in 1977, the newsletters came under the

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<sup>254</sup> Phillips, “Flaming Arrow Newsletter,” AISC, n.d. (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Library). DTCs were committees appointed by the NSA whose job was to assist and support Bahá’í teachers.

guidance and administration of NABI to reflect local activities, news from the national and international levels, and the stages of growth both in the Institute and in the Diné population on the Navajo reservation. The newsletters, along with other letters, flyers, and instructive materials, provide an irreplaceable resource for the history of the Diné who came into the Bahá'í Faith at a significant time in its history, as the first House of Justice was elected.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RELIGIOUS IMAGERY: ANCIENT NAVAJO CHANTS

The ancient Navajo chants, in their published form, came about through the physical and spiritual adventures of Bahá'í Vinson Brown (see Appendix C-5).

According to Brown's wife Barbara, she and Vinson met Diné Bahá'ís Chester and Annie Kahn at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference in 1962.<sup>255</sup> Annie shared with Vinson the story of the eschatological oral chants that her grandfather had passed down to her. The chants give prophecies of a chief coming to the Diné from the east wearing twelve feathers and tell the Diné to look for the number nine, among other signs of an eschatological nature embedded within Diné traditions and cosmology. Brown, an anthropologist and natural historian, traveled in Asia, Central America, and North America visiting indigenous tribes and studying their thoughts, dreams, and customs.<sup>256</sup>

Brown was five years old when his father showed him a beautifully beaded doeskin bag about four feet long in “glowing” colors of red, blue, gold, white, and green.<sup>257</sup> Brown's father, a physician in the 1890s on the Sioux reservation, was gifted the bag by an Oglala Sioux chief whose small son had been near death from pneumonia. Brown's father worked on the child for two days and nights, finally in desperation blowing his own breath into the child before collapsing. The son survived and the doctor refused to take any payment from the chief, saying that the white man had taken too much from the Indians already and so he gave the child's life back to his father without

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<sup>255</sup> Barbara Brown, personal communication, Nov 12, 2010.

<sup>256</sup> Vinson Brown, *Warriors of the Rainbow: Strange and Prophetic Dreams of the Indian People*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1962 (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, 2005), Back Cover.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, *Warriors*, 17.

charge. The chief, too proud to take something for nothing, told his wife to bring out the bag and insisted on giving it to the doctor to show his gratitude.<sup>258</sup>

Brown retells the story his father told him of how the bag had been thrown on a great pile of Indian things gathered by white soldiers and the whole pile set afire intending to crush the Indians' spirit. A wind came and blew the bag off the pile to a place where the Indians found it. Brown's surprised father asked the chief why he would give him such a valuable bag. The chief said that "in a dream he had been told to give it to the first white man who did something kind for his family because someday giving this bag would bring good to the Indians."<sup>259</sup> After Brown's father showed him the bag and told him its story, saying that one day the bag would belong to him, Brown began to have a repeating dream of despair and renewal among indigenous people. The dream stopped suddenly after he visited a destitute Shoshone reservation when he was nine years old.<sup>260</sup>

Later in his life, Brown's dream was interpreted for him by an Otomi/Olmec Indian from central Mexico who introduced Brown to the prophecy of "Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent," which provided a link to the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>261</sup> Brown established Naturegraph Publishing in 1946, specializing in American Indian stories, prophecies, and natural phenomena. In 1962 Naturegraph published *Warriors of the Rainbow: Strange and Prophetic Dreams of the Indian People* followed in 1963 by *Four Remarkable Indian Prophecies* as a "capstone or conclusion" to *Warriors of the Rainbow*.<sup>262</sup> Brown wrote that these four prophecies were "somehow missed" in his research for *Warriors of*

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<sup>258</sup> Brown, *Warriors*, 17.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., *Warriors*, 18. The bag was later identified as Crazy Horse's Pipe Bag. Also see: Lionel Little Eagle, *Greengrass Pipe Dancers* (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph, 2000), 11-25.

<sup>260</sup> Brown, *Warriors*, 18-19.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., *Warriors*, 21-22. Barbara Brown identified the Otomi/Olmec Indian as sand painter David Villaseñor. Barbara Brown, personal communication, Nov 12, 2010.

<sup>262</sup> Brown, "Introduction," *Annie Kahn, Olin Karch, and Blu Mundy: Four Remarkable Indian Prophecies*, (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, 1963), 2.

*the Rainbow* but that they were “discovered” and given to Naturegraph “by the authors under whose name each prophecy appears.”<sup>263</sup> Brown explains that Naturegraph “had felt the lack” of a conclusion for *Warriors* but found themselves “unable to remedy” it until these prophecies came to light. Brown asserted,

Basically these four prophecies give us two essential bits of information that were missing in the *Warriors* book. They show that the psychic knowledge of the great Indian Holy Men of the days before the white conquest went far deeper than just a premonition of a great spiritual event that was to appear and regenerate their people, that sometimes their spiritual insight gave them knowledge of *actual* dates and *actual* signs by which the new Light of the Great Being could be recognized. This is exactly what the following prophecies do and in such a way so conclusive and so inspiring that only those blinded by prejudice will fail to seek carefully and with open minds for the evidences of a New Revelation and a New Day.<sup>264</sup>

Annie Kahn’s “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants” was one of the four “discovered” prophecies. A year later Brown reproduced his own version of Annie’s interpretations as a rhythmic chant in *Songs of the New Dawn*.<sup>265</sup> Perhaps, over many years and after numerous publications for, about, and by Native Americans, Brown’s establishment of Naturegraph could be seen as fulfilling the dream of the chief, which said something good would come to the Indians following the gifting of the pipe bag to Brown’s father.

### **Annie Kahn’s Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants**

Diné Bahá’í Annie Kahn was one of the organizers of the Great Council Fire Unity Conference at Pine Springs in 1962. As stated earlier, Brown says that Annie learned these “wonderful chants from her grandfather and the old medicine men” of the Navajo

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<sup>263</sup> Brown, “Introduction,” 2-3.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>265</sup> Vinson Brown, *Songs of the New Dawn* (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph, 1964), 10.

nation.<sup>266</sup> Although Annie's interpretation of these Navajo chants was published by Naturegraph a year after the Great Council Fire Unity Conference, no doubt the chants were a well-known sacred oral tradition in Diné culture that most adult Diné were familiar with prior to its being published. Annie's interpretation of the Navajo chants, written down together as one narrative, established a link with the Bahá'í Faith through two prophecies of a nine-pointed star and a chief with twelve feathers who would come from the east. The Diné chants contains powerful images of a restored universe and serves as the second eschatological narrative, in addition to the first eschatological narrative of the return of the Warrior Twins, which directly or indirectly influenced some Diné to accept the new religion. Annie first wrote down the oral prophecies of the chants that were handed down to her by her grandfather and then adds her own interpretation at the end of each chant in light of her becoming Bahá'í. Written in the flowing style of Navajo speech, the message of the nine chants gives a clear picture of Diné Bahá'í eschatological expectations and fulfillment (see Appendix B).<sup>267</sup>

### **First Sign: The Nine-Pointed Star**

Nine is an important number in Diné ceremonies because there are usually nine sets of nine songs or nine prayer chants conducted by the Diné singer leading the ceremony.<sup>268</sup> Some of the longer chants, such as in the Holy Way chants, take nine

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<sup>266</sup> Brown, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>267</sup> Annie Kahn, "Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants," in *Four Remarkable Indian Prophecies*, ed. Vinson Brown (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, 1963), 6-11. I was unable to interview Annie Kahn. However, for a rare glimpse of her life, see: Bobette Perrone, H. Henrietta Stockel, and Victoria Krueger, "Annie Kahn: The Flower That Speaks in a Pollen Way," in *Medicine Women, Curanderas, and Women Doctors* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 29-39.

<sup>268</sup> "Navajo Prophecy and its Fulfillment in the Bahá'í Faith" (private collection, n.d.), 2; Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 211.

nights to complete.<sup>269</sup> In addition, the Diné hogan is an eight-sided log house used for daily life, ceremonies, and prayer, but according to Diné prophecy, people will pray in nine-sided houses in the future.<sup>270</sup> Annie writes that the seventh chant stipulates that a nine-pointed star “must come from the east” and that its points symbolize completeness and the “love and unity of all religions, races, and nations.”<sup>271</sup> She then explains that “nine is the sign of the highest unity” because “all the numbers can be found in this one number.”<sup>272</sup> One of the three religious symbols of the Bahá’í Faith is the nine-pointed star. The Persian Bahá’í scholar Abu’l-Qásim Faizí wrote a brief history on the number nine within the Bahá’í Faith and gave several reasons for its significance: first, the Arabic alphabet represents numbers by attaching a numerical value to words.<sup>273</sup> In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá’u’lláh identifies the numerical value of Bahá as nine.<sup>274</sup> Bahá is the root word for Bahá’í, Bahá’u’lláh, and Allah-u-Abhá (God the Most Glorious), which is used as a greeting between Bahá’ís.<sup>275</sup> Second, Faizi said that “the Báb sent a tablet to Bahá’u’lláh with 360 derivatives of the word Bahá,” which “fulfilled the Islamic tradition” that the “Promised One” would reveal “the hundredth name of God—the ‘Qur’an contains ninety-nine names of God.’”<sup>276</sup> Third, other derivatives of nine, such as the Báb’s disciples, known as the “Eighteen Letters of the Living,” the nine doors found in all nine-sided Bahá’í temples, and the number of nine elected members serving on

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<sup>269</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 47.

<sup>270</sup> “Navajo Prophecy and its Fulfillment in the Bahá’í Faith,” 2.

<sup>271</sup> Kahn, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 2.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 2.

<sup>273</sup> Abu’l-Qásim Faizí, *The Greatest Name of God: The Explanation of the Greatest Name*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., *Bahá’í News*, October 1968 (Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States); 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of South Africa, 1998), 1- 20.

<sup>274</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa, Israel: The Universal House of Justice, 1992), 218.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 179; Faizí, *Greatest Name of God*, 1-20.

<sup>276</sup> Faizí, *Greatest Name of God*, 1- 20.



each Bahá'í religious institution are testimonial to the significance of nine in the Faith.<sup>277</sup> Faizí writes that “nine is the perfect number—it is on top of the ladder of numerical progressive elevation and is very mysterious, full of special qualities and potencies.”<sup>278</sup>

Such a convergence between an important Bahá'í religious symbol and the Diné prophecies in the Navajo chants concerning the appearance of a nine-pointed star, along with the racial and religious unity demonstrated at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference among its thousand-plus attendees from around the world, supported the chants' prophecy that “all races and religions will come together in unity under the sign of the nine-pointed star” and served as significant precursors of conversion for Diné Bahá'ís. In addition to those Diné who recognized or acknowledged the return of their eschatological Warrior Twins in the forms of the Twin Messengers of the Bahá'í Faith, the presence of the nine-pointed star as a Bahá'í religious symbol served as a strong indication and catalyst for those Diné who became Bahá'ís at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference.

### **Second Sign: The Chief with Twelve Feathers**

The second sign, prominent in the seventh Navajo chant, instruct the Diné to look for a “great chief with twelve feathers,” or twelve teachings that will bring “peace and unity.”<sup>279</sup> Annie interprets the great chief as Bahá'u'lláh, although throughout her interpretation of the chants she only alludes to the new religion, without actually naming it. Annie says that “if we search carefully we will find that these twelve principles of

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<sup>277</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 7; *Bahá'í Faith: Religion Renewed for a Changing World*, “Houses of Worship,” <http://www.bahai.us/bahai-temples> (accessed Oct 6 2010). Only eight Houses of Worship have been built around the world, one on each continent, with a ninth temple currently under construction in Santiago, Chile. The first temple built in Ashkabad, Turkestan, in 1908 was appropriated by the Soviet government in 1938 and demolished after an earthquake in 1962.

<sup>278</sup> Faizí, *Greatest Name of God*, 17-19.

<sup>279</sup> Kahn, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 4-5.

world unity have already come to the world and, even in this day, are beginning to bring people together in unity, understanding and love.”<sup>280</sup> Sandner writes that the number twelve has a “special significance for holiness and completion” in Diné cosmology.<sup>281</sup> He refers to a “very holy” sandpainting with a “special blessing” that is taken from the Blessing Way and depicts the “Twelve Holy People” in twelve panels, with each panel representing a principal power: yellow Earth, blue Sky, black Darkness, white Dawn, yellow sunlight, Sun, Talking God, Calling God, Male Corn, Female Corn, Corn Beatle Girl, and Pollen Boy.<sup>282</sup> In addition, Sandner notes there are twelve-word formulas connected with the chants that are “very sacred and not often recorded.”<sup>283</sup> Renowned sandpainter and Otomi/Olmec Bahá’í David Villaseñor (see Appendix C-4), when explaining the design of the “twelve sacred laws” incorporated into the Seed Blessing Way Chant in *Tapestries in Sand: The Spirit of Indian Sandpainting*, notes, “It is interesting that Christ had twelve disciples, the Sun has twelve signs of the Zodiac, there were twelve tribes of Israel, there are twelve months of the Christian calendar, and that the Bahá’í Dispensation, as revealed by Bahá’u’lláh, has twelve great principles.”<sup>284</sup> As a whole, the Diné Bahá’ís I interviewed accepted the twelve basic social and spiritual principles instituted by Bahá’u’lláh as symbolic of the twelve eagle feathers on the headdress of the Great Chief in the seventh chant.

In the eighth chant, titled the “Unity Chant” as opposed to the other chants, which are simply designated as “the chants,” multiple symbolisms of glory within the Bahá’í

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<sup>280</sup> Kahn, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 5.

<sup>281</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 211.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 211.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 211-12. These twelve-word formulas, repeated in an exact order, are said at specific times in the ceremonies. Sandner cites Reichard (1950:272). Bahá’u’lláh did not number his principles as 12, but they appear this way in many descriptions of his teachings.

<sup>284</sup> Villaseñor, *Tapestries in Sand*, 30.

writings and within Bahá'u'lláh's name serve to connect him to the "Great One."<sup>285</sup> In the Unity Chant, "the Great One" will "come like the dawn" and "gather His flock," bringing all the wandering sheep back together again. There are multi-layered symbolic images in the Unity Chant that relate to the sheep-herding economy of the Diné, their need to find wide-ranging pastures, and their lifestyle with its belief system of the importance of dawn-time. Diné Bahá'í Linda Wilson relates how her mother taught her and her siblings to pray at dawn-time:

So my mother would say, "When you say the early prayers, early morning, you're connecting yourself with the relatives in the next life and you're connecting with a life in this life. Not only are you connecting with the plant life, the earth, anything of mineral. You're connecting yourself with the animal life and even in the other worlds." So those prayers would be said, like four o'clock [a.m.] and during that time she said that it's the most purest air of this earth and of the universe connected together. That's why we say it. So she said, "When barely four o'clock, you see the morning star coming out, barely you put your corn pollen to the earth and you reach out as far around you as you can." And she was saying, "Not only are you saying a prayer for yourself, you're saying a prayer for the whole people. . . . She stood right by me and as I say mine. She had all her children line up beside her and she says her prayer, we say right along with her, "And this is for the people who are suffering. They don't know us, they don't know you, but you have to say a prayer for them. These are the instructions of the Holy People that came. These are the reasons why we say the prayers."<sup>286</sup>

Similar symbolic images are found in Bahá'í prayers: "I have risen from my couch at this dawntide when the Daystar of Thy oneness hath shone forth from the Dayspring of Thy will, and hath shed its radiance upon the whole world, according to what had been ordained in the books of Thy Decree."<sup>287</sup> Bahá'u'lláh enjoined his followers to attend dawn prayers in the nine-sided Bahá'í temples or Houses of Worship, titled the "Mashriqu'l-Adhkar," or "Dawning Place of the Mention of God," at the "hour of dawn,"

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<sup>285</sup> Kahn, "Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants," 6. This appears to be the only chant designated as the "Unity Chant," upper-cased, with all the other "chants" lower-cased, which sets it apart. See fn. 39.

<sup>286</sup> Linda Wilson, interview.

<sup>287</sup> *Bahá'í Prayers*, "Morning," 122.

although “any time from the earliest dawn of day, between dawn and sunrise, or even up to two hours after sunrise” is acceptable.<sup>288</sup>

Two more feather principles are specifically noted in the fourth chant and the eighth chant that served as part of the catalyst for conversion.

**Feather Principle: Removal of Prejudices.** Annie describes the coming of the “New Day” (new religion) in the fourth chant as akin to “the birth of a new baby.”<sup>289</sup> The new religion is clean and fresh in the same way that a new baby is because the new religion has “none of the prejudices and misunderstandings that the older religions have accumulated down through the centuries.”<sup>290</sup> Elimination of prejudices from a Bahá’í standpoint applies to racial, religious, social, and economic prejudices. Part of Diné Bahá’í Johnny Nelson’s delight in the new religion was the encouragement from the Bahá’ís attending the Great Council Fire Unity Conference not only to keep, but to use his corn pollen, sacred to him and to those with whom he conducts ceremonies in his capacity as a medicine man. In his interview, Nelson speaks with carefulness about some religious prejudice from the Christian community on the reservation experienced by himself and his friend, Diné Bahá’í medicine man, Jacky Wilson. Wilson, who walks with difficulty, had his daughter bring him to Nelson’s hogan when he learned an interview was taking place. Nelson remembers what they were told at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference:

And a lot of these Christianity, they have said to, said to us that you, you really need to, ahm, discard all your belongings and paraphernalia, burn it. But Bahá’ís, they say, keep it. And pray with it. And keep your language, tradition and culture.

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<sup>288</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 226.

<sup>289</sup> Kahn, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 3.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 3-4.

It's very, very good, and he [Jacky Wilson] accepted in that way. And prayers, he still keeps going with it, and chants. It is one.<sup>291</sup>

Nelson remembered home-front pioneer Amos Gibson “coming around” to tell Johnny and his family about the new religion prior to the Council Fire. Gibson, an African American with Native American heritage, was one of the first home-front pioneers to the Navajo reservation (see Appendix C-5). Dick and Mary Wright were home-front pioneers contemporary with the Gibsons. I asked Mary Wright if it was unusual to see an African American on the Navajo reservation and if the Diné displayed any prejudice towards him or his white wife:

There wasn't that many [African Americans] in the Gallup and Reno areas, when I stop to think about it. As far as I know there were no prejudices. There was no prejudice toward them, I don't think. He did well. He was well-liked and well-respected and he taught in a couple different places. Fort Defiance and Lukachukai, those two places I know for sure where he taught school and he did fine. And Mary, his wife, they both taught school.<sup>292</sup>

The Diné Bahá'ís knew that the home-front pioneers had come from a variety of previous religious backgrounds, and they observed the racial differences among the Bahá'ís both prior to and at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference (see Appendix C- 5, 10 and 11). Gibson and the other home-front pioneers served as examples of both religious and racial unity that fulfilled the prophecies in the second and fourth chants, which demonstrated a religious and racial unity that Annie interpreted as “clean and fresh” of old prejudices while practicing the “true love” that the Holy Medicine Men had said in the chants that would come at “the time of the end.”<sup>293</sup>

**Feather Principle: Oneness.** In the second chant Annie quotes one of the “Holy Medicine Men” who said that the “Time of the End” is like two stages: one stage is that

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<sup>291</sup> Nelson and Wilson, interview.

<sup>292</sup> Wright, interview by author.

<sup>293</sup> Kahn, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 2-3.

the “Spirit of the People” shall live again, and the second stage is that “people shall melt into one,” meaning, Annie writes, that “true love” between people will be practiced. Annie affirms in the third chant that the “love of the Great Spirit and of mankind that comes in the New Day is so great that all the world’s afflictions and its dangers can in no way harm us.”<sup>294</sup> The new spiritual and social laws, laid down in the Bahá’í covenants and instituted through its administrations, call for a world-wide federal system that unites all nations, races, creeds, and classes and safeguards the autonomy, personal freedoms, and initiatives of all people—the “melting” that may allow the ancient chants’ “true love” among people to be practiced. I argue that the chants’ prediction of “true love practiced between people” has become evident at NABI since its founding, evident between the significant numbers of non-Diné Bahá’ís who have come to NABI from around the country (and the world) to provide voluntary services to the Diné, both Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í. I also argue that the long years of sociological and economic deprivations suffered by the Diné, along with the prophecies of the ancient chants and the Warrior Twins, prepared the “ground” of the Diné spirit for what they experienced as the comforting Bahá’í message of acceptance, acknowledgement, and spiritual renewal so familiar to the Diné from their oral traditions contained within these eschatological narratives.

**Beauty as Equality.** The eighth chant or Unity Chant also refers to the Beauty Way Chant, and says that “in the Day of Unity, you will walk in beauty; the beauty will walk before you; the beauty will walk behind you; you will be surrounded by beauty.”<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Kahn, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 3.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 6.

The Diné philosophy of *hozho*, or walking in beauty and harmony, *Sa'ah naaghi Bik'e Hozho*, with a balanced mutual respect among human beings, also matches up with the Bahá'í principle of equality between women and men. Diné Bahá'ís recognize the Bahá'í principle of equality between women and men as another expression of the Beauty Way Chant and as another validation of their own matrilineal and matrilocal culture expressed in the new religion's teachings, which added another impetus to the becoming Bahá'í process. Alfred Kahn, Jr. speaks with a passion when he combines his understandings of walking in beauty with the ideals of Bahá'í prayer, serving others, the principle of gender equality, and the status of Diné women:

It seems like on the Navajo reservation, there is an understanding that every person has a responsibility to make everything in their world better. It has to do with prayer. I think for a Navajo person everything is prayer. You walk in beauty. Everything you do has to do with a spiritual reality. All your actions have a consequence. So if you make good decisions your whole life, you can affect the world positively. Navajos understand that. Hum, you turn to a medicine man; sometimes they have this vision, this understanding. They have a gift for healing, but anybody can be a medicine man. You train, you learn it, you know. Everyone has a capacity to serve and to attain. Nobody can say that they are special. Everyone has the capacity to become what they want to be, choose to be. I think even [non-Diné] women have an understanding of Navajo that is distorted because I don't think western society can understand matriarchal society. Like women have almost a higher station than men. Men serve women and women make decisions. Women inherited, the land was passed down in their name. Everything went through the women and men were servants. Men worked and respected women. So there is that connection with the Bahá'í Faith, you know.<sup>296</sup>

The religious imagery of beauty language that Annie conveys in the Navajo chants connects with the beauty language found in the Bahá'í writings. Annie writes that “again in another place in the chants He [the Great One] says that those who speak with beautiful speech will lead the world to beauty and He says the center of this beautiful

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<sup>296</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

speech comes from a Holy Mountain.”<sup>297</sup> Annie identifies the holy mountain as Mt. Carmel in Haifa, Israel, now covered with expansive and beautiful gardens at the site of the Bahá’í World Centre, and asks, “Is this not the most holy mountain in the world?”<sup>298</sup> Annie connects the Bahá’í gardens on Mt. Carmel with the prophecy of Isaiah 35:1-2, and says, “This is closely linked with the Promised Day of the New Spirit when ‘the desert shall rejoice, and blossom like the rose.’”<sup>299</sup> Annie explains that from Mt. Carmel “we are beginning to hear the Message of Beauty and of the Spirit that is awakening the World.”<sup>300</sup>

## Summary

An electronic resource library of the world’s religious literature uses a “unique book-centered research engine” called *Ocean*, which houses 171 authoritative Bahá’í documents.<sup>301</sup> A survey of *Ocean* returned 1,899 sentences that employed the word beauty. In one document, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to the “beauty of unity,” the “Spiritual beauty [a reference to Christ],” the “beauty of the Kingdom [of God],” the “beauty of the oneness of humanity, of love, and of brotherhood,” and the “beauty of a real union [marriage].”<sup>302</sup> In another document, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to nature reflected in “the perfect majesty and beauty of a tree,” and trees as “adorned with utmost beauty and perfection” to demonstrate spiritual ideals and values.<sup>303</sup> Samples from a variety of

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<sup>297</sup> Kahn, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 6.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 6.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 6

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 6.

<sup>301</sup> Bahá’í Education: Resources for Advancing the Frontiers of Bahá’í Education, “OCEAN: Personal Research Library,” <http://www.bahai-education.org/ocean/> (accessed 6/29/2010).

<sup>302</sup> ‘Abdu’l- Bahá, *Abdu’l- Bahá in London*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London: UK Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 12, 40, 39, 54, 90.

<sup>303</sup> ‘Abdu’l- Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 120, 129, 27.



documents on Ocean show titles of Bahá'u'lláh as “the Divine Beauty,” the “Abhá Beauty,” the “Blessed Beauty,” and the “Ancient Beauty.” Bahá'u'lláh also refers to other divine messengers in terms of beauty: “recognizing the beauty of Jesus,” the “everlasting Beauty [Muhammad],” and “by their countenance the Beauty of God is revealed.”<sup>304</sup> Many terms of beauty refer to God in these documents, and Bahá'u'lláh often referred to his own revelation in terms of beauty: “recognizing the beauty of the Best Beloved;” “thou disbelieved in my Beauty and turned away from My Self;” “when the day star of my beauty is set [reference to his death];” and “Observe My commandments for the love of My beauty.”<sup>305</sup>

Such a multitude of conversive religious images within the Bahá'í writings connect the Diné's practice of beauty language with the tangible proof of beauty found in the Bahá'í gardens that blanket the formerly barren slopes of Mt. Carmel. These conversive religious images may also fit Catherine Bell's idea of practice, which is “descriptive of human nature and all human activity” as a way to be more “prescriptive in action.”<sup>306</sup> I argue that the term “descriptive” paints a picture in words of what and how humans do, act, and be. “Prescriptive” prescribes an action, which can be a prescription for a means of correction to remove imperfections, to create balance and harmony, and to bring about a healing for whatever ails an individual or a culture. In the eighth chant, Annie demonstrates that the Diné concept of walking in beauty is a prescriptive act:

In the Day of Unity you will walk in beauty; the beauty will walk before you; the beauty will walk behind you; you will be surrounded by beauty. Through the beautiful writings of a new Prophet of God, these meanings will become very clear. Man himself in this New Age has found ways to create beauty. With all

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<sup>304</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 20, 27, 53.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, *Gleanings*, 94, 143, 332.

<sup>306</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory/Ritual Practice*, 75.

these beautiful things we must now have beautiful minds. With beautiful minds we will talk in beauty. The speech of all men will be in beauty.<sup>307</sup>

Annie Kahn became more prescriptive in action, for herself, her family, and her culture, when she made the choice to interpret ancient prophecies of her Diné ancestors by writing down the chants, following her decision to become Bahá'í. Bell redefines practice in her own terms as a *redemptive hegemony*, which includes the ability to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world.<sup>308</sup> Clearly, Annie saw her worldview and those of her family and relatives as *reconfigured* by their acknowledgement and acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith—a worldview that gave Annie the *power* to interpret the Navajo chants as a redemptive hegemony for herself and her Diné culture.

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<sup>307</sup> Kahn, "Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants," 5-6.

<sup>308</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory/Ritual Practice*, 81.

## CHAPTER SIX

### BAHÁ'Í INSTITUTIONS: EXAMINING THE RELIGIOUS MATRIX

The Bahá'í Faith, like all religions, does not occur in a physical vacuum. Each religion must have both physical matrices, such as churches, temples, schools, and other institutions, and non-physical matrices composed of speaking and acting behaviors or activities such as social events, committee meetings, devotional meetings, and instructional classes that take place within those physical structures. In the Bahá'í Faith, a structure called the House of Worship, or *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* in Arabic, is situated on each continent.<sup>309</sup> Bahá'ís do not build “churches,” but communities in most metropolitan centers have enough members to support a Bahá'í Center, which may be a rented or owned facility, sometimes a renovated home, business, or small school. I examine several aspects of the Bahá'í Faith in this chapter that I define as part of the Diné Bahá'í matrix, including a prayer hogan, the Native American Bahá'í Institute, and the community Feast, which is a designated time for spiritual reflection, taking care of business, and socializing common to Bahá'ís everywhere.

Rambo writes that the “process of religious change takes place in a dynamic force of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations.”<sup>310</sup> Rambo defines religious institutions as the matrix or womb in which the process of change in belief and behavior is given form on all levels of religious human activity.<sup>311</sup> I use the term *religious matrix* to define those womb-like institutions of development and growth that gave birth to the Bahá'í administrative structure. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá used the developing

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<sup>309</sup> “Houses of Worship,” <http://www.bahai.us/bahai-temple> (accessed July 20, 2010).

<sup>310</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 5.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 11.

embryo in the matrix of its mother's womb to metaphorically explain different aspects of physical creation and spiritual creation:

In the matrix of the mother we were the recipients of endowments and blessings of God, yet these were as nothing compared to the powers and graces bestowed upon us after birth into this human world. Likewise if we are born from the matrix of this physical and phenomenal environment into the freedom and loftiness of the life and vision spiritual, we shall consider this mortal existence and its blessings as worthless by comparison.<sup>312</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh laid the foundations for the future Bahá'í Administrative Order in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Book of Laws), and 'Abdu'l-Bahá later confirmed the "supreme institutions" of the Guardianship of the Cause and of the Universal House of Justice with the "authority and guarantee of divine guidance decreed by Bahá'u'lláh for the Universal House of Justice on all matters which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book."<sup>313</sup> Shoghi Effendi referred to the institution of the Guardianship and the institution of the Universal House of Justice as the "Twin Successors" of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.<sup>314</sup> Shoghi Effendi, addressing the "community of the believers of the North American continent, at once the prime mover and pattern of the future communities," refers to the "Golden Age" of the religion in the far future when the religion has reached its full potential:

What mysteries could 'Abdu'l-Bahá have contemplated except the mysteries of that embryonic World Order now evolving within the matrix of His Administration? What righteousness if not the righteousness whose reign that Age and that Order can alone establish? What freedom but the freedom which the proclamation of His sovereignty in the fullness of time must bestow?<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 90.

<sup>313</sup> Universal House of Justice, "Introduction," *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 3.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, "Introduction," *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 3.

<sup>315</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, 6.

The religious institutions established on the Navajo reservation are a function of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and this chapter examines the dynamics of change and belief for those Diné Bahá'ís within those institutions.

As discussed previously in chapter two on the history of the religion, the Universal House of Justice had not yet been established in 1962, when the Great Council Fire Unity Conference was held at Pine Springs. The Bahá'í Faith, while developing on a worldwide scale, was still organizing as a new religion. Based on the grassroots initiatives of its members who follow the structural plan for divinely ordained local institutions as outlined by Bahá'u'lláh and set in motion by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the religion's Local Spiritual Assemblies adhere to their local governmental civil boundaries for their areas of jurisdiction. Spiritual Assemblies, forerunners of future Houses of Justice, are authorized to supervise the publishing of literature, instigate teaching programs, and oversee devotional services at both the local level and the national levels.<sup>316</sup> Starting at the local level, individual Bahá'ís become “registered groups” when two or more members reside in a defined civil area of a county or township. A Local Spiritual Assembly is elected when there are nine adult Bahá'ís in a civil area who are age twenty-one or over. When there are enough Local Spiritual Assemblies in a country to support a national institution, representative delegates elect the country's National Spiritual Assembly. As discussed previously, the first international convention was held in 1963 to elect the Universal House of Justice for the first time.<sup>317</sup> The “Administrative Order,” encapsulated within the laws and institutions of the religion, corresponds to the “Most Great Peace” of its

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<sup>316</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 59.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, *Bahá'í Faith*, 59, 64, 66-67.

Greater Covenant, which contains a “pattern for a future society that will bring about the unification of the world.”<sup>318</sup>

The Bahá’í matrix of the administrative order included the Diné as needed and respected members of a world community while advocating that each Diné can find truth for oneself through the principle of independent investigation of truth. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred to it as the first principle: “The first is the independent investigation of truth; for blind imitation of the past will stunt the mind. But once every soul inquireth into truth, society will be freed from the darkness of continually repeating the past.”<sup>319</sup> This principle alone was especially empowering and appealing to Diné Bahá’ís. Such positive reinforcement of independence of choice and action addressed the Diné’s need for autonomy in light of their history, when choices were denied them, especially in the arenas of self-governance and education of their children. Self-governance extended into the clergyless administrative realm. Local Spiritual Assemblies function on the Bahá’í principle of consultation, in which all elected members have an equal voice in overseeing the affairs of their individual religious communities while learning how to apply the Faith’s universal principles and guidelines. The Diné Bahá’ís witnessed their much-loved home-front pioneer Amos Gibson’s election to their National Spiritual Assembly in 1960, followed in 1963 by his election to the first Universal House of Justice.<sup>320</sup> Without doubt, even more validating to the Diné Bahá’ís was the election of two Kahn brothers to the NSA of the United States. Franklin Kahn was elected in a by-election in November 1968 and served until April 1981(see Appendix C-2; Appendix E-1 and 7). Chester Kahn was

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<sup>318</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*, 37-39.

<sup>319</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections*, 248.

<sup>320</sup> Wright interview; personal correspondence, National Bahá’í Archives Office.

also elected in a by-election in 1982 and served until 1989 (see Appendix C-2; Appendix E-2). These two Diné Bahá'ís were the first American Indians to serve on the national governing body of the new religion, while numbers of their relatives and Diné friends served in other local and regional administrative positions.

### **Local Spiritual Assemblies as an Administrative Matrix**

It was not enough for Diné Bahá'ís to know the oral stories of the Warrior Twins and the Unity Chant and to believe that they had been fulfilled by the coming of the Bahá'í Faith to the Navajo reservation. Chester Kahn remembered that few Diné Bahá'ís were “deepened” enough in the 1960s and 1970s to manage their own Local Assemblies after the Assemblies were formed. The task of becoming deepened falls to every Bahá'í to gain knowledge about their religion’s history and its institutions and purposes, and learn how to implement its teachings in order to “live the life” that designates a spiritual rejuvenation through perseverance and commitment.<sup>321</sup> Deepening requires not only the proper spirit, concentration, and meditation, but also requires the personal discipline and effort needed to devote the time, attention, and care necessary to “unravel the meanings which lie enshrined in the Revealed Word—deepening is like a skill or art which must be acquired through effort.”<sup>322</sup> Chester lived in Flagstaff at that time and the distances between Diné Bahá'í believers were a great barrier to carrying on the deepening work:

And we lost a lot of our people who were interested because we lived so far apart. We don't live in villages just to see one person. We had to drive a hundred, two hundred miles to see them, to see that person and so forth and this was the problem. How difficult the deepening process was in light of the vastness of the

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<sup>321</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon*, 16.

<sup>322</sup> Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez, “The Conservative Turn in Bahá'í Scripture: An Intersubjective Communications Model for Bridging Global Diversity,” *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 17, no 14 (March-December 2007): 46. De Ramírez quotes a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, January 21, 1993.

reservation. And so, this was to say, is to say that this was the beginning of the Bahá'í Faith here on the Navajo Nation.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Kahn says, they had formed some Local Spiritual Assemblies “here and there at the Chapter level . . . but there again,”

Very few were deepened, not all of them, ah, so it [the deepening process] went up and down since that time. However, during the '70s we continued to make efforts, and we had several Local Spiritual Assemblies, and we had gatherings like the one we had at Pine Springs and different parts of the reservation. A lot of people would come. And up in Utah, ah, people in that area heard about the Bahá'í Faith but not too many became Bahá'ís. And they still have the Local Spiritual Assembly up there. So the whole problem was what we call deepening where they really understand the history and the whole purpose, the process of the Bahá'í Faith. A lot of them didn't, weren't deepened, so they drifted. We don't see them anymore.<sup>323</sup>

In the early years of the religion on the reservation, with few roads and fewer telephones, it was difficult to get Diné Bahá'ís together for the election of their Local Spiritual Assembly. The Palmbergs recalled their struggle to oversee elections that are held every year worldwide on April 21, the first day of Ridvan. Sandy Palmberg explains,

Somebody gave Evangeline Kahn a list of people who were Bahá'ís, and she'd find out if they were still Bahá'ís. Those who said 'no' were crossed off the list. Ridvan coincided with spring lambing, and we would have to go and physically round up the people. Had to go a month before and two weeks before, got absentee ballots, then a week before, then night of election, mid-afternoon started picking people up; had to feed them, was how an LSA was maintained. The Chapter system was so big; lots of problems with logistics.<sup>324</sup>

Bruce Palmberg describes the peripatetic lifestyle on the reservation, which contributed to the difficulties in getting Diné Bahá'ís to vote:

People who lived in winter houses would leave their houses for spring houses; it depended on where the grass was at. Winter time, they moved close to the trading post. When the *Bahá'í News* came out, the trader gave us a great big stack of unclaimed *Bahá'í News*. Lots of Navajos couldn't speak English, much less read.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Chester Kahn, interview.

<sup>324</sup> Sandy Palmberg, interview.

<sup>325</sup> Bruce Palmberg, interview. Bruce refers to the then-monthly newspaper sent to all adherents.



**Consultation as a Religious Matrix.** Local Spiritual Assemblies function on the Bahá'í principle of “consultation,” the highest form of conversive or verbal communication and the underlying requisite of community life, in which all members, even children, can have an equal voice in the affairs of the religious community.<sup>326</sup> Having an equal voice means more than just voicing one’s opinion. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ gently admonished members of local and national assemblies to enter their meetings with “absolute love for each other” and free from estrangement, for all are “the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven.”<sup>327</sup> Members are to proceed with courtesy, dignity, care, and moderation to search out the truth through free and full expression of their views. Each is encouraged to disclose his or her thoughts, and if a difference of opinion arises in the assembly, the majority of voices “must prevail.”<sup>328</sup> John Kolstoe describes consultation as the “bedrock of a Bahá'í community,” which allows “both a means of jointly considering something and a means of allowing an idea to grow”:

There is a unique blend of experiences, knowledge, minds, hearts, feelings, hopes and fears. In a condition of suspended judgment these combine to allow the development of an idea, a transformation comes about when there is a sincere exchange. Generally the final result is quite different from either the original thought or any of the specific additional contributions. It is neither a compromise nor the simple addition of one thought to another; it is a new creation.<sup>329</sup>

Diné Bahá'ís feel more comfortable and familiar with the process of consultation as a natural outgrowth of their own indigenous ways of time-honored reflective and paced oral communications than do their non-native counterparts. We have seen

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<sup>326</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 165.

<sup>327</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages, 1922-1932* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1928; 7<sup>th</sup> ed., 1974), 22-23; Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 165-67.

<sup>328</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 167.

<sup>329</sup> John E. Kolstoe, *Consultation, A Universal Lamp of Guidance*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1988), 8-9.

examples of this reflective process in the Diné interviews, where the pauses and ahmms form an integral part of their speech and lend emphasis to listening deeply. Being interrupted while one is talking conveys the highest form of rudeness and disrespect in Diné culture. Consultation in a mixed community, with non-native Bahá'ís who most likely did not have the same inflection in speech or the same cultural injunction against interruptions, surely was challenging for both sides. Professor of English and native-heritage Bahá'í Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez writes,

Within the framework of cultures in which most forms of communication are elicited and responded to fairly quickly at the levels of mind and passions, the much slower-paced and contemplative mode of conversive consultation, common among past cultures, is now distanced from our view and eludes our conceptual grasp. Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly urged his readers to 'ponder' in conjunctive thought that involves both mind and heart, thereby avoiding the divides that result in the extremes of unfeeling reason or uncontrolled emotion. This process that, for a literate world, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá need to declare and reiterate and explain again and again was part of the fabric of everyday life in oral cultures.<sup>330</sup>

De Ramírez defines conversive communication as a “collaborative, intersubjective, and relational co-creative articulation” with the transformative power to “bring diverse people and elements of the world together” through the “unifying power of deep, interpersonal connections” that require the engagement of hearts and spirits along with minds and senses to become “interactive speakers and listeners.”<sup>331</sup> Based on the Bahá'í principle of consultation included in *The Sacred Tree: Reflections on Native American Spirituality*, the authors, who are both native and Bahá'í, describe the process of conversive communication in a way readily understandable by indigenous people everywhere:

Respect the wisdom of the people in council. Once you give an idea to a council or a meeting it no longer belongs to you. It belongs to the people. Respect

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<sup>330</sup> De Ramírez, “The Conversive Turn,” 34-35.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., “The Conversive Turn,” 27, 46.

demands that you listen intently to the idea of others in council and that you do not insist that your idea prevail. Indeed you should freely support the ideas of others, if they are true and good, even if those ideas are quite different from the ones you have contributed. The clash of ideas brings forth the spark of truth. . . . Once a council has decided something in unity, respect demands that no one speak secretly against what has been decided. If the council has made an error, that error will become apparent to everyone in its own time.<sup>332</sup>

Consultation among the local Diné Bahá'ís, their home-front pioneers, and the institutions at the national level laid the foundation for the native-based Bahá'í institute on the Navajo reservation. It was through the consultative process of conversive communication that the Native American Bahá'í Institute came into being and developed, and through the injunction to “respect the wisdom of the people in council” that those Diné Bahá'ís who were “deepened,” although not always in agreement, complied with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s injunction to support the majority of voices.<sup>333</sup>

### **The Native American Bahá'í Institute as Religious Matrix**

The Native American Bahá'í Institute (NABI), located in a high corner of the reservation, down an isolated sand-covered and partially paved asphalt road lined with scrubby cedars, pinion-junipers, and cacti, serves 16,000 of the 24,000 square miles of the Navajo reservation (see Appendix D-1 and 2). Included are 110 Navajo and five Hopi communities in Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico, with twelve non-native communities immediately adjacent to the Navajo nation sometimes served by NABI activities.<sup>334</sup> Metropolitan cities are hundreds of miles away. A reliable telephone and internet service has been slow to arrive in this corner of the reservation. Although there are indigenous Bahá'ís on nearly every Indian reservation in the United States and on a number of the

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<sup>332</sup> Judie Bopp, Michael Bopp, Lee Brown, and Phil Lane, *The Sacred Tree: Reflections on Native American Spirituality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada: Four Worlds Development Press, 1985), 78.

<sup>333</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 165-167.

<sup>334</sup> “NABI,” 32.

First Nations reserves in Canada, NABI is the only native-oriented official Bahá'í institution in North America. Established near Pine Springs in 1977 by a small group of about thirty Diné Bahá'ís who became Bahá'ís either at the Great Council Fire or afterwards, NABI provides a meeting place suitable to the unique needs and cultural background of the Diné.<sup>335</sup> Chester Kahn's story of how NABI came about conveys a remembered poignancy that connects back to the sheep economy of the Dinés when they returned after imprisonment:

We decided we needed a center where we could bring the people together to deepen them, to teach them. And, we start[ed] looking for a place to establish this center. We looked for a year, or over a year, and we finally found one here at a place called Burnt Water, which is just a little ways from where I live here on the Navajo Nation, because there was a trading post going out of business and they wanted to sell. In the old days these trading posts were given free land to build trading posts, something like a square mile, because in those days they, the traders, bought sheep, lambs every year from them [the Diné ranchers]. They needed space for the sheep to graze and so forth, the lambs to graze and so forth. There was to be an economy back at the beginning of, after the return from the prison, from Fort Sumner where they were imprisoned for four years there. They began a new life again where they began raising sheep. Ah, so anyway, this trading post was out of business and they wanted to sell their land, we found out. So we said, "Let us see if we can find some funds, some moneys to buy a piece of land, some of that land." And we found out at the National office [NSA] that there was moneys available where an individual had donated a property. I forget what they call it, when somebody dies and leaves their property to the Faith. This person, an anonymous person, said that these funds would go for the Native American teachings. So, anyway, we found that out, and that was what we were told by the National office. And they said we can use that money to buy the property. So we said, "Fine. That sounds great!" So 40 acres was bought and we started building some buildings there and it was called the Native American Baha'i Institute.<sup>336</sup>

According to *In Service to the Common Good: The American Bahá'í*

*Community's Commitment to Social Change*, Ridvan, 2008, the case report from NABI

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<sup>335</sup> "NABI," 32.

<sup>336</sup> Chester Kahn, interview.

states that the then-named Navajo Bahá'í Institute was established in 1977.<sup>337</sup> However, NABI's Web site reports that in 1978, forty Bahá'ís from Navajo-Hopiland were invited to attend the annual Bahá'í National Convention held in Wilmette, Illinois, along with other native Bahá'ís and home-front pioneers, to honor the achievement of establishing twenty-five LSAs on Indian reservations as a part of the goals of the then-current five-year teaching plan.<sup>338</sup> The Diné Bahá'ís announced to the convention their desire to build a "Bahá'í place" on their reservation. The National Assembly members, after a hurried meeting in the midst of the convention, announced their support and approval. NABI's Web site says that two years later (1980) the land was purchased and the institute began. NABI administrators reported in the case study that the National Assembly, along with individual contributors from around the country, "contributed substantially" to the new institute's development; \$40,000 was paid for the trading post land and \$100,000 was invested in facilities that included hiring professional educators to manage the Institute's administration.<sup>339</sup>

Facilities grew to include four modest residential buildings, five trailers, and one moderate-size house, which paid staff share with multiple volunteers who come for various lengths of service over the course of a year. The main office is a converted three-bedroom trailer situated at the entrance to the campus. The renovated dorm facilities can now accommodate 40 men and 40 women with three private areas and two large bathroom areas with stalls and showers. The classroom building houses an adult classroom, children's classroom, indoor bathroom, small library, and small foyer.

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<sup>337</sup> "NABI," 31.

<sup>338</sup> "About NABI—Its History," Native American Bahá'í Institute, (accessed April 11, 2010) <http://www.nativeamericanbi.org/about.asp>.

<sup>339</sup> "NABI," 31.

Additions in recent years include the “Big Hogan,” which contains a large dining area that is also used for other large programs (see Appendix D-6 and 7). A new extension off the Big Hogan is another hogan-shaped structure that houses a commercial kitchen, which replaced the older and much smaller kitchen. The old kitchen was converted into another indoor bathroom facility to supplement the still-in-use outhouse that had been the closest facility to the Big Hogan.<sup>340</sup> A new concrete sidewalk circles around the Prayer Hogan and the Big Hogan, passing by the new outdoor, hogan-shaped, open-air arena situated between them. The part of the campus adjacent to the gravel chapter road is surrounded by a simple wood-rail fence with a small sign attached to it announcing the presence of the Institute at the gated entrance. According to NABI co-administer Alice Bathke, these modern' renovations were made upon recommendations from the elders, especially those using wheelchairs for ease of transportation from one area to another.<sup>341</sup>

Jeff and Helen Kiely were NABI's appointed administrators in 1985 when some alarm and confusion ensued among its originating Diné Bahá'ís over the Institute's proposed name change from the Navajo Bahá'í Institute to the Southwest Native American Bahá'í Institute. The September 1985 report to the national office contained Diné Bahá'í Helen Kiely's statement on NABI's dilemma of growth: “The physical nature of the Institute was intended by the project's initiators to arise out of the consultation, expertise and labor of the Navajo friends, as an evidence and symbol of a new strength, self-reliance and independence born of the Navajos' faith in the Promised One.”<sup>342</sup> *In Service* noted that it took some time to find the best use of this assistance from outside the Diné Bahá'ís own labors and to achieve results—time that required the

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<sup>340</sup> “About NABI.” Part of this description comes from the author's visits to the Institute.

<sup>341</sup> National Review Office of the Baha'is of the United States, by correspondence, September 9, 2011.

<sup>342</sup> “NABI,” 31.

consultative “clash of differing opinions” before the “spark of truth” could be produced in order to resolve the confusion created by the name change. The final and more inclusive name change to Native American Bahá’í Institute challenged the Diné adherents in ways incomprehensible to their non-Diné counterparts, who had not experienced the Dinés’ history of loss of autonomy and freedom to run their own affairs. Chester Kahn explained his thoughts, feelings, and ultimate acceptance in a hesitant yet straightforward and non-critical way:

At the beginning we wanted it just for the Navajo institute or center because Navajo is a big nation. It’s lots of people! Today, we have something like a quarter of a million Navajos. I often think now in looking back, it should have been Navajo instead of all Native Americans because it is too far for them to come, like the Lakotas, the Lakota people, there are some Bahá’ís up there on some of these reservations. It’s just too far to travel. Ah, and because the money was given to us by the National, the National office took it over. Some of us were thinking that the Navajos would totally run the whole thing. We do things, ah, on the reservation, and this is, ah, if it went that way, things would have been different, I think. And so anyway that’s the home called NABI, the Native American Baha’i Institute that’s in operation now. It’s doing pretty well in teaching the Faith and deepening the Bahá’ís and so forth. Ah, and my community is in, NABI is in our community [Chapter House civil boundary], so we work very closely with, ah, we have a Local Spiritual Assembly here for several years now and things are going really well. I just often wonder if, hoping that someday other areas all over the country, all over the United States, things would develop like the Navajo Nation where people are becoming Bahá’ís and taking their responsibilities to run their own activities, administrative, teaching activities, deepening. However, that’s not happening on other reservations. So that’s kind of the history of our Faith here in the Navajo Nation.<sup>343</sup>

Following consultations among local Bahá’ís and between local Bahá’ís and the national office, the decision was made that NABI’s development would continue to be a grass-roots initiative whose strength would be drawn from the local population it intended to serve. Seeing the challenges as “unique and enormous,” the Institute, with nine permanent staff members, had by 2000 focused its goals away from providing all of

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<sup>343</sup> Chester Kahn, interview.

its services on campus (like the three national Bahá'í schools or conference centers around the country), and was instead designated by the National Spiritual Assembly as a regional training institute. As such, it came to focus on outreach and delivery of programs into the camps (clusters of extended family homes) and especially toward the 80% of the Diné population who were under the age of twenty-four. By 2004 programs designed to enhance participants' parenting skills were initiated in the reservation's Chapter Houses.<sup>344</sup> According to the 2008 case report, the Institute's record of programs in 1999 served nearly 10,000 individuals, with 2,000 in formal training, 6,000 in community development programs, and 2,000 more who attended Bahá'í outreach teaching programs. Core activities at the Institute included systematic study courses based on the Bahá'í writings, devotional gatherings, and children and youth classes. Alfred Kahn, Jr. has chosen to work with youth as a part of his religious service. Alfred clarifies 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promise to native peoples when talking about the education of youth,

It has two parts to it. It has the condition that we train and develop. It says, 'The native people, when properly trained and educated, will be so enlightened so as to illumine the whole world.' It was always conditional on that training and education, 'When properly trained and educated,' and the Navajo people need to re-arm themselves with the new weapons, to use a metaphor of the Monster Slayers. It takes the training and education. In the Bahá'í Faith right now something that has become really important to me is the Institute process. I've been working with junior youth and been part of the 'Institute process,' which has four core activities. One of them [core activity] is devotional gatherings, study circles, children's classes and junior youth groups. I've had a real kinship with that junior youth group because they have this particular role in life. We go through this transition phase where we begin to develop an identity. We begin to start making decisions and choices. And it's a native thing that takes place.<sup>345</sup>

Part of the Institute process that Alfred refers to is known as Ruhi study circles, in which information about the religion, its founders, and its teachings are organized in a

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<sup>344</sup> "NABI," 32-34.

<sup>345</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.



systematic way contained within seven workbooks. The Ruhi workbooks are based on developing a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í writings through a process of comprehensive reading, with questions and exercises at the end of each section. Their purpose is to develop the skills, spiritual insight and knowledge to contribute to building Bahá'í community life. The books progress from simple to difficult in their comprehension and exercises. Alfred, Jr. continues with his thoughts about providing service to the youth:

There was a ceremony associated with that [‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s promise]. It’s not part of the culture anymore. It’s Changing Man, Changing Woman Ceremony. For man it was the Warrior, there was a Warrior training that went on to develop yourself, to mature yourself. For women there was a Changing Woman ceremony in the Navajo. And in society there is nothing like that. There are so many junior youth between the ages of 12-15 that turn towards drugs, violence, and alcoholism, towards all these different things. We knew it traditionally that it was such an important time to train our junior youth to make sure that they understand their role in society and have a spiritual understanding. The Bahá'í Faith has brought the Institute process. The Universal House of Justice has told us all to be part of the Institute process and what I’ve been drawn to is the junior youth aspect because our society, once you turn 12, 13, 14, 15, you make a lot of choices and it becomes so self-involved. You have this need and once you develop an identity, you feel like you have to fill that need. A lot of times you get filled with the material solution of drugs, violence you know, sex, western culture of materialism that western culture provided. The way we combat it in the Institute process is by acquainting junior youth with their community. You redirect all that energy toward serving others.<sup>346</sup>

Psychiatrist and Bahá'í H. B. Danesh defines Bahá'í service as the “third element of the universal code of ethics emerging as a result of the evolution of humanity and its coming of age” and says that the immature behaviors humanity had as children and the rebellious, acting-out stages that adolescents go through are no longer “suitable” for an evolving, mature human society.<sup>347</sup> Danesh defines the first code as truthfulness, or truth,

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<sup>346</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

<sup>347</sup> H.B. Danesh, *The Psychology of Spirituality: From Divided Self to Integrated Self* (Wienacht, Switzerland: Landegg Academy Press, 1997), 164.

a “life-long quest” that involves the independent investigation of all things relating to human nature.<sup>348</sup> The second code requires a “fundamental unity that recognizes humanity’s oneness, based in the qualities of truth and love, without which, we cannot recognize that fundamental unity of the human race.”<sup>349</sup> Service to others, coupled with truth and unity, lead to humanity’s “age of maturity—the era of spiritual civilization.”<sup>350</sup>

Alfred, Jr. continues with his thoughts about service to others:

Service toward humanity is the most important and fundamental aspect of the Faith. You serve all mankind. If junior youth can take that to heart, understand it as their outlet as opposed to drugs, alcohol, and violence. There is a metaphor that comes along with that training that we understand that when you are a junior youth, it’s like you’re a branch. And if you’re bending a certain way, such as bending away from the sun and bending towards the earth, you grow in that certain way. You can be bent when you are a junior youth but after you turn 15-16, 20 to 30, it becomes very hard to bend back the tree towards the sun. Or bend back the tree from where it was directed. So, it’s those few crucial years you can guide that plant away from the material towards the spiritual. If you lose that chance, it becomes very hard. It’s not impossible, but it’s just that they are waiting for the guidance for attention to be paid to them, so their voice can be heard, so they can have a place in society.<sup>351</sup>

Alfred, Jr. ends his comments on service to youth by likening youth to the growth of a young tree. Danesh notes that in today’s “adolescent world,” people’s first impulse to service offered to them by others raises suspicion; however, service needs to be distinguished from charity. Danesh defines service as a reciprocal “act of generosity and assistance from an equal to an equal, while charity is giving from one who has to one who does not have.”<sup>352</sup> Humanity requires an “integrated lifestyle” of both charity and

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<sup>348</sup> Danesh, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 161-62.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., *Psychology of Spirituality*, 163-64.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., *Psychology of Spirituality*, 165.

<sup>351</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

<sup>352</sup> Danesh, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 165.

equal service for reciprocity to develop, in which egotism lessens, equality becomes established with others, and individualism becomes replaced with unity.<sup>353</sup>

Youth are also responsible for providing service to others, as well as service being provided to them. As an example, Thursdays are full days on the NABI campus, with the weekly community dinner popular with everyone (see Appendix D-7 and 8), especially with the Diné junior youth, who have a chance to congregate and to visit with each other. Youth, regaining a nearly lost Diné tradition, serve the elders at mealtime. Food from the evening meal, considered as sacred and healing in the context of a spiritual gathering in most native traditions, is available on side tables for the Diné to take home for later or for absent family members.<sup>354</sup> Prior to the 6:00 evening meal, NABI volunteers offer an hour-long weekly tutoring class to children and youth who need assistance with their homework, followed by another hour of children's classes while their parents are at devotions in the Prayer Hogan. Thursday dinners are often attended by medicine men, who are encouraged to offer their prayers in their Navajo language. The elderly Diné, who, if they are unable to attend and live close enough, may have their dinners delivered to them by one of the co-directors, Jerry and Alice Bathke, who were appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly in 1998. The Bathkes are both Bahá'ís and Alice Bathke is a Diné (see Appendix D-6). In addition to Diné attendance at the community dinner, often there are non-Diné Bahá'í guests who come to visit NABI and may give a short talk or presentation on some aspect of Bahá'í activities taking place in other parts of the country. Nancy Davis, then director of the National Assembly's Education and Schools Office, closed the 2008 report with the statement,

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<sup>353</sup> Danesh, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 165.

<sup>354</sup> "NABI," 33-34; NABI, <http://www.nativeamericanbi.org/about.asp> (accessed April 11, 2010).

Loving care for, and service to, the people served by the Institute has been a hallmark of the approach and staff at NABI. . . . Plans are essentially to continue the process, multiplying human resources through the institute process and continuing to build and strengthen relationships with the [larger] community.<sup>355</sup>

The Universal House of Justice urged Bahá'ís to “pursue your education and training for future service to mankind, offering as much of your free time as possible to activities on behalf of the Cause.” Those families who have their “life’s work” chosen and who already have families, are urged to “strive toward becoming the living embodiments of Bahá'í ideals, both in the spiritual nurturing of your families and in your active involvement in the efforts on the home front or abroad in the pioneering field.”<sup>356</sup> Next, I examine one of those efforts, the event of feasts held in individual homes.

**Feast as a Religious Matrix.** The Palmbergs remember when Diné Bahá'ís first broached the idea of a meeting place during a “Nineteen Day Feast” gathering held in 1970. According to the Bahá'í solar calendar instituted by the Báb, who “swept away” the names of pagan feasts and Roman holidays and replaced them with the “sublime attributes of God” such as Splendor, Glory, Beauty, and similar other names, the Bahá'í year has nineteen months of nineteen days each, with the first day of each month designated as a “Feast” day, called the Nineteen Day Feast.<sup>357</sup> Held in private homes or small community centers like NABI, Feast is a time set aside for the believers to come together. Accepted as divinely ordained, the Feast has three parts: 1) devotional, with writings, prayers, and music; 2) administrative, with reports from the LSA to the community, and consultative, with recommendations back to the LSA from the community; and 3) social, with time for visiting and refreshments. In the *Kitáb-Aqdas*,

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<sup>355</sup> “NABI,” 32.

<sup>356</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon*, 16.

<sup>357</sup> *Bahá'í Prayers and Selected Holy Writings*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007), 168; Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 154-155.

Bahá'u'lláh made Feast a spiritual law for his followers: “Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a Feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through earthly and heavenly means.”<sup>358</sup>

‘Abdu'l-Bahá reiterated that the “Nineteen Day Feast rejoiceth mind and heart. If this Feast be held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world.”<sup>359</sup>

Feast, as a new learning and deepening religious experience for Diné Bahá'ís, was a time of transition in understanding its importance as a divinely ordained religious institution. Yet, the structure of Feast, too, would have had familiar tones for the Diné, with their own similar gatherings of concord. According to the Palmbergs, they timed their Feasts early enough in the evening after sunset so that the Diné Bahá'ís could leave for dances or other traditional events as soon as the Feast was over. The Bahá'í day runs from sunset to sunset, so Feast either occurs after sunset on the date it falls on or begins before sunset on the following day.

During our interview the Palmbergs recollected when the idea of a “Bahá'í church” first came up during a Feast. Bruce said he remembered when

we had Feast in our trailer at Pine Springs in 1970. We were constantly picking up Navajo Bahá'ís to bring them to Feast. We asked the Navajo Bahá'ís at Feast, ‘What could the people do to help Bahá'ís to become known and to become Bahá'í?’ The answer was: ‘A Bahá'í Church!’

Sandy added her memory of that event when she said,

The Diné Bahá'ís needed a focal point, a physical place. We actually planned to build a nine-sided hogan. Later, we were at Alta and Jack Kahn’s and Alta and Jack asked, ‘Where was a nine-sided Hogan to be built?’ Bruce said to [the Kahns] to make an outline of the nine-sided Hogan, but it didn’t actually end up

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<sup>358</sup> *Bahá'í Prayers, Selected*, 164. Cites Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid., Selected*, 165. Cites ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.

there.<sup>360</sup>

Bruce laughed when he noted “there were a lot of little positive things; you don’t think you’re doing any good or people are not paying attention, so we’d have Feast before everyone was out drinking at a Squaw Dance!”<sup>361</sup> As frankly discussed by the Palmbergs, openly mentioned by Alfred Kahn, Jr. in his remarks, and forthrightly stated by Rúhíyyih Khánum, home-front pioneers needed to be “patient” with deepening issues, “loving” in spite of some Diné Bahá’ís disobeying the Bahá’í prohibitions against alcohol and drugs such as peyote, “understanding” of Diné culture and ingrained habits, and willing to “persevere” over the long run in their “service” to the Diné.<sup>362</sup>

**The Hogan as Religious Matrix.** The Palmbergs’ question of “there” for the nine-sided hogan during Feast day with the Diné Bahá’ís became NABI, a centering place of order for the Diné adherents. Historian of religion Mircea Eliade, in his classic work on myth, symbol, and ritual, provides a reference point for the study of NABI with his concept of the *imago mundi*, or a mirror image of the world as it was first constructed by divine action.<sup>363</sup> “Religious man,” Eliade wrote, “feels the need always to exist in a total and organized world, in a cosmos.”<sup>364</sup> Eliade defined an *imago mundi* as a square constructed from a central point and divided into four sections or horizons.<sup>365</sup> In the case of NABI, situated on the Navajo reservation between four sacred mountains or horizons, the NABI campus became a place of order for Diné Bahá’ís. At the center is the Prayer Hogan (see Appendix D-3 through 6), or Eliade’s empty space where “heaven” is

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<sup>360</sup> Palmbergs, interview. All of Jack and Alta Kahn’s nine adult children became Bahá’ís either before or after their parents did.

<sup>361</sup> Palmbergs, interview.

<sup>362</sup> Rúhíyyih Khánum, *Quickeners of Mankind*, 98.

<sup>363</sup> Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford, 2006), 194, 202.

<sup>364</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1957; 1987), 55-56; Pals, *Eight Theories*, 201-203.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, *Eight Theories*, 202.

depicted and where an *axis mundi*, or centerpost, “connects and supports heaven and earth and whose base is fixed in the world below.”<sup>366</sup> The Diné Bahá’ís need for a place of order was fulfilled, not only through the administrative structure of the new religion, but especially by the building of the NABI with its hogans, or *hoogans*, on the Navajo reservation.

Sandner places Eliade’s *imago mundi* squarely in the Diné prayer Hogan, which was “established by *Álltsé Hastiin*, First Man, as a miniature cosmos with its opening toward the east, its fork posts representing deities, and all the powers of the universe ranged in their appointed places on the north and south side around the center, which was also the center of the world.”<sup>367</sup> Diné Bahá’í Alfred Kahn, Sr., the youngest brother of those early founders of the Great Council Fire (see Appendix E-7), was five years old when he attended that momentous event. During his interview, held in NABI’s Prayer Hogan, Alfred, Sr. explained with reverent humor and a sense of delight the metaphor of the hogan:

Navajos built Hogans as a metaphor for the spiritual world based on honoring the four directions because anywhere one turns in the world, there is a spiritual world around you. Within the Hogan is healing through the sandpaintings and through other ceremonies, and we can tell our children and grandchildren about this wonderful, powerful healing. All this, all the sandpainting, is about healing. They put it right in the middle of the Hogan here. On the west side there past the fireplace is where you put the foot. So when they are praying, right and left foot and they sit down, it’s heaven! That’s healing for the patient. And come back with the Holy People to that place of safety and it’s all different. The symbol of the different spirit of healing, calling them, calling them like a Concourse on High, say come and look at your child, see your child having problems, having problems with themselves. Different ways or breathing or air, there is air ceremony. People will be coming here to be saying prayers, coming with whatever garbage you might have and leave it here and come back and say, “I feel better.” And I have great gratitude for the sun, the air, Mother Earth, and our

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<sup>366</sup> Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 92; Pals, *Eight Theories*, 202.

<sup>367</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 115.

Father Sky up there to bless us with the rain and cool us down for our people here, for our plants and animals and our beautiful Hogan.<sup>368</sup>

Alfred Kahn, Sr. speaks of two healing ceremonies held in a hogan that are connected to sandpaintings and holy wind, and which McNealy named “the most central and most sacred of stories.”<sup>369</sup> Framed Navajo sandpaintings, with the calligraphic Arabic emblem of the “Greatest Name, which translates into “O Thou Glory of Glories!” (see Appendix C-3), embedded in the centers of ancient Diné symbols, grace the timbered walls of the NABI Prayer Hogan and bring to mind the prophecies of the Unity Chant. Bahá’í prayer books, scattered around the low circular seating above the red dirt floor, give emphasis to the prayer Hogan as one aspect of the “religious matrix,” to use Rambo’s terminology, in which becoming Bahá’í continues to take place.<sup>370</sup> This is obviously an especially sacred place for Alfred, one that, years after the Great Council Fire, he helped to construct and bring into being. Diné Bahá’ís took “ownership” of the Native American Baha’i Institute when they incorporated the traditional prayer hogan on the campus grounds and demonstrated empirically that they are still able to maintain their culture and uphold their traditions while accepting the Bahá’í Faith. Just as the Great Council Unity Fire did for those early believers, the formation of NABI by and for the Diné Bahá’ís effectively mobilized a socio-religious grouping.<sup>371</sup> The first Diné Bahá’ís created a new vision of order within their world by building a strategic Diné Baha’i imago mundi (campus) located situationally on the Navajo reservation, as opposed to the closest center of population off the reservation that could have provided more resources.

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<sup>368</sup> Alfred Kahn, Sr., interview.

<sup>369</sup> McNely, *Holy Wind*, 14-16. McNeley cites an early Navajo researcher, Katherine Spencer (1947).

<sup>370</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 11- 14.

<sup>371</sup> Lincoln, *Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, 24-25.



**Serving the People: Serving Water.** Water, an extremely precious commodity on many parts of the Navajo reservation, has been a source of stress and anxiety ever since the Diné returned from Fort Sumner. According to Reno, “‘Water is the lifeblood of the earth,’ Navajos say, and the Colorado River and its tributaries sustain life throughout a vast, semi-arid area of 244,000 square miles; more than twenty Indian tribes live along the waterways of the Colorado River Basin and have rights to the water arising or flowing through their lands.”<sup>372</sup> Agriculture in the San Juan River Basin dates back at least one thousand years to the Anasazi Indians. The Diné arrived in the region after the Anasazis had abandoned their farms and villages during the great drought recorded in the thirteenth century.<sup>373</sup> The Diné later also abandoned the Basin, but after returning from Fort Sumner, Diné farmers started cultivating land on both sides of the San Juan River when white farmers began to settle the area in the late 1800s. Any Diné family wanting to farm had been promised 160 acres of irrigated land in arid northwest New Mexico in the treaty of 1868, but the promise of land with water was “based on empty words” for nearly a hundred years while dams were constructed up and down the Colorado River Basin in order to provide water for non-Diné agricultural development.<sup>374</sup> Reno notes that the availability of water to the Diné was critical to their survival:

To provide a satisfactory life for themselves and their children, Indians must have an economically adequate supply of water, and must be free to use it for purposes that best serve their own interests. Assertion of Indian rights comes face to face with awakening recognition that the river basin does not have enough water to supply Indian rights if all existing commitments for water to non-Indians are met.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Reno, *Mother Earth, Father Sky*, 46.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, *Mother Earth, Father Sky*, 65.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, *Mother Earth, Father Sky*, 66.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, *Mother Earth, Father Sky*, 48.

Adding cultural insult to watery injury, in the 1960s a powerful and federally sanctioned coal mining company began to drill into the principal hydrologic basin that underlies Black Mesa, considered sacred and the “liver” of Mother Earth by the Diné. The long-term heavy usage of this multiple aquifer system, recharged by sparse rainfalls, has lowered water levels in the springs and other water sources on Dinétah. Reno says the reservation’s “highest quality water is used to slurry coal away for processing while the Diné people drink water heavily laden with salts,” and he asserts that the transportation and health costs of water for the Diné are “enormous.”<sup>376</sup>

NABI has been “blessed” with a well of abundant fresh water on its campus. According to NABI’s case study taken from 1999 demographics, 80% of Diné families on the reservation did not have running water or electricity in their homes in 1999.<sup>377</sup> NABI installed an outdoor water pump to serve anyone who needs water. Families, arriving in the iconic and indispensable pickup truck, collect water in barrels from the pump to take back to their homes. NABI also offers their office shower facility to any individual who wants to use it, charging one dollar per shower.<sup>378</sup> Thirty-one-year-old Diné Bahá’í Leander Nelson works in maintenance at NABI. Sitting on an outdoor picnic table facing the Big Hogan after his work hours were completed, Leander answered my question concerning the services provided by the Institute to the surrounding area:

I think it [NABI] does [provide services]. I think it does. It provides a whole lot actually. We try to help anybody that comes through here. As for me, as for myself, you know, we especially, back during winter seasons, the people come around to ask if they could stay the night. They ask for some bite to eat. Or ask to be driven back their home because it’s hard to get there, especially during the winters. And then in the summer time, there is a lot of people who come here and ask for assistance and want to work here or want to know if there is work to be

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<sup>376</sup> Reno, *Mother Earth, Father Sky*, 58, 60-61.

<sup>377</sup> “NABI” 32.

<sup>378</sup> NABI, <http://www.nativeamericanbi.org/about.asp> (accessed April 11, 2010).

done here. Ahmm, and of course there is a lot of work to be done, but we can only take in so many people. We try to help everybody here in every which way we can. And a lot of people come and go through here. And a lot people come here for water, just to come to visit. There's [are] a lot of people who come and go every day.<sup>379</sup>

The service of providing water to the community without payment or expectations and the feelings of goodwill that the gift must generate for NABI cannot be estimated. For local families the gift of water brings with it an easing of the expense of obtaining water, gives families access to involvement in NABI's other programs, provides relief from water-based anxieties for the elderly, and builds trust and acceptance within the larger Diné community. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "It is appropriate that in this illumined age—the age of the progress of humanity, we should be self-sacrificing and should serve the human race."<sup>380</sup> A line from a Bahá'í prayer for healing allegorically seems to incorporate the gift of water along with some of the other needs that Leander Nelson identified among the Diné:

Thou art He, O my God, through Whose names the sick are healed and the ailing are restored, and thirsty given drink and the sore vexed are tranquilized, and the wayward are guided, and the abased are exalted, and the poor are enriched, and the ignorant are enlightened, and the gloomy are illumined, and the sorrowful are cheered, and the chilled are warmed, and the downtrodden are raised up. . . .<sup>381</sup>

Numerous analogies to different forms of water, such as drops, waves, oceans, streams, floods, mists, seas and rivers, are used in Bahá'í writings to signify the drinking of divinely revealed word, and the gift of water from NABI to the Diné on the reservation conveys a recognized material and spiritual service to the Diné, given and received regardless of the religious positioning of the giver or the receiver.

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<sup>379</sup> Leander Nelson, interview with author, NABI campus, Navajo Reservation, July 31, 2008.

<sup>380</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre and Marzieh Gail (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), 68.

<sup>381</sup> *Bahá'í Prayers*, 100.

## Summary

Religious matrixes come and go, grow and dwindle, along with the health of the religion they are born in—and decay in. In this chapter I have examined the newness of a new religion's matrixes, identifying some activities as matrices that others, no doubt, would not. The activities within those matrices, of the prayer hogan, the community Feast with its consultative process, and the procedure and functioning of the local administrative institutions, such as NABI, were briefly examined as matrices in which Diné Bahá'ís come into being, grow, and develop. As with all other entities in the world, the concept of religious conversion can be examined, too, in the light and under the scrutiny of the social sciences of psychology, anthropology, and sociology, which leads to a study of ways that social scientists have understood conversion in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

Sociologists focus their research on the “study of the development, organization, functioning, and classification of human societies,” which includes “patterns of social relationships, social interaction, and culture” among individuals or as “members of associations, groups, and institutions.”<sup>382</sup> Anthropologists focus on “the study of humans, their origins, physical characteristics, institutions, religious beliefs, and social relationships.”<sup>383</sup> These two definitions indicate that both sociologists and anthropologists may focus their research on either individuals or the larger units of societies, and may develop theories about the culture of an individual or a group that makes an individual’s or a group’s religion cohesive for that individual and or group. According to cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the study of religion is a two-stage operation: first, an analysis of the systems of meanings embodied in the symbols that make up the “religion proper”; and second, the relating of these systems to social structure and psychological processes. For Geertz, all knowledge of human culture is “local knowledge” and each culture should be examined in depth using its particular worldview and ethos to understand it.<sup>384</sup>

Psychologists of religion tend to focus more on individuals and *why* they are religious and *what* makes them so, rather than on the question of what makes an entire culture religious. In particular, psychologists are interested in understanding the dynamics

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<sup>382</sup> Dictionary.com: *Collins English Dictionary-Complete & Unabridged 10<sup>th</sup> Edition*, HarperCollins Publishers, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sociologist> (accessed: October 05, 2010); Dictionary: Define Sociologist, <http://sociologist.askdefine.com/#wp> (accessed October 05, 2010).

<sup>383</sup> Dictionary.com: *Collins English Dictionary-Complete & Unabridged 10<sup>th</sup> Edition*, HarperCollins Publishers, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/anthropologist> (accessed October 05, 2010).

<sup>384</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 125.

of individual religious conversion from one religion to another and have developed religiosity scales, charts, tests, and schematics as attempts to answer questions about religious conversion. Sociologists, on the other hand, “examine the social and institutional aspects of tradition in which conversion takes place” and focus on the “interaction between individuals and their environmental matrix.”<sup>385</sup> Historians of religion may utilize all these methods to examine the phenomena of religion in addition to developing their own methodologies of interpretation. In each of these disciplines, researchers have formulated unique terms, phrases, and concepts that strive to grasp and define religion, without quite achieving the ever-elusive goal of complete definition—that “essence of religion” Talal Asad refers to in his critique of Geertz’s theories.<sup>386</sup>

Geertz maintained that his approach was scientific in that it involves the systematic acquisition of a body of knowledge through the critical weighing of observations and involves the proposal of theories regarding the meaning of events, with tests using evidence from further observation.<sup>387</sup> Geertz’s principles of investigation should also hold true for researchers who study the conversion process. Geertz’s method may be applied to Diné culture by utilizing the large body of knowledge already gained from researchers in the field who have observed the lifestyle and ceremonies of the Diné, proposed their own interpretations or understandings of those events, and then tested their theories against other researchers’ similar observations and fieldwork in order to gain further understanding.

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<sup>385</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 9.

<sup>386</sup> Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” in *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 29; Pals, *Eight Theories*, 299.

<sup>387</sup> Pals, *Eight Theories*, 260-65; Momen, *Phenomenon of Religion*, 80.

## Combinative Religious Theory

Historian of North American religions Catherine L. Albanese wrote that the “new story” of religion in America was one of “meeting and change” between religions that “modified” themselves upon contact with American soil, in “a world of religious interchange” beginning with the earliest contact between religions.<sup>388</sup> Albanese includes the European religious contact with American Indians, beginning in the early 1600s, who, while “constrained by circumstances to convert to Christianity, did so on their own terms and for their own needs.”<sup>389</sup> Albanese’s qualifier here is “constrained.” I noted earlier the unusualness of the Diné’s conversion to Bahá’í, because historically American Indians typically have not converted to any other religion without coercion of some sort. Albanese’s term “constrained” implies a form of coercion.<sup>390</sup> In defense of both our arguments, the qualifying word is “historically.” While it is certainly true that many Diné are Christians today by their own free will and choice, that seems not to be the case in the early colonial periods that Albanese places her work in, and appears not to be the case during the 1930s through the 1950s, according to my interviewees’ remembrances from their boarding school experiences, in which they had to “choose” a church to attend. I argue that Iverson and Boyce demonstrated in their work on the early history of Diné culture in the 1800s and in the 1940s, respectively, that the majority of Diné did not incorporate Christianity into their lifestyles without some form of coercion. Sects or denominations of Christianity are the only religion(s) that American Indians have

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<sup>388</sup> Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 200-04.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 204-06.

<sup>389</sup> Scott Anderson, “Coercion,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/coercion/> (accessed July 21, 2010).

converted to other than Bahá'í—I know of no cases of full-blood American Indians who grew up on reservations converting to Buddhism, Judaism, or Islam, for instance.

Although, according to Albanese, some American Indians converted to Christianity “on their own terms” and to “meet their own needs,” the Diné Bahá'ís I interviewed did not verify from their own experiences this reason for conversion to Christianity, nor did they relate any stories of willing conversion within their knowledge of their family and cultural histories. Rather, to the contrary, the act of choosing a Christian church to attend was forced upon them in boarding schools, which, as Boyce and Iverson amply demonstrated, did not meet the needs of the Diné. The acts of coercion and constraint that have happened over the centuries since contact and Indians taking what they could wrestle out of conversion do not fit any model of a “true” conversion experience, as defined below, based on the current sociological and psychological models of conversion. In my experience, most American Indians have historically recognized the basic truth of Christ as a divine prophet and a “holy man” but have strenuously objected to how Christ’s followers conquered and decimated their native cultures. American Indians, with little recourse when all other means had failed, joined ranks with their conquerors through conversion to Christianity, which often was the safest circumstance that could be obtained by Indians during that time period. Recognition by Indians of the validity of Christ as a divine personage does not by itself translate into a true conversion experience of acceptance and belief, with the inward changes followed by observable outward changes that signify a true conversion experience that most psychological models demand as a proof of true conversion. Psychologist Bernard Spilka cites James Strickland’s earlier argument (1924) that if



different actions and a change of habits do not follow the embracing of new ideals, then true conversion has not occurred.<sup>391</sup>

Albanese talks about the exchange of material gifts in a religious marketplace, claiming that “what was being sold was self and soul,” while what was “being bought was new and combinatory American religions.”<sup>392</sup> Albanese speaks rightly about the 1960s “wannabe contamination,” or usurpation, of American Indian ceremonies by New Agers that was, and continues to be, an appropriation by non-natives of native practices, and she states that the act of gift-giving/gift-taking “masks oppression and also subverts it,” signaling “new narratives of contact and combination.”<sup>393</sup> While Albanese’s observations are accurate, gift-giving and gift-receiving in American Indian culture, called a *give-away*, fulfill a traditional duty and obligation performed at rites of passage, ceremonies, crossing-overs (deaths), and honorings; it should not be confused with what would be known in colloquial terms as the “looking a gift-horse in the mouth” exchanges between Indians and the dominant Christian culture of the time as a process of true conversion. The old idiom about a “gift horse” refers to questioning the value of a (gift) horse by looking in its mouth at the age of its teeth. In other words, refrain from finding fault with a gift that one may not have asked to be given in the first place and may not in fact want—reflective of what Albanese calls the masking and subversion of oppression through gift-giving.<sup>394</sup>

I agree with Albanese and Rambo that encounters between potential converts and religious advocates can involve a dynamic interaction in which reciprocal needs—the

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<sup>391</sup> Bernard Spilka, Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Bruce Hunsberger, and Richard Gorsuch, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003), 345.

<sup>392</sup> Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 203.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 204.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 204.

acts of giving and receiving gifts—are met.<sup>395</sup> The words “can,” “dynamic,” and “reciprocal” are qualifiers that do not necessarily include or imply coercion or constraint. The needs met for the Diné through Bahá’í adherence are certainly many, more through gifts of the spirit than of the body, which provide personal growth, enlightenment through education, and autonomy and empowerment through administrative responsibility for their own religious institutions. The reciprocal gift to the new religion is the inclusion of another group of people with their unique talents and abilities and perspectives to help the emerging world religion build upon its plan of global unity. These gifts, for Diné Bahá’ís, are not Albanese’s selling of self and soul to the new religion; rather, to the contrary, according to my Diné informants, self and soul were saved instead of sold.

Albanese documents the arrival of Asian religions in the United States as early as 1801 and notes that the first World Parliament of Religions (WPR), held in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, served as a “watershed for Eastern religions,” which then incorporated some forms of religiosity from the religions already established in the United States, thereby developing combinatory religions.<sup>396</sup> The Bahá’í Faith (as did Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) arose in the Near East, and the first mention of the new religion in America was in a paper read at the 1893 Parliament of Religions, although it cannot be said that the WPR was a watershed for the Bahá’í Faith as Albanese indicates the WRP was for other Eastern religions.<sup>397</sup> In the words of Bahá’í scholar and educator William Hatcher, the Bahá’í Faith is “a distinct religion, based entirely on the teachings of its founder, Bahá’u’lláh. It is not a cult, a reform movement

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<sup>395</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 59.

<sup>396</sup> Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 220-21.

<sup>397</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*, 52.

or a sect within any other faith, nor merely a philosophical movement.”<sup>398</sup> Hatcher quotes the well-known historian Arnold Toynbee, who added the incorrect phoneme of *ism* to Baha’i: “Bahaism is an independent religion on a par with Islam, Christianity, and the other recognized world religions. Bahaism is not a sect of some other religion; it is a separate religion, and it has the same status as other recognized religions.”<sup>399</sup>

The Diné conversion to the Bahá’í Faith should not be confused with Albanese’s combinative religious model; yet, no major religious system has arisen in a religious vacuum. The Bahá’í Faith arose within the matrix of Islam, its mother religion, just as Christianity arose within the matrix of Judaism. Diné Bahá’ís, finding their traditional oral prophecies fulfilled in the Bahá’í Faith, did not form a new religion from either source nor do they consider their traditional way of life and their Bahá’í way of life as a new “combinatory religion,” in Albanese’s terms. Close and objective observation shows that traditional and new remain independent of each other, while at the same time paralleling each other, as in Alfred Kahn, Jr.’s statement that he sees the Bahá’í Faith as “a continuation of Navajo belief,” much as Christians consider Christianity a continuation of Judaism.<sup>400</sup>

Clearly, Albanese’s work does show that decaying older religions may try to become something new and vibrant again by combining with new material. Vine Deloria, Jr. addressed common Indian problems, especially those of the “white man’s religion” and federal legislation that impacted all of native life. As one of the first natives to hold a

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<sup>398</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá’í Faith*, xiii.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, *Bahá’í Faith*, xiii. Hatcher takes Toynbee’s quote from a letter to Dr. N. Kunter, Avakat, Istanbul, Turkey, dated August 12, 1959, and published in the *British Bahá’í Journal*, 141 (November 1959): 4.

<sup>400</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview. See fn. 321.

Master's degree in theology, Deloria was uniquely qualified to assess the impact of Christianity on reservations, and he spoke to the issue of "decay" as he saw it:

The justification of past exploitations of native peoples has been that the gospel had to be preached to them and that a newer, better civilization had to rise from the native peoples' primitive hovels. Such a gospel of peace has been notoriously lacking as an element in Western civilization and it is very questionable whether the present state of decay, corruption, and exploitation is better than what had existed before the coming of the Western Christian to the nations of the world.<sup>401</sup>

Historian of North American religions Martha L. Finch aptly notes that in indigenous cultures "there has traditionally been no concept of 'religion' distinct from all aspects of everyday life. Everything a person did was 'religious' or 'spiritual,' the term some Indians today use in order to avoid the problems with the term 'religion.' Thus, many Christian missionaries thought native people had no religion."<sup>402</sup> The idea that native people "had no religion" and that the gospel "had to be preached to them" in order that a "newer, better civilization had to rise from the native peoples' primitive hovels" describes the religious intersections that Albanese addresses when she talks about "exchanging selves, exchanging souls" between native people and their conquerors in the New World.<sup>403</sup> Deloria describes the "present state" as a state of "decay, corruption, and exploitation" within Western civilization, without actually saying what he believes has caused this decay, although he alludes to "the coming of the Western Christian to the nations of the world."<sup>404</sup>

According to Bahá'í tenets, religions are organic entities that are born, grow and develop, and decay and die over time just as do all other organic entities in the known

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<sup>401</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1999), 166.

<sup>402</sup> Martha L. Finch, private communication.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, private communication; Deloria, *For This Land*, 166; Albanese, "Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls," 204.

<sup>404</sup> Deloria, *For This Land*, 166.

universe. Albanese accurately observed the attempts of combinative religious groups to revitalize themselves, to struggle for positioning, and to stop their process of decay. I argue that, because the Bahá'í Faith *is* a new, independent religious system *and* because neither Diné nor non-Diné Bahá'í adherents admit to a combinative result of the two systems of Diné and Bahá'í, Albanese's combinative religious model does not describe the Diné becoming Bahá'í conversion experience. However, Diné traditional customs and Bahá'í religiosity obviously share an intermingling and overlapping of certain features, such as gift-giving and gift-receiving, Diné prayers at Holy Days and Feast days, and Bahá'í prayers in the Diné Prayer Hogan.

According to its founders, the Bahá'í Faith will remain free of schisms, breakaways, or combinatory effects within the religion due to the explicit Covenants of Bahá'u'lláh that protects the religion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts this protection from divisions, schisms, and combinations:

As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past, it is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant ['Abdu'l-Bahá]. By this appointment and provision He [Bahá'u'lláh] has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief. To insure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world including the Interpreter and Explainer of His teachings so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine words. The Book of the Covenant or Testament of Bahá'u'lláh is the means of preventing such a possibility, for whosoever shall speak from the authority of himself alone shall be degraded. Be ye informed and cognizant of this.<sup>405</sup>

The Universal House of Justice addressed the problem of possible future schisms in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, saying, "Although the Universal House of Justice is explicitly authorized to change or repeal its own legislation as conditions change, thus providing Bahá'í law

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<sup>405</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 455.

with an essential element of flexibility, it cannot abrogate or change any of the laws which are explicitly laid down in the sacred Text.”<sup>406</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote,

Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá’í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.<sup>407</sup>

As an example, the Prayer Hogan at NABI remains Diné. It is not considered a hybrid Diné-Bahá’í Prayer Hogan; although Bahá’ís built it and pray within it, the Prayer Hogan remains uniquely Diné without producing a schism or division either within the religion or within Diné traditional customs. Other indigenous cultures that have Bahá’í adherents also maintain their own cultural traditions, but the Bahá’í Faith remains unchanged by these other indigenous intersections.<sup>408</sup> Essentially, Diné ceremonies and traditions remain just that—traditional. On the other side, the Bahá’í scriptures, structure, and administrative institutions have not combined with Diné cosmology, either. Rather, the Bahá’í principle to protect diverse cultures led to the acceptance of the Diné Prayer Hogan on the campus grounds of a Bahá’í institution (NABI) without a hybrid, combinatory result or lessening of religious or cultural identity on either side.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Introduction, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, 5.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, 5.

<sup>408</sup> “Bahá’í Faith: Religion Renewed for a Changing World,” <http://www.bahai.us/bahai-statistics> (accessed July 11, 2010). This Web site reports that “2,100 indigenous tribes, races, and ethnic groups” are represented in the Bahá’í Faith worldwide.

<sup>409</sup> For a fuller understanding of the protection of diverse cultures see: Baha’i International Community, “Rights of Indigenous Populations,” 1988 Aug 01. Statement to the fortieth session of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, sixth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Agenda item 5: Standard-setting activities: Evolution of standards concerning the rights of indigenous populations. Geneva, Switzerland: 1-5 August 1988, 1-2.

## Rambo's Phenomenological Religious Model

Lewis R. Rambo's phenomenological model incorporates earlier process models and addresses a wide range of conversion experiences and models across major religious systems, including indigenous cultures, and provides a broad, multidimensional theory of religious conversion "throughout the world."<sup>410</sup> Rambo examines seven dimensions of religious conversion that he identifies as: 1) context; 2) crisis; 3) quest; 4) encounter; 5) interaction; 6) commitment; and 7) consequences. In addition, Rambo identified five conversion types distinguished by the social and cultural distance involved in making the conversion: 1) apostasy or defection; 2) intensification; 3) affiliation or movement from no religious involvement to full involvement; 4) institutional transition, or movement from one faith community to another within a major religious tradition; and 5) tradition-transition, a movement from one major religious tradition to another.<sup>411</sup>

**Context.** Rambo writes that the "human drama" of conversion, "spanning historical eras" and molded by "geographical expansion and contraction," comprises the total cultural environment (macrocontext) in which conversion takes place.<sup>412</sup> Within the macrocontext lies the more immediate microcontext of "family, ethnic group, religious community, and neighborhood" that creates "a sense of identity and belonging and shapes a person's thoughts, feelings, and action."<sup>413</sup> According to Rambo, until recently psychologists have ignored the social and cultural context of religious conversion because psychologists focus instead on the individual. However, Rambo argues,

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<sup>410</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, back cover.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 13-14.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 20-21.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 22.

psychologists “cannot talk adequately about a person’s psyche without contextualizing that psyche”; the person who grows up in a small, remote area lives in a different world than the person who lives in an urban setting “with its supermarket of social, moral, and religious options.”<sup>414</sup> Rambo writes,

Context not only provides the sociocultural matrix that shapes a person’s myths, symbols, and beliefs; it also has a powerful impact in terms of access, mobility, and the opportunity for coming into contact with new religious influences. Increased mobility in the modern world makes it easier for the advocate (the missionary) to move into new areas to propagate religious ideology. Increased mobility also enables the potential convert to more readily leave behind old patterns of social relationships that may feel constricting, and to find new options. . . . Conversion to a religion that offers clear answers and belief systems can provide relief from the overwhelming multiplicity of options and cacophony of voices pulling the individual in different directions. It [the new religion] can provide a coherent center from which to conduct one’s life in a world where that center has been lost.<sup>415</sup>

As I argued earlier, the historical era of the Diné’s Long Walk to Fort Sumner and their return (1863 to 1868) to the changed world of a geographically contracted reservation potentially sowed the seeds of a later conversion of some Diné to Bahá’í. Included in the potentiality of conversion was not only the home-front pioneers’ ability to move onto the Navajo reservation in the late 1950s, but also the increased mobility of the Diné themselves to move into other social environments, whether that of the Bahá’í Center in Gallup, New Mexico, or into the social arena of a home-front pioneer’s environment, or into that of a job in an urban setting, such as Linda Wilson’s move to Washington, D.C. By the 1960s, the Diné had experienced years of hearing a “cacophony of voices” from various governmental agencies, churches, missions, and boarding schools pulling them “in different directions.” Perhaps one of those contextual directions was toward Rambo’s fifth theory of conversion, tradition transition, which may take place

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<sup>414</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 30.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 30-31.



when contact occurs between two different cultures.<sup>416</sup> According to Rambo, tradition transition into a foreign religion may be imported in three ways: 1) by missionaries who are allowed contact with indigenous cultures because they are representatives of a colonizing and powerful government; 2) by the contributions of outsiders that come into an already opened society; 3) or because the weakened society cannot prevent contact.<sup>417</sup> All three conditions for tradition transition had already occurred in the Diné culture by the time Bahá'í home-front pioneers arrived on the reservation.

I argue that tradition transition more closely aligns with Diné becoming Bahá'í than do most other current psychological and sociological theories of conversion. In Rambo's tradition transition, a conversion from one religious system to a completely different religious system calls for the individual to integrate and modify his or her lifestyle to fit the new religion's belief system. In significant ways, Rambo's model of tradition transition applies to Diné who are in the process of becoming Bahá'í, while at the same time, Rambo's model cannot completely describe the becoming Bahá'í experience either, because Bahá'í conversion does not require turning one's back on one's previous religious system. However, Diné Bahá'ís, along with all other non-Diné Bahá'ís, do strive to integrate and modify their lifestyles to come into accord and compliance with the Bahá'í laws governing physical and spiritual behaviors and attitudes, as seen earlier in Diné attempts to become Bahá'í through striving to live the Bahá'í life. Striving and integrating, transformation and change are significant aspects both of Rambo's model and of becoming Bahá'í. Psychiatrist and Bahá'í H. B. Danesh writes in the *Psychology of Spirituality: From Divided Self to Integrated Self* that "striving is the

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<sup>416</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 38.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 39.

essential component in the life of any human being.”<sup>418</sup> All humans have the “quality of striving or questing,” which Danesh sees as “an aspect of the capacity to love,” in which humans “desire, strive, and quest for an object, a person, or an idea.”<sup>419</sup> Danesh describes a lack of these human qualities as a spiritual “disorder of love,” or a crisis that requires a reevaluation of one’s “intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of being.”<sup>420</sup> Rambo notes that “indigenous cultures that are in crisis will have more potential converts than stable societies.”<sup>421</sup>

**Crisis.** Rambo writes that “some crises are caused by external forces,” as when “colonial powers disrupt” and possibly “destroy the existing sociocultural reality of the indigenous people.”<sup>422</sup> Although the culture may be more or less resilient, Rambo notes that “the very fabric of a culture may be rent asunder” and is “rarely able to resist” the overwhelming force of an outside power such as the Europeans exerted upon the indigenous peoples of North America.<sup>423</sup> Included in the externally stimulated crisis may be the activities of missionaries or advocates, which, according to Rambo, may trigger dissatisfactions not previously felt in potential converts prior to the colonial expansion.<sup>424</sup> Rambo notes that most psychoanalytic orientations within the psychological literature view conversion as stemming from a crisis of debility and breakdown, explaining conversion as “an adaptive mechanism that attempts to resolve psychological issues.”<sup>425</sup> Humanistic and transpersonal psychologists, on the other hand, suggest that people are

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<sup>418</sup> Danesh, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 128.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., *Psychology of Spirituality*, 128.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., *Psychology of Spirituality*, 129.

<sup>421</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 41.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 54.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 55.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 54-55.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 52.

naturally “spiritual questors, always growing, learning, developing, and maturing.”<sup>426</sup> In short, psychoanalysts, because their subjects are taken from their “emotionally ill” clinical cases, see conversion as a “search for emotional resolution,” while humanists psychologists see their subjects as “healthy people who seek conversion in their quest for intellectual, spiritual, and emotional transformation and growth.”<sup>427</sup> Regardless of the psychological orientation, personal change is a necessary ingredient of conversion.

As stated previously, Spilka cites an earlier psychological argument that if different actions and a change of habits do not follow the embracing of new ideals, then true conversion has not occurred.<sup>428</sup> Some earlier researchers’ views were that “a genuine religious conversion is the outcome of a crisis.”<sup>429</sup> Most psychodynamic approaches to conversion use this classic model of the convert as being acted upon, or passive, in the conversion process, while theorizing that religious conversion functions as a solution to unresolved childhood problems and sexual or aggressive impulses (psychoanalytic model).<sup>430</sup> The classic model of conversion cannot be entirely dismissed from the becoming Bahá’í experience of the Diné, because research has clearly shown that the Diné suffered great crises both as a people and individually, which supports not only my earlier argument for a culture-wide, crises-induced PTSD but also that those same historical crises “plowed the ground” of Diné hearts and minds and led them to consider more readily what the Bahá’í Faith had to offer them. However, I argue against the notion that the Diné who become Bahá’ís are being “passive” or “acted upon” as the

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<sup>426</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 52.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 52.

<sup>428</sup> Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion*, 345.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., *Psychology of Religion*, 349. Spilka cites James (1902/1985), Coe (1916), and Johnson (1959).

<sup>430</sup> Peter J. Kahn and A. L. Greene, “Seeing Conversion Whole: Testing a Model of Religious Conversion,” *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 52, no. 3 (January 2004): 235.

classic model indicates. In the psychological sense, being passive or acted upon implies a dominant force acting upon a subordinate subject, such as the United States military forcefully removing the Diné from their homeland, or the coercive pressure put on Diné parents who had little choice but to allow their children to be taken to Christian-run boarding schools. From a psychological point of view, Albanese also uses the classic model of religious conversion when she talks about the use of coercion and constraint (forms of being acted upon and passive) as common occurrences of “trade in the religious marketplace” between the dominant Christian culture and American Indians, which resulted in an exchange of the native self and soul with the dominant culture.<sup>431</sup>

**Quest.** Rambo notes that social scientists are beginning to view individuals as their own “active agents” (the contemporary model of conversion) in the “creation of meaning and the selection of religious options,” which Rambo sees as the impetus for *quest*.<sup>432</sup> Rambo conceptualizes questing as playing out in five different modes of individual response to potential conversion: active, receptive, rejecting, apathetic, and passive.<sup>433</sup> The quest motif highlights the potential convert as actively seeking something “more” in religious life: seeking new options to replace old ways or a desire for innovation, fulfillment, and growth (active mode); having a readiness for new options for a variety of reasons (receptive mode); consciously rejecting the new option (rejection mode); having no interest in a new religious option (apathetic mode); or being so weak and fragile one is easily manipulated by external influences (passive mode).<sup>434</sup> Rambo,

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<sup>431</sup> Albanese, “Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls,” 204-06.

<sup>432</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 56-65; Spilka et al., *Psychology of Religion*, 355-56; Danesh, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 101-02; Momen, *Phenomenon of Religion*, 163.

<sup>433</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 59.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 59; Kahn and Greene, “Seeing Conversion Whole,” 235; Momen, *The Phenomenon of Religion*, 163-165.

like Albanese, says that encounters between potential converts (such as Diné) and their religious advocates (Bahá'í home-front pioneers) can and do involve a dynamic interaction in which reciprocal needs are met. My research did not show any coercion or constraint from the Bahá'í home-front pioneers upon the Diné. Rather, research and interviews show the opposite; in the early days of home-front pioneering, the Diné often asked the non-Diné Bahá'ís what they were going to give them in exchange for coming to Bahá'í events. While research does show that some services, such as showers and water, were provided by NABI to the Diné, these acts of service were not tied to any expected religious action in return from the Diné.

**Encounter.** Rambo identifies his fourth stage of conversion as *encounter*, the “vortex of the dynamic force field in which conversion takes place.”<sup>435</sup> Within this stage, the details of an advocate’s interaction with a potential convert are “extraordinarily complex” with the continuum of the outcome ranging from total rejection to complete acceptance.<sup>436</sup> Rambo notes an “interesting find rarely mentioned in conversion studies” that shows the “majority of target populations reject new religious options”:<sup>437</sup>

The truth is that that enmeshment with old systems of religion, family society, and politics seldom encourages movement to a new religious option. Personal and social conditions rarely facilitate change. Hence, what makes any voluntary conversion process possible is a complex confluence of the “right” potential convert coming into contact, under proper circumstances at the proper time, with the “right” advocate and religious option.<sup>438</sup>

I argue that Rambo’s findings of rejection support my initial argument about the unusualness of Diné becoming Bahá'í, even with the stressors of economic factors and historical oppression that induced crisis among the Diné. I argue that, without an active

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<sup>435</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 87.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 87, 99.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 87, 89, 90-91.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 87.

and knowledgeable belief by the Diné in the fulfillment of their prophecies, most likely there would not have been the 1962 mass enrollment of three hundred Diné into the Bahá'í Faith at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference, nor would smaller numbers of Diné have continued to enter the new religion over the years since then.

In the United States, enrolling in the religion entails the simple act of signing an enrollment or declaration card that says one recognizes Bahá'u'lláh as the Messenger of God for this age and one agrees to abide by the laws of the religion.<sup>439</sup> The enrollment of three hundred Dinés in the Bahá'í Faith, which happened during and immediately following the Great Council Fire Unity Conference, might have been viewed as an early step in the process of “entry by troops,” a precursor to future mass conversions predicted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and precipitated by the “flow of pioneers” to teaching areas.<sup>440</sup> Troop in Bahá'í context refers to a “group of people who come together in large numbers” rather than the more common use of “troop” as a military unit or force.<sup>441</sup> The Universal House of Justice, in a series of letters to Bahá'í communities, further reinforces the idea of entry by troops and mass conversion:

A thrilling consequence of these favorably conjoined developments is the emergence of a new paradigm of opportunity for further growth and consolidation of our world-wide community. New prospects for teaching the Cause at all levels of society have unfolded. These are confirmed in the early results flowing from the new teaching initiatives being fostered in a number of places as more and more national communities witness the beginnings of that entry by troops promised by the beloved Master [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] and which Shoghi Effendi said would lead on to mass conversion.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> *Lights of Guidance*, comp. Helen Bassett Hornby, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Delhi, India: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1994), 75.

<sup>440</sup> National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, “Introduction,” *Quickeners of Mankind: Pioneering in a World Community*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of Canada (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 8.

<sup>441</sup> See: Robert McClelland, “Promoting Entry by Troops: Study Guide,” *Bahá'í Online Library*, [http://bahai-library.com/mcclelland\\_promoting\\_entry\\_troops.html](http://bahai-library.com/mcclelland_promoting_entry_troops.html) (accessed October 6, 2010); Oxford Dictionaries, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/troop?view=uk> (accessed October 6, 2010).

<sup>442</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon*, 199. Letter dated August 31, 1987.

However, simply enrolling large numbers of individuals into the religion is not the ultimate goal. The Universal House of Justice wrote that

it is not enough to proclaim the Bahá'í message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Bahá'í membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, but it lies in the will and effort of the individual to achieve it in obedience to the Covenant. Necessary to the progress of this life-fulfilling transformation is knowledge of the will and purpose of God through regular reading and study of the Holy Word.<sup>443</sup>

While aspects of Rambo's theory of conversion, already defined as a "turning from [old] and to new religious groups, ways of life, systems of belief, and modes of relating to a deity or the nature of reality," align with the Diné becoming Bahá'í experience, Rambo's use of "turning from" warrants further examination in that Diné Bahá'ís' did not turn from salient parts of their traditional belief system.<sup>444</sup> However, Rambo's model does fit in that Diné Bahá'ís did turn from non-productive patterns of thought and behaviors created by colonization through adherence to the teachings of their new religion. This turning from, as a process of individual personal growth, allows for the transformation of character resulting in the "new models of [spiritual and religious] life" that the Universal House of Justice speaks to.<sup>445</sup> Transformation entails change, and "human beings," Rambo says, "continually engage in the process of world construction and reconstruction in order to generate meaning and purpose, to maintain psychic equilibrium, and to ensure continuity."<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon*, 203.

<sup>444</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* 3; Kahn and Greene, "Seeing Conversion Whole," 233-34. Kahn and Greene write that "despite recognition of its promise for bringing religious conversion into the broader stream of personality research, Rambo's model has been accorded little empirical attention." The purpose of Kahn's study, written as a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Greene, is to attempt an empirical test of Rambo's model of religious conversion.

<sup>445</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon*, 203.

<sup>446</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 56, 145.

**Interaction.** In Rambo's fifth stage of *interaction* those individuals who choose to continue with a new religious group after the initial encounter find that their interaction with the advocates intensifies.<sup>447</sup> Rambo defines these crucial elements of interaction as relationships, rituals, rhetoric, and roles.<sup>448</sup> Kahn and Greene found that once the sphere of influence is established by "encapsulation," a matrix in which "crucial elements of conversion operates," Rambo's four dimensions of interaction create and consolidate potential converts' emotional bonds to the group of advocates, provide rituals through the repetition of physical actions that embody holistic knowledge, provide new uses of language, new metaphors, and new narratives that reframe the self (convert), and place the self within the larger scheme of the new "world" created by the advocates.<sup>449</sup> Rambo explains that the three varieties of encapsulation—physical, social, and ideological—impose conditions that are not entirely distinct from one another. Instead, they overlap and reinforce each other in a process that is crucially intense to a potential convert "as a rebirthing process should be."<sup>450</sup> Rambo's fifth stage describes the tensions that may occur during the deepening process of newly converted Diné Bahá'ís.

**Commitment.** Rambo describes his sixth stage of conversion as the "fulcrum of the change process."<sup>451</sup> In this *commitment* stage the potential convert decides to affiliate with the new religion, which may include a public demonstration, such as a personal testimony of faith by the convert. The convert's public testimony serves as a symbolic repudiation of the old self and the embracing of a new identity by using the new language

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<sup>447</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 102; Kahn and Greene, "Seeing Conversion Whole," 235-6.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 103; Kahn and Greene, "Seeing Conversion Whole," 236.

<sup>449</sup> Kahn and Greene, "Seeing Conversion Whole," 236; Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 104-118; Momen, *Phenomenon of Religion*, 155.

<sup>450</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 105; 123.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 124. A fulcrum is a support or prop upon which a lever is turned.



of the new religion as a means of personal transformation.<sup>452</sup> The rhetoric of public testimony is one way to activate a necessary reconstruction and reinterpretation of personal history.<sup>453</sup> Rhetoric, Rambo explains, is the “language of transformation.”<sup>454</sup>

The Wrights remembered the rhetoric of a “public testimony” at the June 1962 Great Council Fire Unity Conference, when the clan patriarch John Hale got up on the stage the second day of the event wearing his rather famous mountain lion-skin hat with its tall eagle feather (see Appendix C-5) and said, “I don’t understand any of this but my hat and my heart tell me it’s true.” The Wrights noted that “from then on, things started to roll.”<sup>455</sup> Nancy Phillips documented the event in an August 1962 Bahá’í newsletter as a “glimpse.”<sup>456</sup> Hale, a medicine man whose hat was a symbol of strength and wisdom, was the highly respected leader of the Pine Springs community. On stage addressing the multitude of strangers spread out on the grounds before him, Hale, “with tears in his eyes, exclaimed, ‘Something has happened! The earth is true, the sun is true, the atmosphere is true, and this gathering of brotherhood is true.’”<sup>457</sup> According to Phillips, the stately eighty-three-year-old Hale embraced Hand of the Cause of God Zikru’lláh Khádem (see Appendix C-1, 2, and 5), while “men and women alike wept unashamedly, as these two men communicated through the heart.”<sup>458</sup> Hale’s public approval and embracing of the Bahá’í Faith provided a strong fulcrum of change for those Diné in attendance.

**Consequences.** Rambo’s seventh and last stage, the *consequences* phase of the conversion process, requires a long temporal perspective over time that must take into

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<sup>452</sup> Kahn and Greene, “Seeing Conversion Whole,” 236; Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 137.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., “Seeing Conversion Whole,” 237; Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 132-133.

<sup>454</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 118.

<sup>455</sup> Wrights, interview. The Wrights quote Hale and identify him as possibly Chester Kahn’s grandfather.

<sup>456</sup> Nancy Phillips, “Bahá’í News,” no. 377 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, August 1962), 10-12.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., “Bahá’í News,” 10.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., “Bahá’í News,” 10.

consideration the consequences of conversion for the converts in their resolutions of life-course challenges.<sup>459</sup> Rambo begins the consequences phase with a word of caution about the potential personal biases of an assessor of conversion, regardless of whether that assessor comes from a “theological orientation” or from “the human sciences.”<sup>460</sup> Rambo defines “theology” as a “disciplined effort to articulate beliefs and ways of life in fresh and challenging ways so that the religious message can be accepted and understood by people of various cultures” and writes that the “central effect of theology on conversion is the creation of norms for what is expected in the conversion process, and the shaping of expectations and experiences of converts.”<sup>461</sup> Rambo notes that psychologists, as assessors from the human sciences, tend “to be vigilant for pathology,” which results in “generally portraying conversion in a negative light” in the psychological literature.<sup>462</sup> According to Rambo, any study of the conversional process should take into account the investigator’s own values and “disciplinary ethos” that may “shape interpretation” of the data, so that one’s research will have a “maximum value for peers and other readers.”<sup>463</sup> Consequences arising from conversion range across a broad spectrum, from positive to negative, and can include both positive and unexpectedly negative sociocultural and historical consequences for the convert and the convert’s group, along with a shaping or reshaping of the religious “geography” or “religious landscape” of the convert’s group, as well.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 165

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 142.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 171.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 142-43.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 142-44.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 148-54.

Kahn and Greene write that in the consequence phase, a convert needs to consider the role of conversion in one's life. Resolving life-course challenges of "identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity" evolves into a creative process and spiritual work for the convert.<sup>465</sup> Any given conversion experience (like that of a Diné becoming Bahá'í) may include some but not all of Rambo's identified phases. Individual phases may also vary in intensity and duration and may frequently overlap and reoccur. Kahn and Greene noted that the implications of even a "sudden surrender experience" may take much processing for the convert and a gradual conversion process "may require many years to assimilate fully."<sup>466</sup> Kahn and Greene's astute observation can be seen in the length of time it has taken for some of the Diné converts to become "deepened" in the spiritual and administrative processes of their new religion.

According to the native Elders I named in my acknowledgements, life-course challenges are "boulders in the road" that test one's commitment to the task at hand. One has the choice to climb over, go around, or stop and go back. Getting off the road (of life) is not advised as an option. Boulders appear on narrow, steep slopes that block one's path and demand ingenuity, creativeness, energy, independence mixed with cooperation, and thought to resolve. Through the process of working one's way to the other side of the boulder one grows, advances to the next stage of "tests and difficulties," and becomes.

### **Moving Toward Becoming: Living the Life**

When Chester Kahn remarked that undeeptened Diné were "not seen anymore," he meant that they were "inactive" Bahá'ís who did not "live the life" by following the

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<sup>465</sup> Kahn and Greene, "Seeing Conversion Whole," 237. Kahn and Greene cite Erik Erikson (1968).

<sup>466</sup> Ibid, "Seeing Conversion Whole," 237.

Bahá'í spiritual and moral laws outlined in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Not living the life may be deduced from a Bahá'í's lack of participation in religious functions or by known behaviors that are at variance with "the Bahá'í laws of personal living [that] will assert the fullness of, and arouse a desire to share in, the Bahá'í way of life."<sup>467</sup> However, outwardly observable behaviors do not preclude the fact that some of those Diné Bahá'ís whom Chester refers to as undeepened still considered themselves to be Bahá'ís.

Occasionally, Diné individuals appear to Diné Bahá'ís or at NABI and declare themselves to be Bahá'í from years previously. Psychological studies that examine the adaptive versus regressive quality of conversion experiences have given little consideration to these kinds of longer-term religious and spiritual consequences, such as a person's evolving relationship with God, a sense of mission, a reason for living, and the experience of a change in their nature of reality over time.<sup>468</sup> Sandner investigated the concept of sin among the Diné and said that the "counterbalance to fear of possession [by ghosts associated with evil power and witches] is the Navaho reliance on reason and knowledge in regulating their moral and ethical behavior, and in building their extensive healing system."<sup>469</sup> The Diné were characterized in a 1957 study of their moral code as rational, prudent, and practical. Sandner's comment on possession refers to the Diné's traditional belief in ghosts:

When faced with a problem, they believed in talking it over, examining all sides, and arriving at a reasonable solution. By itself, appeal to authority or tradition is not a sufficient guide. The solution must be prudent, offering the greatest good to the welfare of the individual and the group and it must be practical. The Navajo are primarily oriented toward what works. Their discussions center on what has worked in the past and what may be expected to work in the future. . . . These

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<sup>467</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon*, 20.

<sup>468</sup> Kahn and Greene, "Seeing Conversion Whole," 237. Kahn and Greene cite Allison (1969); Ullman (1982); and Erickson (1968).

<sup>469</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 101, 110. Sandner's original spelling of Navaho is maintained.

traits are closely connected with their idea of universal order. . . . There is no place for sin as Christians conceive it, rather the Navaho moral code tells a person what he should do or not, what the punishment is, not for the transgression, but for correction of error. The closest a Navaho has to the concept of sin is being out of order, lacking control, a definition that involves rationalization, not salving a bad conscience or confession of error, not a feeling of guilt.<sup>470</sup>

The custom had been that when Diné died their hogans were either burned or abandoned and their names were not spoken again. Bahá'í theology strongly urges restraint against “superstitions,” such as the belief in harmful ghosts, while yet upholding a fundamental belief in other levels of existence, along with the emanation of dreams as proof of those other “worlds of God” that contain the “Divine Concourse” of departed souls.<sup>471</sup> A search in Ocean found 2,446 sentences in 171 Bahá'í documents containing some form of the phrase “worlds of God.” Narrowing my search down to “worlds” resulted in 16,015 hits, which include the singular “world.” An example from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in regard to the worlds of God said,

The immortality of the spirit is mentioned in the Holy Books; it is the fundamental basis of the divine religions. Now punishments and rewards are said to be of two kinds. Firstly, the rewards and punishments of this life; secondly, those of the other world. But the paradise and hell of existence are found in all the worlds of God, whether in this world or in the spiritual heavenly worlds. Gaining these rewards is the gaining of eternal life. That is why Christ said [to] act in such a way that you may find eternal life, and that you may be born of water and the spirit, so that you may enter into the Kingdom.<sup>472</sup>

In Bahá'í scripture, dreams are a “created phenomena” that contain “myriad perfect wisdoms” and “myriad new and wondrous truths,” with “concealed worlds” and many secrets and wisdoms “deposited therein.”<sup>473</sup> Alfred Kahn, Sr. and I were riding in

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<sup>470</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 110. Sandner cites researchers John Ladd (1957) and Gladys A. Reichard (1950).

<sup>471</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 240-42.

<sup>472</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 223.

<sup>473</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 32.

Alfred's pickup truck when he inadvertently played an old cassette recording of a Bahá'í talk his deceased brother, Ben Kahn (see Appendix E-3), had given years before. His subsequent behavior demonstrated significant inward and outward changes in thought and belief from the old Diné tradition that the departed person's name is not to be spoken, and that their spirits can harm one ("ghost sickness") as he continued to listen to the recording and then said his brother's name aloud.<sup>474</sup> When I asked Alfred about the Bahá'í admonition against "idle fancies and vain imaginings," Alfred said he was trying to get away from "superstitions," from not being scared because of the traditional belief about the deceased.<sup>475</sup> With his usual humor Alfred said,

I heard my brother's voice on the tape and someone else would have had a cow! Or just go berserk; saying we're not supposed to do that [listen to the deceased one's voice]. I'm thinking of Bahá'í, Bahá'u'lláh. I'm thinking of Bahá'u'lláh made the way. And I say, 'Thank you, thank you that he [Ben] is with You [Bahá'u'lláh] and that he's all right, I'm sure, and that he's been safe.' I felt my strength. And I'm overcoming some of my weaknesses. I feel very, very good in thinking that way. That's accepting to God and Ben that we're okay with it. I'm happy that way. Not too long ago when I needed someone to encourage me to, ahmm, do some more protection prayers for my family, he [Ben] came to my dream when I was taking a nap on the couch. And the minute I awoke, I told my wife, 'Let's go kids, we need go see a Medicine Man for protection,' and that we needed that, we needed that for a friend. So, I say thank you to Ben, you're working up there way like that.<sup>476</sup>

Sandner cites a study done by psychoanalysts Bert Kaplan and Dale Johnson in 1964 on psychiatric illness among the Diné that identified four patterns of psychopathology.<sup>477</sup> Kaplan and Johnson's third pattern or category, noted by Sandner more as a character disorder than a mental illness, includes ghost sickness and a fear of

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<sup>474</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 101, 102-04.

<sup>475</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 25. "Hold ye fast unto His statutes and commandments, and be not of those who, following their idle fancies and vain imaginings, have clung to the standards fixed by their own selves, and cast behind their backs the standards laid down by God."

<sup>476</sup> Alfred Kahn, Sr., interview.

<sup>477</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 100-01.

possession from “something evil” outside of that person, thereby allowing that person not to be held accountable for his or her own behaviors.<sup>478</sup> Sandner, who comes to his work on Diné healing traditions from the perspective of a Jungian-trained psychoanalytic psychiatrist, as opposed to a humanistic psychologist (refer back to Rambo’s discussion on psychoanalysts’ viewpoints of conversion as a form of emotional illness), writes that “all of these forms of illness have at their core the phenomenon of dissociation, leading to possession and socially undesirable behavior” by the individual who considers himself or herself to be possessed, which “forms the core of the Navaho concepts of mental illness.”<sup>479</sup> The “rational, prudent, and practical” Diné had themselves established the “core” of their own concepts of mental illness prior to any studies conducted by outside agents. Sandner saw these historical Diné cultural adaptations to forms of mental illness among themselves as an “excessive fear of the dead and their ghosts; the development of elaborate ceremonies with strict regulations based on knowledge alone; the avoidance of psychic possession and the vision quest [highly valued in most other native traditions]; and the reluctant acceptance of the peyote religion by many of the traditional medicine men.”<sup>480</sup> According to Sandner, “culture does not have an unlimited license” and “must reckon with the psyche—the culture must stay within emotional, mental, and behavioral boundaries or it becomes a sick culture and, without a remedy, that culture will die.”<sup>481</sup> In their defense, Sandner notes that Diné, unlike many other native tribes, devalue altered states of consciousness, moving such states to the peripheral of their ceremonies, and are

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<sup>478</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 101. The other two categories of character disorder are moth craziness, associated with incest, and crazy violence, associated with acute and chronic alcoholism.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 102.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 102.

<sup>481</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 100.

“very cautious about the use of dreams, trancelike states, and vision.”<sup>482</sup> The purpose of the foundational Diné Blessing Way ceremony is to establish peace and harmony, but it also protects Diné against disturbing dreams and imagery:

Blessing Way practice embraces birth and adolescence, the home or hogan, weddings, maintenance and acquisition of properties, protection against accident, forewarning in dream and imagery, an endeavor to prolong life as long as possible. No other ceremonial in the Navaho system offers the native assistance in every walk of life as Blessing Way does. It knows a solution for disturbing dreams and fancies. In social affairs it strengthens leaders. In religious affairs it adjusts mistakes and errors. It provides a powerful medicine to acquire the comforts of life. It makes the goal in life—old age—a possibility.<sup>483</sup>

Sandner interprets the true power of the Blessing Way with its prayers and songs as the inner form or inner reality of all things that are connected to the earth rather than connected with only the “rituals” of the Blessing Way ceremonies. During the first Blessing Way ceremony at the Place of Emergence, First Man created the earth’s form and the inner forms that became the Holy People, Long-Life Boy and Happiness Girl, who symbolize

happy conditions from the past into the present and future. They represent thought and speech, the supreme achievements of human life through which, especially in prayer, one can make contact [with] the supernatural world . . . inner forms of the earth that represent the esoteric goal of Blessing Way . . . bringing together male and female, winter and summer, thought and speech, duration and contentment; they are the prime examples of the reconciling and transforming symbol . . . of inner reality.<sup>484</sup>

Bahá’is are warned against giving too much credence to one’s own idle fancies and vain imaginings that have arisen from old and inherited “superstitions,” which “have obscured the fundamental reality” and “darkened the world” so that the “light of religion

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid., *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 106.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 124. Sandner quotes Leland Wyman and Berard Haile, *Blessingway* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1970), 8.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 125-26.



is not apparent.”<sup>485</sup> In strong language, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses “superstitions” as counter-productive to progress and humanity’s maturation:

To such an extent has this [inherited “superstitions”] prevailed that they [religious leaders] have taken away the heavenly light of divine truth and sit in the darkness of imitations and imaginations. That which was meant to be conducive to life has become the cause of death; that which should have been an evidence of knowledge is now a proof of ignorance; that which was a factor in the sublimity of human nature has proved to be its degradation. Therefore the realm of the religionist has gradually narrowed and darkened and the sphere of the materialist has widened and advanced; for the religionist has held to imitation and counterfeit, neglecting and discarding holiness and the sacred reality of religion. When the sun sets it is the time for bats to fly. They come forth because they are creatures of the night. When the lights of religion become darkened the materialists appear. They are the bats of night. The decline of religion is their time of activity; they seek the shadows when the world is darkened and clouds have spread over it. . . . This is a new cycle of human power. All the horizons of the world are luminous, and the world will become indeed as a garden and a paradise. It is the hour of unity of the sons of men and of the drawing together of all races and all classes. You are loosed from ancient superstitions which have kept men ignorant, destroying the foundation of true humanity.<sup>486</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá further categorizes “superstitions” into “harmful and dangerous” and “harmless with certain good results,” but qualifies “superstitions” with this positional statement:

The fourth teaching of Bahá’u’lláh is the agreement of religion and science. God has endowed man with intelligence and reason whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions. If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance, and the child of ignorance is superstition. Unquestionably there must be agreement between true religion and science. If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation.<sup>487</sup>

It may be that Alfred’s not speaking his brother’s name aloud because of cultural tradition falls into ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s category of harmless “superstition,” or perhaps mental

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<sup>485</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 179.

<sup>486</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, 125, 237.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, 72.

health professionals might see it as falling into Kaplan and Johnson's category of potential mental disturbances, but in any regard, most knowledgeable non-Diné Bahá'ís continue to respect the Diné tradition of not speaking a departed Diné's name aloud to the Diné. The Diné use other relational terms to refer to the deceased person, as did Diné Bahá'í Linda Wilson in her interview when talking about her recently deceased mother.<sup>488</sup> For Alfred, who was raised as a traditional Diné but also raised as a Bahá'í, to daringly say his brother's name aloud for the first time many years after his brother's death demonstrates one change in his "nature of reality" that becoming Bahá'í requires.<sup>489</sup> As the observer riding in Alfred's pickup truck when this incident occurred, I felt it showed disrespect to assume that I could say Alfred's brother's name aloud to him just because Alfred had said it in his epiphany moment. That moment of transition, a leap of faith between old ways and new teachings, belonged solely to Alfred, Sr.

## **Peyote**

I argued earlier in my introduction that Diné Bahá'ís are not religiously mandated to give up most of their traditional beliefs. I carefully chose "most" as my qualifying word. Peyote, a small cactus native to southwestern Texas and central Mexico, is a hallucinogenic drug used predominately in the Native American Church.<sup>490</sup> The history and controversies that surround the use of peyote, well documented by other researchers, do not need to be restated here.<sup>491</sup> I focus on the Bahá'í position regarding peyote as it

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<sup>488</sup> Linda Wilson, interview.

<sup>489</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 165; Kahn and Greene, "Seeing Conversion Whole," 237.

<sup>490</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 107.

<sup>491</sup> See: David F. Aberle, *The Peyote Religion among the Navaho* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1982; Edward F. Anderson, *Peyote: The Divine Cactus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996); Tony Shearer, *Lord of the Dawn* (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph, 1995).

refers to maintaining or giving up of traditional beliefs by Diné Bahá'ís. The Universal House of Justice refers to Shoghi Effendi's reaffirmation of Bahá'u'lláh's position on the use of hallucinogens such as peyote:

One of the requirements for a "chaste and holy life" is "total abstinence from opium and from similar habit-forming drugs," such as heroin, hashish, and marijuana or hallucinogenic agents such as LSD, peyote and similar substances . . . except when prescribed for medical treatment. . . . Concerning the so-called spiritual virtues of the hallucinogens . . . spiritual stimulation should come from turning one's heart to Bahá'u'lláh and not through physical means such as drugs and agents.<sup>492</sup>

Bahá'í scholar and medical doctor Moojan Momen provides two cautionary notes to the discussion of hallucinogens and the religious experience in *The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach*. First, Momen writes that the phenomena of hallucinogens "probably cannot be used as the truth of religious experience," even though some religions have used or continue to use hallucinogens to attain altered states of awareness or consciousness.<sup>493</sup> Momen writes that features of an altered state of consciousness, such as trances, the perceived passage of time, and a heightened sense of mental arousal or a sense of mental stupor "are a general property of the neurophysiological state induced in the brain, rather than the specific property of the religious experience or the drugs themselves."<sup>494</sup> Second, Momen says scholars should not prematurely conclude that the greatest victories of humanity's progress are solely from the field of science:

The major advances in science involve jumps to a new framework, 'paradigm shifts,' as [Thomas] Kuhn called them, which come from a spark of inspiration welling up from the subconscious. For this to occur, the individual needs to be operating somewhere between the two extremes of everyday consciousness (where no sparks of inspiration come), on the one hand, and extreme hyper- or

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<sup>492</sup> Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, 352-53; Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 238.

<sup>493</sup> Momen, *Phenomenon of Religion*, 180-81.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, *Phenomenon of Religion*, 180.

hypo-arousal (where what is understood cannot be communicated), on the other. This medial position between the two extremes seems to be the position of humankind's maximal creativity—the source of all of the greatest philosophy, art, science and religious thought.<sup>495</sup>

In addition to the Bahá'í prohibition against hallucinogenic drugs outside of medicinal use, Bahá'ís are enjoined to obey the laws of the country in which they live: “In all activities, Bahá'ís are expected to obey civil law and remain loyal to their respective governments.”<sup>496</sup> Peyote is an illegal substance in the United States for anyone to use or possess, with the exception of American Indians who use peyote in specific religious ceremonies and sanctioned with strict legal guidelines.<sup>497</sup> Fully cognizant of the passage of time it takes for some Bahá'ís to “live the life,” the Universal House of Justice wrote a letter in 1963 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States: “Anyone involved in the use of peyote should be told that in the Bahá'í Faith spiritual stimulation comes from turning one's heart to Bahá'u'lláh and not through any physical means. They should therefore be encouraged to give up the use of peyote.”<sup>498</sup>

The use of peyote is not traditional, in the sense that Dinés have not used peyote for centuries, although other native peoples have in Mesoamerica, but rather peyote came from Mexico through Texas and New Mexico onto reservations in the United States, arriving in the “second half of the nineteenth century” and spreading “throughout the

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<sup>495</sup> Momen, *Phenomenon of Religion*, 181. See fn 22 for a fuller reference to Kuhn's work.

<sup>496</sup> Bahá'í International Community, “Magazine - The Baha'is,” ed., Douglas Moore (Office of Public Information of the Bahá'í International Community, 1992). 25.

<sup>497</sup> “Mescaline - The Law,” *Encyclopedia of Drugs and Addictive Substances*, eds. Barbara C. Bigelow and Gale Cengage, 2006, eNotes.com, 2006, <http://www.enotes.com/drugs-substances-yclopedia/mescaline/law> (accessed July 18, 2010); Sandner, *Symbols of Healing*, 107-09.

<sup>498</sup> Helen Hornby, comp., *Lights of Guidance*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (India: Thomason Press, 1999), 353. From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, Nov. 9, 1963, and published in the “Alaska Baha'i News,” May 1972, 4.

newly-created Indian reservations.”<sup>499</sup> The medicine men whom Sandner interviewed on the Navajo reservation (beginning in 1968) “denied having any relationship between it [peyote] and the traditional curing ceremonies.”<sup>500</sup> Sandner quotes Denet Tsosi when Tsosi said peyote “splits people up” and that when Tsosi learned his chants, “They were the only thing being used by the Navaho. There was no such thing as peyote.”<sup>501</sup> Another of Sandner’s informants, chanter Natani Tso, said that when members of the Native American Church came to see him, “they needed chant treatments like the others. There is no connection between the two [chants and peyote].”<sup>502</sup>

Diné Bahá’ís can attest to Tsosi’s comment about peyote splitting up people when a well-known and highly respected Diné Bahá’í resigned from a prominent position in the religion to become a “roadman” responsible for overseeing peyote ceremonies held in hogans.<sup>503</sup> During the emotional and teary interview with this elderly Diné and his family, he still proclaimed to “be a Bahá’í” and said he “had never stopped teaching the Faith.”<sup>504</sup> Religious Bahá’í symbols hung prominently on the walls in his home and he offered his well-worn Bahá’í prayer book as proof that, in his eyes, he had remained a Bahá’í. The details of what moved him to resign from his position remain confidential and closed, but I suggest that this Diné’s becoming Bahá’í more fully took the greater part of his adult life as he continued to work through finding resolutions to his life-course challenges.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> David F. Aberle, *The Peyote Religion among the Navaho*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1982), 25; Sandner, *Symbols of Healing*, 107; “Mescaline - The Law,” <http://www.enotes.com/drugs-substances-yclopedia/mescaline/law> (accessed July 18, 2010).

<sup>500</sup> Sandner, *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 107.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 107. I have kept Sandner’s original spelling of Navaho.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., *Navaho Symbols of Healing*, 108.

<sup>503</sup> Interview by author. This informant wishes to remain anonymous.

<sup>504</sup> Interview by author. This informant wishes to remain anonymous.

<sup>505</sup> Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 165.

According to research in the religion's administrative literature, there are administrative consequences for any Bahá'í who openly and publicly engages in acts contrary to certain laws in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* by Bahá'u'lláh. One consequence is the removal of administrative rights. This deprives him or her of being "in good standing" and includes the loss of rights such as voting in Bahá'í elections, giving to the Bahá'í funds, and attending Bahá'í Feasts. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada in 1948 stated that

The deprivation of a person's voting rights should only be resorted to when absolutely necessary, and a National Spiritual Assembly should always feel reluctant to impose this very heavy sanction which is a severe punishment. Of course sometimes, to protect the Cause, it must be done, but he feels that if the believer so deprived makes an effort to mend his ways, rectifies his mistake, or sincerely seeks forgiveness, every effort should be made to help him and enable him to reestablish himself in the Community as a member in good standing.<sup>506</sup>

Exercise of such rights constitutes a major portion of what it means to be an active and participating Bahá'í in the life of the Bahá'í community. Conduct that may cause a loss of administrative rights include flagrant use of alcohol, common law marriage, promiscuity, disobedience to the Bahá'í laws regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and the use of illegal drugs. Personal behavior is an ongoing process of bringing one's behaviors and choices into alignment with the Bahá'í teachings in a life-long process of becoming Bahá'í, whether public or private, whether active or inactive. The Universal House of Justice urged NSAs to "work to avoid blanket rulings" without extensive investigation into the issue at hand, and to allow ample time and opportunity for those behaviors to be overcome by the Bahá'í in question.<sup>507</sup>

Our teachings, as outlined in the *Advent of Divine Justice*, on the subject of living a chaste life, should be emphasized, but certainly no ruling whatsoever should be

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<sup>506</sup> Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, 61.

<sup>507</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada* (Toronto: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1965), 8.

laid down in this matter. The Bahá'ís have certainly not yet reached that stage of moral perfection where they are in a position to too harshly scrutinize the private lives of other souls, and each individual should be accepted on the basis of his faith, and sincere willingness to try to live up to the Divine Standards; further than this we cannot go at present.<sup>508</sup>

When a Bahá'í rectifies whatever action led to the loss of rights and wishes to be reinstated into good standing, an application is made to the proper administrative institution, which may then reinstate his or her administrative rights.<sup>509</sup>

I continue to argue that Diné Bahá'ís are allowed to practice their traditional beliefs. As Sandner showed, the Diné organized their social/health system in such a way as to identify those Diné who may be mentally ill or have character disorders. To say Dinés should abstain from alcohol, for example, is not an act of depriving them of a cultural tradition. I argue that giving up the use of peyote, a drug that was classified as a Schedule I hallucinogen by the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act in 1970, should be held in no different light than Diné Bahá'ís giving up alcohol, and would not constitute a lack of Diné Bahá'ís practicing their traditional ways.<sup>510</sup>

### **The Power of Rational Thought**

The tensions Alfred Kahn, Sr. experienced from the conflict between culturally sanctioned beliefs such as the belief in harmful ghosts and Bahá'í teachings on “superstitions” took time and rational thought before those beliefs came into alignment with the teachings of the new religion he had grown up in and accepted as an adult. Change comes, Lincoln argues, not when groups or individuals use “knowledge to

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<sup>508</sup> Universal House of Justice, *A Wider Horizon*, 120.

<sup>509</sup> Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, 336.

<sup>510</sup> “Mescaline - The Law,” *Encyclopedia of Drugs and Addictive Substances*, eds. Barbara C. Bigelow and Gale Cengage, 2006. eNotes.com. 2006, <http://www.enotes.com/drugs-substances-yclopedia/mescaline/law> (accessed July 18, 2010).

challenge ideological mystification,” but rather when they “employ thought and discourse,” which includes the modes of stories, symbols, and practices as effective instruments of change.<sup>511</sup> Bahá’í author John H. Hatcher explains in *Close Connections: The Bridge Between Physical and Spiritual Reality* that the crucial power of rational thought is the most essential means by which human beings function, and because of this strong emphasis on rational thought, the power of the mind is greatly emphasized in Bahá’í teachings as the principal means by which humans utilize their experiences in the physical world.<sup>512</sup> Hatcher says that the mind, defined as a “metaphysical reality,” uses all the senses to investigate physical reality. He describes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation of physical and spiritual senses, or powers, as “speaking in terms of Aristotelian philosophy”:<sup>513</sup>

Man has also spiritual powers: imagination, which conceives things; thought, which reflects upon realities; comprehension, which comprehends realities: memory, which retains whatever man imagines, thinks, and comprehends. The intermediary between the five outward powers and the inward powers is the sense which they possess in common, that is to say, the sense which acts between the outer and inner powers, conveys to the inward powers whatever the outer powers discern. It is termed the common faculty, because it communicates between the outward and inward powers, and thus is common to the outward and inward powers.<sup>514</sup>

It was Aristotle who listed and described the four outward senses of sight, smell, hearing, and taste over 2,000 years ago.<sup>515</sup> Psychology has since identified at least nine physical senses by adding the five somasthetic senses of kinesthetic (sense of moving), vestibular (orientation), touch (sensory), temperature (hot and cold), and pain (crucial to

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<sup>511</sup> Lincoln, “Myth, Ritual, and Construction,” 3-5.

<sup>512</sup> John H. Hatcher, *Close Connections: The Bridge between Spiritual and Physical Reality* (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 2005), 212-213.

<sup>513</sup> Hatcher, *Close Connections*, 239.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid, *Close Connections*, 239; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 210.

<sup>515</sup> Stephen M. Kosslyn and Robin S. Rosenberg, *Fundamentals of Psychology: The Brain, The Person, The World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2005), 118.



survival).<sup>516</sup> Hatcher said that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá added “feeling” as a fifth outward sense, and classified imagination, memory, comprehension, thought, and the “common faculty” as the five inward spiritual powers or inward senses.<sup>517</sup> Except for the unidentified “common faculty,” psychologists view these four capacities as components of the brain and mind but do not identify them as senses in particular. Psychologists Stephen M. Kosslyn and Robin S. Rosenberg address the differences between “inner speech and spoken thought” and explain that words are often ambiguous while thought is not—in short, thought is not language. Rather, thought arises from a stream of stored-in-memory visual mental images that allow the experience of inner “seeing with the mind’s eye” and inner “hearing with the mind’s ear.”<sup>518</sup>

In addition, Kosslyn and Rosenberg argue, thought arises from unambiguous, often abstract, internal representations termed *concepts*, which are neither images nor words but groupings of objects (living or non-living) or events, including relationships between individuals.<sup>519</sup> Thought is clear and unambiguous while language is often ambiguous—the concepts people hold in their heads are not always so easy to put into words or to define even to themselves. According to Hatcher, Bahá’í theology identifies soul as a non-local, non-material “rational being or mind” that translates metaphysical ideas (concepts) through the brain’s capacities to send, receive, and process information.<sup>520</sup> This information in the form of concepts or metaphysical ideas flows “to and from the inner self” on a stream of a bidirectional “common faculty” that translates

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<sup>516</sup> Kosslyn and Rosenberg, *Fundamentals*, 118-121.

<sup>517</sup> Hatcher, *Close Connections*, 239.

<sup>518</sup> Kosslyn and Rosenberg, *Fundamentals*, 208-209.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid*, *Fundamentals*, 208-209.

<sup>520</sup> Hatcher, *Close Connections*, 68.

into “forms of action.”<sup>521</sup> Alfred, Sr. saying his brother’s name out loud is a concrete example of the power of rational thought in action. The ability, or willingness, to think things through rationally carries the power to change outward actions and inward attitudes. Such changes in thought and action take time to process. In the case of those Diné becoming Bahá’í, change becomes a matter of education for both the Diné Bahá’ís and their non-Diné counterparts who are trying to assist them in the process. In a training session held around 1956 for Indian teaching, the participants were encouraged to use wisdom:

When enrolling new believers, we must be wise and gentle, and not place so many obstacles in their way that they feel it is impossible to accept the Faith. . . . Once accorded membership it must be brought home to them that they are expected to live up to His Teachings and to show forth the signs of a noble character. . . . This can be gradually, after the new believer is enrolled. . . . The essential thing is that the candidate for enrollment should believe in his heart in the truth of Bahá’u’lláh. Whether he is literate or illiterate, informed of all the Teachings or not, is beside the point entirely. When the spark of faith exists the essential Message is there, and gradually everything else can be added unto it. The process of educating people of different customs and backgrounds must be done with the greatest patience and understanding, and rules and regulations not imposed upon them, except where a rock-bottom essential is in question.<sup>522</sup>

A “rock-bottom essential” might be a new Bahá’í deliberately creating disunity and disharmony within a Bahá’í community, or the public demonstration of drug use or drunkenness, as discussed earlier. The essential point made in this statement accords with an earlier statement that the Bahá’í teachings govern physical and spiritual areas of an individual’s relationship to God, relations between individuals, and relations between the individual and society.<sup>523</sup> How much a person can absorb of the teachings and how long

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<sup>521</sup> Hatcher, *Close Connections*, 181, 238.

<sup>522</sup> Training Session-Indian Teaching, AITC: American Indian Service/Teaching Committee Records, Publications and Regional Files, box 1, Mss. Collection No: M-476/18/23/31, 1952-1956 (Wilmette, IL: National Bahá’í Archives), 2, 10, 18.

<sup>523</sup> Universal House of Justice, “Introduction,” *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 4-5.

it may take to absorb the “rules and regulations” are dependent upon each person’s cultural background, and upon his or her mental, emotional, and spiritual capacity to accept and integrate new information and knowledge.

**Blind Faith.** Psychologist Raymond Paloutzian explores tensions between dimensions of religious commitment, such as informed faith (knowledge) versus blind faith (belief without knowledge), and consistency in belief versus a hypocritical believer (effects of religion in practical life). Paloutzian writes that “intellectual conversions” are changes in belief, “moral conversions” are changes in motivation, and “social conversions” are changes in one’s actions toward the social environment.<sup>524</sup> Paloutzian’s three dimensions of religious commitment through intellectual, moral, and social changes in belief, motivation, and actions are necessary complements to Rambo’s seven stages of conversion and represent natural processes of religious growth over time. Some public or outward actions that define being an active Bahá’í are voting in elections, serving in administrative capacities, attending Feasts, and providing service to others. The inward or private actions and behaviors related to becoming Bahá’í are daily prayer, observing the fasting period, giving to the Bahá’í fund, and daily reading or deepening in the authoritative writings of the religion. Alfred Kahn, Jr. gave voice to religious growth through his belief, motivation, and actions, with service provided to others as an outward sign of inward change:

There are many stages of development but that highest stage of development is in service to all mankind. It’s not about this worldly power. It’s not about an office you take that you can get money and have power over people. It’s about spiritual power. There is nothing like it in the world right now. It’s humility, a humble mode of learning. You learn from each other. You never feel above anyone else. The Perfect Exemplar [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] talks about

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<sup>524</sup> Raymond F Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 141.

that station, “Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones.” It’s the highest station. It’s a spiritual station. It’s a spiritual power to be a servant to mankind. And you’re not longing for the earthly power. Not longing for the early goods, material benefit. You’re longing for the spiritual, which has no connection with the material, you know. You might see the most humble person and he is serving all mankind and you can’t see the spiritual station. You can’t see the spiritual loftiness. I think when you look towards native people, you don’t see a lot of earthly power. We’ve been trained to look for that earthly, material prosperity in terms of earthly wealth, earthly riches; it’s not there. There was so much spiritual dignity, spiritual loftiness in the native culture before the western culture came. Right now we’re struggling with materialism. Not that it was perfect, you know. Navajos were a warrior society. We went and raided Pueblos, but every day you prayed and your life was a prayer.<sup>525</sup>

Alfred, Jr. discusses his life-course challenges, his boulders-in-the-road of becoming Bahá’í as he acknowledges the need to travel through “many stages of development.” Without using the term, Alfred sees reciprocity as a “humble mode of learning,” and identifies social and religious issues as an excessive materialistic need for “earthly power” instead of “spiritual dignity.” In a moment of honesty and levity, Alfred defends his Diné culture as having “spiritual loftiness”— even when they raided Pueblos every day, “life was [still] a prayer.”<sup>526</sup>

Sociologists Richard A. Snow and Richard Machalek have written that a number of scholars suggest that something much more fundamental than beliefs and identities change when one undergoes conversion. Rather, there is a change in one’s “sense of ultimate grounding” or “root reality” and a paradigm shift in the “informing aspect” of one’s life, termed as a “universe of discourse.”<sup>527</sup> Conversion fundamentally and significantly displaces one universe of discourse for another and raises it to the status of a primary authority, making the universe of discourse “discernible in a convert’s speech

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<sup>525</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

<sup>526</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

<sup>527</sup> Richard A. Snow and Richard Machalek, “The Sociology of Conversion,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10 (1984): 70.

and reasoning.” Snow and Machalek said that the notion of radical change remains at the core of all conceptions of conversion, whether theological or social scientific, but beyond this point the consensus vanishes—not only are social scientists “uneasy” about the theological association of conversion with the idea of a deity or an enlightened state, but they also disagree about the “precise” nature of the change that is involved in religious conversion.<sup>528</sup>

Running the gauntlet of acceptance or rejection of religious conversion, social scientists have historically moved away from the position of an open religious belief, beginning with Freud in the early 1900s after Freud’s statement that religion is the “universal obsessional neurosis of humanity” and because of the necessary injunction of empirical sciences to have evidence and provide proof before acceptance of theory as fact.<sup>529</sup> Historian of religions Daniel L. Pals notes that both Freud and Marx thought religion was not only false but pathological, unhealthy, and dysfunctional, a “kind of disease people needed to be cured of.”<sup>530</sup> Psychiatrist H. B. Danesh wrote that, nevertheless, Freud spoke of his own struggles to achieve greater self-awareness. In Freud’s defense, Danesh quotes Bruno Bettelheim’s comment that “the English rendition of Freud’s writings distorts much of the essential humanism that permeates the originals.”<sup>531</sup> Bettelheim points out that in the original German, Freud put emphasis on the first part of the word *psychoanalysis*, saying that the “Psyche is the soul—a term full of the richest meaning.”<sup>532</sup> The English translation put the emphasis on *analysis*, and the enormous

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<sup>528</sup> Snow and Machalek, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 169.

<sup>529</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), 55.

<sup>530</sup> Pals, *Eight Theories*, 316.

<sup>531</sup> Danesh, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 15-16.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 15- 16.

significance of the fact that psychiatry and psychology is dealing with the soul, Danesh says, is generally ignored. These distortions, presented in “depersonalized and dehumanized scientific language,” moved psychoanalysis away from its original goal of “reflective introspection” to schools of psychiatry and psychology that are behaviorally, cognitively, or physiologically oriented, concentrating mostly on what can be measured or observed from the outside.<sup>533</sup> Pals writes that, while researchers can continue to investigate and interpret all the varieties of religious structures, the range of evidence for a comprehensive theory of religion will remain insufficient and current theorists wonder if “science” is a term that can continue to be used simultaneously with religious studies.<sup>534</sup>

Mathematician and Bahá’í scholar William S. Hatcher provides a model of the basic categories of existence, with reality divided into subjective and objective categories. Hatcher says that “any increase in knowledge will be reflected by some change in one’s internal states, and usually in one’s conscious internal states.”<sup>535</sup> Hatcher refers to the Bahá’í principle that science and religion will come into agreement over the course of time, with an acknowledgement of “authentic religious belief” that is not simply a product of blind faith.<sup>536</sup>

The corollary of future courses of study will be confirmation on the part of religion and metaphysics that science is not the enemy of religion, but the very means by which the foundation of religious belief can be firmly established and upheld. For to the extent that science ultimately is self-correcting (though often haltingly), it will in time by its own tools of rational investigation be forced to recognize the undeniable evidence of the interpenetration between scientific law (natural forces) and spiritual law (supernatural forces). Likewise, at the heart of

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<sup>533</sup> Danesh, *Psychology of Spirituality*, 16.

<sup>534</sup> Pals, *Eight Theories*, 314-315.

<sup>535</sup> William S. Hatcher, *Logic and Logos: Essays on Science, Religion and Philosophy* (Oxford: George Ronald 1990), 106.

<sup>536</sup> Hatcher, *Logic and Logos*, 106.

true religion and authentic religious belief is not the love of mystery or “blind faith” but the love of discovering the pearls of wisdom that explain reality, resolve mysteries, and make clear the divine rationale for natural law and for the integration of these dual, reciprocal aspects of reality.<sup>537</sup>

## Summary

I argue that, rather than demonstrating blind faith, the idea of a “divine rationale for natural law” was a relatively easy concept for Diné Bahá’ís to grasp, based on their acceptance of the Twin Manifestations of the Bahá’í Faith as the return of their mythical Warrior Twins and on the chief with twelve feathers in the seventh Navajo chant as representing Bahá’u’lláh with his twelve basic principles of religion. Hatcher’s dual, reciprocal aspects of reality agree with Geertz’s explanation that “a cluster of sacred symbols” (similar to those found in both Diné eschatological narratives) “woven into some sort of ordered whole” creates the religious system for that particular culture. It is only common sense, Geertz said, because “between ethos and worldview, between the approved style of life and the assumed structure of reality, there is conceived to be a simple and fundamental congruence such that they complete one another and lend one another meaning.”<sup>538</sup>

The prophecies of the Warrior Twins and the Unity Chants, in conjunction with the appearance of the Bahá’í Faith on the Navajo reservation, through a simple and fundamental congruence completed one another for the Diné who became Bahá’ís and gave meaning each to the other through the process of conversive discourse, in which the internal changes of conversion became outwardly “discernible in the convert’s speech

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<sup>537</sup> Hatcher, *Logic and Logos*, 106.

<sup>538</sup> Geertz, “Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” *Antioch Review*, vol. 17, no.4 (Winter 1957): 421-37; Pals, *Eight Theories*, 270-71.

and reasoning.”<sup>539</sup> Johnny Nelson not only gave credence, in his interview, to discernment in speech and reasoning at the Great Council Fire, but he also stated that discernment brought a belief in the reality of the Bahá’í Faith “even though I’m a Navajo, but somehow the languages were all, practically all the same. You can understand what they were talking about. So there was something there that made us [gain] our belief in [Bahá’í] reality. That’s how we became a Bahá’í.”<sup>540</sup>

Becoming Bahá’í involves the revealed “Word,” written and spoken, which Bahá’ís use to transform their lives. The term *word* appears 5, 273 times in 171 authorative documents in Ocean. At the Great Council Fire Unity Conference, it was the word, spoken, sung, and prayed, that brought acceptance and belief to those, like Johnny Nelson, who listened. Chester Kahn vividly remembers his excitement at the Council Fire when Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís, Indians from different tribes, and Diné elders and medicine men “expressed their feelings, their ideas about the whole process, saying that this is, ah, a prophesy. This is a New Day has come, a new beginning and, ah, they [Diné medicine men] just said this is in harmony [with] our way of life, our way of traditional teachings . . . all spoke, each one of them from their hearts why they were there and they were interested in the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith.”<sup>541</sup> It was “scary,” Chester said, because “so many people came. Ah, the word had gone out to the [people] from this region, to all the communities in the southwestern states, maybe a thousand people.”<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Snow and Machalek, “The Sociology of Conversion,” 70; Geertz, “Ethos,” 129; Hatcher, *Logic and Logos*, 106.

<sup>540</sup> Nelson and Wilson, interview.

<sup>541</sup> Chester Kahn, interview.

<sup>542</sup> Chester Kahn, interview.



Chester remembers a “busload came all the way from Los Angeles, people of all races, colors, [and] beliefs (see Appendix C-4 through 11). And they listened”.<sup>543</sup>

Listening plays a vital role in speaking words, defining languages, and creating the linguistic structure of one’s “universe of discourse.”

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<sup>543</sup> Chester Kahn, interview.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TRANSFORMATION: SACRED SYMBOL, SACRED SOUND

De Ramírez writes that scholars have begun to investigate explicitly the importance of the transformative effects that storytelling (such as the Navajo Chants and the Warrior Twins) and conversations (similar to those the participants had at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference) bring about through people's interactions. According to de Ramírez, through story-telling and conversive conversations, our life experiences and their meanings are created and re-created, formed and reformed; constructing and reconstructing selves and realities along the way, "conversive communication in the form of story-telling is perhaps humanity's primary tool for *changing* reality."<sup>544</sup> De Ramírez reminds us that, before the advent of the Bahá'í Faith, the other great world religious systems had emerged within vibrant oral traditions but also within widespread illiteracy: "Originating in an increasingly literate and textually oriented world, whose respective oral traditions have been variously receding into distant memory, the Bahá'í Faith emphasizes the crucial role of sacred orality for the relational harmonics [vibrational sacred sound] that bring persons together."<sup>545</sup>

The ancient Diné understood the power of transformative vibrational sound and elevated it to the status of knowledge. In Diné cosmology, the world and everything in it are composed of four primary elements necessary for existence on any level: moisture, air, substance, and heat. Zolbrod explains that the twelve levels of knowledge, constructed of these same fundamental elements, are permeated by the fifth element of vibration as sound necessary to maintain life. Diné applied the concept of sacred sound,

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<sup>544</sup> De Ramírez, "The Conversive Turn," 41-42. De Ramírez cites folklorist Karl Kroeber.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., "The Conversive Turn," 28-29.

recreated from the four fundamental elements, to items that were necessary for their comfort, safety, and life in the forms of cradle-boards, baskets, foods such as corn pollen and cornbread, looms, hogans, language, movement, and life cycles.<sup>546</sup> The concept of sound as vibration and movement permeates all things, felt and unfelt, seen and unseen, heard and unheard. Sandner, along with Geertz, frames “symbol” as any “*thing*” that functions as a carrier for a concept:

The carrier or vehicle may be a world, a mathematical notation, an act, a gesture, a ritual, a dream, a work of art, or any ‘thing’ that can carry a concept. The concept may be a rational-linguistic one, an imaginal-intuitive one, or a feeling-evaluative one. It makes no difference as long as the symbol carries it effectively. The concept is the symbol’s meaning. Language is the first kind of symbolism that has a specific, sequential structure which is termed discursive.<sup>547</sup>

De Ramírez defines the differences between Sandner’s discursive communication as a carrier of symbols and conversive communication, explaining that “the concept and practice of [discursive] discourse presumes a separation [of transmitter and receiver] that is bridged by language and logic.” Conversive communication, on the other hand, says de Ramírez, “reflects the dual aspects of conversation and *conversion*” (emphasis mine):<sup>548</sup>

The conversative aspect is an essentially collaborative, intersubjective and relational co-creative articulation that brings diverse persons and elements of the world together . . . that signifies the transformative capacity of language to transform persons (human and non-human) and worlds through the deep unifying power of deep interpersonal connections.<sup>549</sup>

Unfortunately, Sandner (1979) was not privy to de Ramírez’s (2007) conversive twist of the tongue, or Sandner surely would have changed “language is the first kind of symbolism that has a specific, sequential structure which is termed *discursive*” to the more-inclusive *conversive*, because just as surely, conversive describes much more fully

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<sup>546</sup> Zolbrod, *Diné bahané*, 36-37.

<sup>547</sup> Sandner, *Symbols*, 12; Pals, *Eight Theories*, 270.

<sup>548</sup> De Ramírez, “The Conversive Turn,” 36-39.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, “The Conversive Turn,” 36-39.

the Diné's concept of sound as vibration. Within that sound, seen as a symbol and as a concept, lies not only a fuller description of Annie Kahn's *conversive-conversion* interpretation of the Navajo chants but also an answer for Alfred Kahn, Sr.'s metaphysical dream-conversation with his brother through the worlds of "human and non-human" communication so openly included by de Ramírez.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's relational elements of cooperation and reciprocity, "essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness," can be added to the Diné's twelve levels of knowledge.<sup>550</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that the mind functions as the "all-unifying agency" that unites all the component parts [of the mind and brain] with each other so that functions are "in perfect order and thereby cooperation and reaction [through reciprocity, the common faculty] are made possible."<sup>551</sup> As stated previously, everything in existence remains in some state of ongoing transformation, of vibration, and of movement. Nothing remains static—it either decays or grows, either goes forward or goes backwards. De Ramírez, addressing certain decaying forms of communication, clarifies the Bahá'í position:

Bahá'u'lláh makes it very clear that all the sacred traditions of the world throughout time have advocated deeply relational and transforming communications, but that, today, not only do the majority of people not communicate conversively, but that many have even forgotten how to do so, instead communicating in the more efficient, yet superficial, manner of discourse in which communications stay at the level of ratiocinative [logical] thought, personal opinion, and emotional response.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> Bahá'í International Community, "Nature," 6-7.

<sup>551</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Prepared by the 1963-1990 Group, Volume I, Bahá'í Publications Australia (Maryborough: Australian Print Group, 1991), 509.

<sup>552</sup> De Ramírez, "The Converse Turn," 33.

Zolbrod found that most Diné were cooperative but hostile to having their oral stories written down—Dinés believed that if the old culture was dying out, the traditional stories should die with it; stories could not be recited properly because “words on a page were silent and unalive.”<sup>553</sup> Dinés realized the difficulty of capturing the vibration of sound and movement on something as inanimate as a sheet of paper, a “substance” made of wood, reed, or bark. In *Diné bahané*, Zolbrod uses a poetic English idiom appropriate to Diné oral tradition to retain the social and religious significance of the original stories. Speech, Zolbrod says, is the highest human faculty in the Diné hierarchy of things—the final line in a chantway prayer demonstrates the importance of having voice: “*shiné sháádiht*— my voice for me restore.”<sup>554</sup> Restoring the highest human faculty equals a full recovery, a return to well-being and a removal of whatever “spell” one is caught in. Alfred, Jr. had to find his voice—not only to become Bahá’í but to become Navajo, too:

I think I identify myself as Navajo and I believe in a lot of the traditional ways but I had to sort of dig for them. It wasn’t just readily available. I wasn’t taught the language and that keeps me back from a lot of the traditional things but I was raised with traditional understanding. And tradition, culture, and religion are one thing for Navajos. There is sort of a gray line between social, traditional, cultural understanding. I think I’m a Navajo person. And tradition, culture and religion are not like cut and dry, like western culture where I’m like this religion, and I’m this culture, this race. Separate. I think the more I become Bahá’í, the more truly Navajo I am. Some Navajo people may say that you’re getting away from traditional beliefs, but really it’s a sacred duty to recognize the Twin Manifestations. And I believe that the Navajo Twin Manifestations have come back. They are the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. So the more you accept and internalize the Bahá’í Faith the more Navajo you are. There is no distinction, it’s not like you close that chapter and open a new one. It’s the rest of the story, the rest of the chapter, the rest of the tale. It’s just the next part of it. It’s a continuation.<sup>555</sup>

Alfred, Jr.’s statement that “it’s the rest of the story,” a continuation, refers to the Bahá’í tenet of progressive revelation, in which the major religious systems are one

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<sup>553</sup> Zolbrod, *Diné bahané*, 21-22.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, *Diné bahané*, 13.

<sup>555</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

continuing story throughout humanity's history, occurring at different times in history, at different geographical places in the world, and appearing with different great teachers or Manifestations who bring their own holy books, laws, and social changes needed to update and move humanity forward.<sup>556</sup> Alfred, Jr. had to internalize (as he states) this particular aspect of the Bahá'í teachings, or he would not be able to accept the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as the return of the Diné Warrior Twins. Not being able to accept would of necessity create religious, psychological, emotional, and spiritual tensions and confusion within Alfred, Jr., eventually turning him away from the Bahá'í Faith because of the disharmony within himself.

Alfred, Jr.'s acceptance, internalization, and voiced acknowledgement of his belief in the Bahá'í Faith signify the outward and inward changes associated with what psychologists in particular define as a true conversion. Without some signs of inward and outward change in behavior, speech, thought, action, most psychological models determine that a true or genuine conversion experience has not occurred. These changes in internal states of being manifested in even slight outward signs of change usually signal true conversion, significantly evident in the convert's universe of discourse, whether discursive or conversive. The ancient oral story of the Warrior Twins along with the Navajo chants were effective instruments of change for Diné Bahá'ís, as seen evidenced in their speech, language, and behavior. I argue that becoming Bahá'í for Diné Bahá'ís, which, logically, incorporated some of the phenomenological aspects from the other religious conversion models I have discussed, can be found in relationship between the Diné Bahá'ís two eschatological narratives with their many symbols and the teachings of the Twin Manifestations that vibrate within important components of the Diné traditional belief system for those Diné who "became Bahá'í."

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<sup>556</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 140; Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, 497.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CLOSURE: BEING “WHO I AM”

I know of no other work focused on the tradition-transition conversion experience of Diné Bahá'ís. Questions, objections, and alternative views must of necessity arise from this early research that cannot and does not respond to all of them. This case study has focused exclusively on the event of the Great Council Fire Unity Conference as a starting point for conversion to the Bahá'í Faith among the Diné and on the oral stories that served as eschatological narratives. A study of early Bahá'í literature assessed the amount of outreach from Bahá'í home-front pioneers to the Diné and the resultant religious matrix created from that outreach process. Research and comparisons in the fields of psychology, anthropology, and sociology demonstrated significant signs of Diné becoming Bahá'í as manifested through religious ideology and religious imagery, as reported through an analysis of the eschatological narratives, through interviews with Diné Bahá'ís, and through observing activity at the Native American Bahá'í Institute on the Navajo reservation.

There are many layers yet unexplored in Diné mythology that may match up with the Bahá'í message of return, renewal, and a new age to come, including another set of twins and a prophecy about a crystal hogan that matches up with the quartz-embedded Bahá'í “Mother Temple of the West” built on the shores of Lake Michigan near Chicago.<sup>557</sup> The columns by the sides of the nine entrances to the Temple include a

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<sup>557</sup>Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, xvii. See: Bruce E. Whitmore, *The Dawning Place: The Building of a Temple, the Forging of the North American Bahá'í Community* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984); Benjamin Leiker, “Sacred Bahá'í Literature” (Wilmette, IL: Wilmette Institute, 2003), Bahá'í

swastika molded into it, as a representation of the tribal peoples of the Americas and as an ancient religious symbol of the world (see Appendix F-2). Shoghi Effendi wrote with delight about the ornamentation of the Temple,

In the geometric forms of the ornamentation, a writer in the well-known publication “Architectural Record” has written, covering the columns and surrounding windows and doors of the Temple, one deciphers all the religious symbols of the world. Here are the swastika, the circle, the cross, the triangle, the double triangle or six pointed star (Solomon’s seal) but more than this the noble symbol of the spiritual orb . . . the five pointed star; the Greek Cross, the Roman cross, and supreme above all, the wonderful nine pointed star, figured in the structure of the Temple itself, and appearing again and again in its ornamentation as significant of the spiritual glory in the world today.<sup>558</sup>

The swastika was turned by Hitler, literally by flipping the swastika directionally away from its ancient form and figuratively by turning it into one of the world’s most dreaded war symbols. Believed to be 6000 years old and originating in India, in response to Hitler’s usurpation of the sacred symbol, the Diné, Papago, Apache, and Hopi leaders signed a whirling log proclamation in 1940 that read,

Because the above ornament, which has been a symbol of friendship among our forefathers for many centuries, has been desecrated recently by another nation of peoples, therefore it is resolved that henceforth from this date on and forever more our tribes renounce the use of the emblem commonly known today as the swastika . . . on our blankets, baskets, art objects, sand paintings and clothing.<sup>559</sup>

For the Diné, the swastika depicts the whirling log with a male and female *Yé’is*, or “dreaming twins” at the end of each arm (See Appendix F-1).<sup>560</sup> The dreaming twins, which may serve as a representation of the Diné Monster Slayers (the Warrior Twins) and therefore serve as representations of the Twin Manifestations (the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh)

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Library Online, [http://bahai-library.com/index.php5?file=bailey\\_seven\\_valleys\\_peace](http://bahai-library.com/index.php5?file=bailey_seven_valleys_peace) (accessed May 11, 2007).

<sup>558</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 352.

<sup>559</sup> Collectors Guide, <http://www.collectorsguide.com/fa/fa086.shtml> (accessed 05/09/2010); Villaseñor, *Tapestries in Sand*, 15.

<sup>560</sup> Collectors Guide, <http://www.collectorsguide.com/fa/fa086.shtml> (accessed 05/09/2010).



for Diné Bahá'ís, who accept the Twin Manifestations as the return of the Monster Slayers, are positioned on the outstretched arms of the swastika that once was a symbol for friendship and now is the symbol of a world that was gripped by violence.

I was caught by surprise when, in a pause toward the end of Alfred, Jr.'s interview, he quite suddenly and indignantly exclaimed,

I don't think you can say Bahá'u'lláh isn't the One for today because we have this prophesy of the Crystal Hogan. If you have ever heard of Wilmette, it has a Hogan for the North American continent brought by the Bahá'ís and it is made out of quartz. And it's round in shape and it accepts people of all religions. And it's a House of Worship built on the North American continent. So that's a fulfillment of that same prophesy of the Crystal Hogan we are waiting for. . . . We're looking for the Crystal Hogan and the Twin Manifestations [that will] come with the Message.<sup>561</sup>

Just as suddenly, it was not me alone, the quietly listening emic interviewer with whom Alfred, Jr. was conversing, but Alfred was conversing with his inner self, as well. De Ramirez says conversive responses engage not only with scripture as sacred symbol, but also with sacred sound voiced at the deeper levels of heart and spirit while listening deeply to what has been heard, read, or experienced in contemplative and meditative ways that open the self to “empathic and spiritualized understandings.”<sup>562</sup> Moments and periods of silences, akin to the pauses and ahmms naturally occurring in the speech of Alfred's father and uncle, are the keys to unlocking the door of this process in which thoughts and feelings are “given deep consideration at the level of the heart, enabling the understanding that comes from inspiration and insight.”<sup>563</sup> De Ramirez credits the work of Diné scholar and poetess Luci Tapahonso when she says that many indigenous writers and thinkers affirm that part of the conversive process is “inherently relational,” as hearts

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<sup>561</sup> Alfred Kahn, Jr., interview.

<sup>562</sup> De Ramirez, “The Conversive Turn,” 44.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid., “The Conversive Turn,” 27, 46.

join in love and affection—“heart alone can communicate to heart the state of the knower.”<sup>564</sup>

As stated earlier, it was to be expected that some American Indians would convert to Christianity due to the assimilation process since contact, but the same expectation does not hold true for other religious systems. American Indians attend their own Native American Church; join the Catholic Church (as Chester Kahn and Linda Wilson did in boarding school); become members of one or more of the Protestant denominations; or they choose to remain traditional or secular with no affiliation to any outside religious system. Again, there are no known cases of an American Indian choosing to convert to Buddhism or Judaism, although both of these religions have ties of friendship to the American Indian community as members of the international family of tribal cultures—Buddhists monks, in particular, are welcomed and honored guests on the reservations they visit.

What was the motivation for and through what means did hundreds of Diné readily choose to enter over a short period of time and without coercion of any sort into a new religion previously unknown to them is the question posed, argued, and answered in this work. The Diné Bahá'ís told their stories with verve and passion about their ongoing process of becoming Bahá'í. They expressed without hesitation belief in their own prophecies and skillfully demonstrated the power of rational thought. In the milieu of the interview context, each informant communicated conversively with an attitude of trust. Each person shared poignant memories and experiences of how they see themselves as Diné. Each one told what it means to him or her to be a Diné Bahá'í and what it means to

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<sup>564</sup> See: Luci Tapahonso, *Blue Horses Rush In: Poems and Stories*, v. 14, Sun Traces: An American Indian Literary Series (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997) and fn. 31. De Ramírez quotes John E. Esslemont.

be included as participating and welcomed members of the collective Bahá'í family.

Alfred Kahn, Sr. moved toward closure with these words:

Ahmm . . . to me . . . it's ah . . . it's still taken time for people to live together, understand each other. It's the languages; it's the communication that's different. We're all different. There might be somebody out there or even in here that would totally go against the Faith or even my own tradition. You know there is some prejudices still and differences—all the 'isms' like we say, ahmm . . . classism, maybe. And somebody might dislike me because I'm wearing old tennis shoes and long, not long 'Injn' hair, excuse me, Indian hair. But it doesn't bother me. It gives me power. So it doesn't bother me a bit. So, I'm here being who I am.<sup>565</sup>

Alfred Kahn, Sr.'s being who he is fits Geertz's statement that the worldview of a people or an individual is "sheer actuality"; a picture of the way things are, one's concept of nature, self and society; one's worldview that contains one's most comprehensive ideas of order.<sup>566</sup> Such ideas of comprehensive order appear to have been severely tested over Vine Deloria, Jr.'s lifetime before his passing in 2005. American Indian, historian, theologian, lawyer, and educator who had taught at the University of Arizona, Deloria's words contained within his prolific writings rage discursively against the losses and injustices of conquest while at the same time he conversively tries to re-find "mankind's life story" in those same textual articulations.

I do not know if Deloria had ever heard of Annie Kahn's Navajo chants, the Warrior Twins, or the Bahá'í Faith—or if it would have made any difference in his worldview if he had. It seems likely that such a renowned scholar and activist as Deloria would have examined all three in his investigations of the tensions between religion(s) and culture(s). In *God Is Red* (1973) Deloria exemplified Geertz's statement by

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<sup>565</sup> Alfred Kahn, Sr., interview. Alfred's reference to "in here" refers to the Prayer Hogan at NABI.

<sup>566</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books 1975), 127; Pals, *Eight Theories*, 272.

questioning nature, self, and society, and sallied forth with the existential question of the twenty-first century:

Can we survive increasing speed and constant migration and hold the same religious convictions about the world that men held two centuries ago? Or even a century ago? Or even in the previous decade? Almost everywhere we turn, we are confronted with the necessity of renewing our vision of the totality of our existence, our understanding of the nature of the universe and the paths by which we can move forward as diverse peoples upon [the] continent. . . . When ecologists find a predictable life-span of a generation separating us from total extinction, it would seem that we have a duty to search for another interpretation of mankind's life story instead of the traditional Christian view of the world and what it means. Unless we solve some of our problems, God will *have to intervene* to save any of us.<sup>567</sup>

Muscogee (Creek) James Treat, in his introduction to Deloria's *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*, picked up the sound of Deloria's cry from *God Is Red* and revoiced it from the far end of the twentieth century with a reverberatory accusation hurled toward what he saw as a scientific and intellectual lack of movement:

We are actually in the midst of a "Dark Age" of intellectual activity. The Darwinian-Freudian-Marxist synthesis that has dominated the century has long since come apart but Americans refuse to admit it. We have a duty to move beyond it—ethical demands of personal integrity require it—but I see almost no one willing to undertake such a task or even to nibble at the edges of the current synthesis to begin a critique. All this hesitancy while the hard sciences are returning study after study that contradicts this synthesis.<sup>568</sup>

W. Hatcher writes that, in the mid-nineteenth century, Bahá'u'lláh had urged the peoples of the world to "be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."<sup>569</sup> The concerns that Deloria voiced and Treat echoed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded to from the early twentieth century, long before their questions were necessary to ask. 'Abdu'l-Bahá advocated that

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<sup>567</sup> Deloria, *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1978), 69, 284.

<sup>568</sup> James Treat, "Introduction," *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 18.

<sup>569</sup> Hatcher and Martin, *Bahá'í Faith*, 204. Hatcher quotes Bahá'u'lláh cited in *The Prosperity of Humankind* (New York: Bahá'í International Community, 1995), 4-5.

humanity needs a spiritual educator because, without spiritual education, humankind becomes “lower than an animal” in thought and action. Material education, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, develops completeness of “intelligence and thought” and complements spiritual education so that comprehension, using intellectual senses or powers, can “penetrate the metaphysical world” and receive the “sanctifying breeze of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>570</sup>

Zolbrod explained that in the Diné hierarchy of things, speech is the highest human faculty. Speech, articulated into words, is composed of vibrational sounds that penetrate both the material and the metaphysical worlds and change the condition of the listener. De Ramirez introduced the concept of spiritualized conversive communications among individuals and between individuals and the divine as “crucial” to the “transformations of lives and cultures”; and she informs her readers that Bahá’u’lláh makes it abundantly clear that “human utterance is the most powerful means for human transformation.”<sup>571</sup>

The Diné’s eschatological narratives (human utterances) contained ancient material and spiritual education that, when placed in the context of the Bahá’í Faith by the Diné at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference through significant conversive conversations, became the most powerful means for the Diné to engage as participants in the new religion, which fulfilled their own prophecies and allowed those who chose to do so to begin the transformative process of *becoming* both Diné and Bahá’í.

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<sup>570</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 7-9; 152; Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 47, 303.

<sup>571</sup> De Ramirez, “The Conversive Turn,” 34, 44.

## EPILOGUE: SYNTHESIS

Nancy Phillips provides a description of the Great Council Fire Unity Conference in her AISC report in August, 1962:

Millions of stars lighted the sky on the evening of June 1. Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, peoples of many nations, had begun to gather from the world over to join in all the activities and to live the life of our beloved Faith. The preparation of the sacred Navajo cake, to be shared by all present, had begun on this beautiful evening. The traditional cake was wrapped in corn husks and baked in a pit of hot stones in the earth. It was first blessed with traditional Navajo prayer by beautiful "Mother," by the menfolk, the children and the guests who had begun to arrive—each one blessing the Mother Earth and the Father Sky. The fire for baking the cake was kept aglow through the night by willing Navajo hands. After weeks of preparation and yearning for this oneness-of-mankind conference, the day had finally come. The Saturday noon meal, of traditional mutton stew, delicious Navajo fry bread, coffee, and the sacredly-prepared Navajo cake, was served to over a thousand people. All who were there were enlightened and deeply touched by the wonder of the gathering, and of being served in the spirit of love by our non-Bahá'í Navajo friends. To simply say that this conference—these 'different races gathering with prayer'—was a success is far from adequate, as any words would be, because all felt the presence of the Great Spirit—a feeling which "transcends words and letters."<sup>572</sup>

Phillips refers to a prayer by 'Abdu'l-Bahá when she describes the mystical feeling that the Unity Conference generated in its participants: "Reveal then Thyself, O Lord, by Thy merciful utterance and the mystery of Thy divine being, that the holy ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls - a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds - that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendor."<sup>573</sup> When closing his interview, I asked Alfred Kahn, Sr., to express his final thoughts, words, or stories about his spiritual journey:

Can you think of any stories you might like to tell or share along this path, this spiritual path that has re-invigorated your Faith or reaffirmed it, re-established it? One thing in religious studies we find is people often move around, change and go

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<sup>572</sup> Phillips, "Bahá'í News," no. 377 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, August 1962), 10-12.

<sup>573</sup> *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers*, 69-70.

from one religion to another, one church or another. Have you personally ever felt the need to explore other religions or can you tell me about that? I know that in the Bahá'í Faith there is a principle that you are to consort with other people of other religions, be friends with them; not be prejudiced against them. But personally, what has your spiritual journey been like as far as maintaining your Navajo Bahá'í identity?<sup>574</sup>

Alfred responds to my question about feeling a need to explore other religions in his now-familiar contemplative way, reaffirming yet one more time who he really is—both a traditional Diné and a “declared” Baha’i:

Ahmm . . . . Well, ahmm . . . like I’ve been saying, you know, carrying corn pollen is who I am and that’s how I was taught by my mother and dad . . . late mother and father. I still carry my corn pollen with me. Ahmm . . . I’m still a Navajo, Diné, and my arrowhead [is] with me at all times like I was taught by my parents and grandparents. Ahmm . . . and then saying I’m a declared Bahá’í and trying to obey the laws of the Faith. And saying what He says just share about the Faith and that it’s okay that you are here in this Hogan, praying with different Christians. It’s okay. It doesn’t bother me and it doesn’t bother them. And we’re fine. And we just pray together and share some of the Bahá’í Writings and Teachings.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> Alfred Kahn, Sr., interview.

<sup>575</sup> Alfred Kahn, Sr., interview.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A. IRB Approval Letter



**Missouri  
State**  
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

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**DATE:** May 27, 2010

**TO:** John Schmalzbauer  
Linda Covey

**FROM:** Joseph Hulgus, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Counseling  
Institutional Review Board Chair

### **HUMAN PARTICIPANTS PROTECTION REVIEW**

Your project, "MA Thesis: The Navajo Tradition-Transition Conversion to the Baha'I Faith," was approved by the Missouri State University Protection of Human Participants Institutional Review Board as submitted. Copies of your application and proposal will be on file in the Office of Sponsored Research & Programs. Please note that your project has a starting date of 3/ 30/ 2009 and that it was approved until 3/ 29/ 2010.

If you find it necessary to extend your project beyond this date, it will be necessary for you to reapply to the Protection of Human Participants Institutional Review Board. The application form for this may be obtained on the Office of Sponsored Research and Programs web page <http://www.srp.missouristate.edu>.

Please feel free to contact your college representative, the Office of Sponsored Research & Programs, or myself if you need additional assistance. This project has been assigned the number #09469. Please reference this number when asking any questions regarding this project.

Institutional Review Board Chair  
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## **Appendix B. Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants by Annie Kahn**

**First Chant:** He who is the all wise, all knowing, brought to the Navajo people something like a Holy Book except that the Navajo could not write at that time so he gave it to them in the form of chanting. To chant is to speak in rhymes like poetry so that the ancient wisdom is remembered longer. This chanting is like the Holy Scriptures. It tells the Indians what to look for at the Time of the End when He would come to the people again.

**Second Chant:** One of the Holy Medicine Men said the Time of the End is like two more stages to climb forward: first is to have the Spirit of the people live again, and second, the people shall melt into one, meaning that true love between people will be practiced. In the chanting He (the Great Spirit) has said that He is expected in the east, but also in the west. As He comes and brings these good things of the spirit and of love it will be the most happy and glorious occasion.

**Third Chant:** The melting into one is like the wonderful feeling of the Navajo girl when she falls in love and says of her beloved: "Hey John! Oh, I melt when I see him!" But the love of the Great Spirit and of mankind that comes in the New Day is so great that all the world's afflictions and dangers can in no way alarm us or hurt us.

**Fourth Chant:** In the chants it says that when this New Day comes to us it is like the birth of a new baby, like a mother bringing her new baby home from the hospital. Everyone in that home cries: "Let me hold the baby!" Even the grandmothers, even down to the little ones, all cry: "Let me hold the baby; it is so clean; it is so fresh; it is so wonderful!" So the new religion is clean and fresh in the same way because it has none of the prejudices and misunderstandings that the older religions have accumulated down through the centuries.

**Fifth Chant:** The New Faith comes also to the Indians like the Sun at dawn. As the sun rises it touches the peaks and buttes first with its light; then slowly it moves down into the canyons. The light is at first visible only to a few who are awake, high up and watching. Some of the Navajo and other Indian peoples are like people down in a deep canyon. They are listening for the Voice of the Great Creator, but they do not know where to look for it yet because the dark shadows blind them. But there are some Indians who are as if they are on the mountain tops and they begin very early to dance and sing with joy when they see the Glory coming.

**Sixth Chant:** The fact that a new Light is said to come like the dawn warns us that, even as the early sunlight rises up through the mists of morning and slowly drives away the dark shadows of the canyons, so the coming of the New Teaching will not be widely visible at first, but will reach in its beginnings only those whose spiritual eyes and ears are open. It is taught, however, in the chants that even the people down in the dark canyons will hear the Voice of the Great Spirit and they will search for Him until they also receive the Light of the New Day. Many of the Navajo people now believe that this

glorious light has come, but we must seek it out with understanding hearts, even as lost children see for their father in the wilderness.

**Seventh Chant:** The chants say that there are two signs of the New Spirit that all the people should look for. The first sign is a Nine-Pointed Star that must come from the east. The number nine is the sign of the highest unity, for all numbers can be found in this one number, and so all religions and races and nations will come together in love and unity under the sign of the Nine-Pointed Star. Another sign of this coming is that there will be a great chief in the east who will wear (symbolically) a headdress with twelve feathers. The chants say these twelve feathers mean twelve great principles that He will bring to mankind. If we search carefully we will find that these twelve principles of world unity have already come to the world and, even in this day, are beginning to bring people together in unity, understanding and love.

**Eighth Chant:** In the Unity Chant the Great One says He will come like the dawn and like the Shepherd who gathers His flock and brings all the wandering sheep back together again. In the Day of Unity you will walk in beauty; the beauty will walk before you; the beauty will walk behind you; you will be surrounded by beauty. Through the beautiful writings of a new Prophet of God, these meanings will become very clear. Man himself in this New Age has found ways to create beauty. With all these beautiful things we must now have beautiful minds. With beautiful minds we will talk in beauty. The speech of all men will be in beauty.

**Ninth Chant:** Again in another place in the chants He says that those who speak with beautiful speech will lead the world to beauty and He says the center of this beautiful speech comes from a Holy Mountain. What is the most Holy Mountain in the world? Is it not Mt. Carmel in the Holy Land where the Bible says (in Isaiah 35:1-2) “the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord”? This is closely linked with the Promised Day of the New Spirit when “the desert shall rejoice, and blossom like the rose.” Today, Mount Carmel, which, only a few decades ago was nothing but desert, is now being covered with beautiful gardens. From there we are beginning to hear the Message of Beauty and of the Spirit that is awakening the World. So are the prophecies of all peoples of the Day of Unity is being fulfilled.<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Annie Kahn, “Interpretation of Ancient Navajo Chants,” 3-6. Reproduced with permission from editor, Barbara Brown, Naturegraph Publishers.

**Appendix C. Pictures of the Great Council Fire Unity Conference, Pine Ridge, AZ, 1962**



Appendix C-1. Chapter House at Pine Springs where the Council Fire took place. Oneness of Mankind wall painting by Chester Kahn with portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá' as a young man in white turban. Hand of the Cause of God Zikru'lláh Khádem is speaking. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C- 2. Left to right: Franklin Kahn, John Hale wearing his famous mountain lion skin hat, Mr. Khádem from Australia, and Chester Kahn. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-3. Flag carries the Bahá'í emblem of the Greatest Name. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-4. Otomi/Olmec Bahá'í and well-known sand painter, David Villaseñor. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



**Appendix C-5.** Home-front pioneer to the Navajo reservation, Amos Gibson, in the back with white hat. Gibson was elected to the NSA of the U.S. in 1960 and to the first UHJ in 1963. Johnny Nelson said Gibson “was an Indian” and seemingly didn’t realize he was also African-American. Next to Gibson is Nancy Phillips, lady in hat, secretary of the AITC. Carol Manuelito stands in front of Phillips. Her son Randy Manuelito is first left in the row of children. Second row: Vinson Brown is wearing a black shirt and white hat standing next to Mr. Khádem.

Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-6. The bus from California that brought participants to the Unity Conference. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-7. Setting up camp in the area behind the Chapter House at Pine Springs. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-8. Part of the over 1000 that came to participate. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-9. Native Americans from other tribes. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-10. Visitors in blankets against the cold high desert air of the evening with Navajos looking on what must have been an unusual sight to them. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-11. Left to right: Carol Manuelito, Bob Manuelito, Reginald Newkirk, and James W. Wonders III. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-12. Preparation of the sacred corn cake that is baked in the earth for the Saturday noon meal began on Friday evening, June 1, 1962. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.





Appendix C-13. Pouring the cake into the “womb” of Mother Earth to bake it. The pit was lined with corn husks on top of hot coals. See epilogue. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-14. Covering the cake in its oven, to be baked through the night by keeping the fire on top of it going. Note the Navajo woman in red skirt still has bread dough on her hands. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-15. Serving the noon meal on Saturday. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix C-16. Navajo women making fry bread. Note the box of cooked bread to the right of woman in black and the little girl standing behind the open box eating a piece of bread. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.

## Appendix D. The Native American Baha'i Institute



Appendix D-1. Road to NABI. Photo courtesy of Joyce Olinga.



Appendix D-2. Entrance into NABI. Photo courtesy of Joyce Olinga.



Appendix D-3. Door of NABI's Prayer Hogan. Note the nine-pointed star on door.



Appendix D-4. Skylight in ceiling of Prayer Hogan. Photos courtesy of Jim Johnston.



Appendix D-5. Outside view of NABI's Prayer Hogan. Photo courtesy of Jim Johnson.



Appendix D-6. Inside Prayer Hogan. Note the sand painting with Greatest Name on the wall. Back row: Jim Johnston, Tlingit Bahá'í Ralph Houston, co-director Diné Alice Bathke, Alfred Kahn Sr., Tina Kahn, Linda Covey, and co-director Jerry Bathke. Front row seated: Diné medicine man Jackie Wilson. Photo taken after devotions and before Thursday evening dinner. Photo courtesy of Jim Johnson.



Appendix D-7. Thursday evening meal inside the Big Hogan's Dining Room at NABI. Alfred Kahn, Sr., is seated to the right at first table. Photo courtesy of Joyce Olinga.



Appendix D-8. Outside of Big Hogan with the newest pavilion, also in the shape of hogan, directly behind Big Hogan, and the Prayer Hogan behind the outdoor pavilion. Photo courtesy of Joyce Olinga.

## Appendix E. Diné Bahá'ís and members of the Kahn Family



Appendix E-1. Franklin Kahn served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States from 1968 to 1981. He is seated next to former Universal House

of Justice member Glenford Mitchell, who was then on the NSA. Photo courtesy of National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, IL.



Chester Kahn

Appendix E-2. Chester Kahn served on the National Spiritual Assembly from 1982 to 1989.

Photo courtesy of National Baha'i , Office, Wilmette, IL.



Appendix E-3. Ben Kahn, younger brother of Franklin and Chester, served on various Bahá'í committees. Photo courtesy of National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, IL.



Appendix E-4: Navajo medicine men and Bahá'ís Jacky Wilson and Johnny Nelson in Johnny's prayer hogan following their interview. Photo courtesy of Jim Johnston.



Appendix E-5. Diné Bahá'í Rubie Nelson, wife of Johnny Nelson. Photo courtesy of Jim Johnson.



Appendix E-6. Diné Bahá'í Linda Wilson. Photo by author.



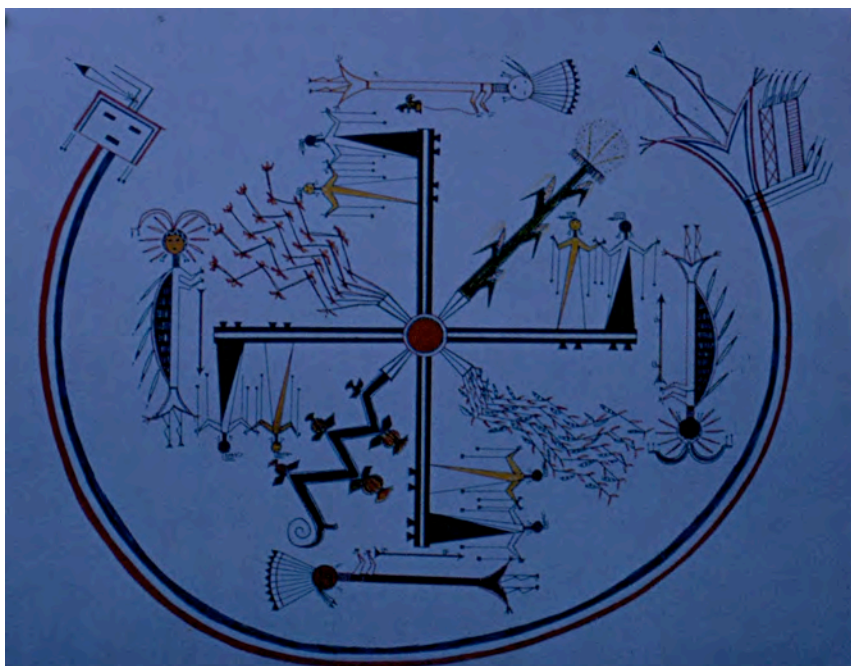
Appendix E-7. Jerry Bathke, who then served on the American Indian Teaching Committee, and Franklin and Mary Kahn, taken sometime during the years Franklin served on the NSA (1968-1981). Photo courtesy of National Bahá'í Archives, Wilmette, IL



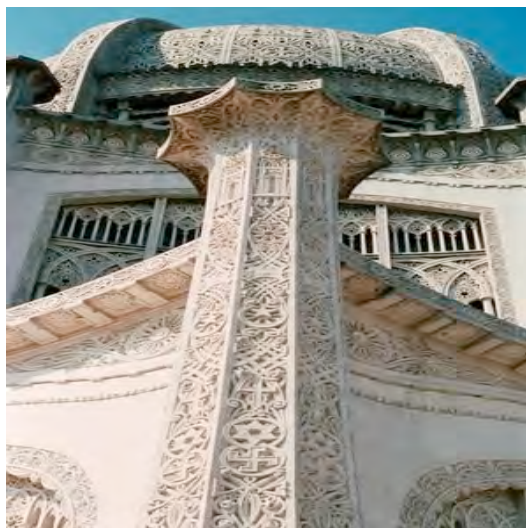
Appendix E-7. Back row: Alfred Kahn, Sr., youngest brother of Franklin, Chester, and Ben Kahn; Franklin Kahn; and Alfred Kahn, Jr. Seated: Eunice Kahn, daughter of Franklin and Mary Kahn; Mary Kahn; and Tina Kahn, wife of Alfred Sr. Tina is of Cherokee/Osage heritage. Photo by author, April, 2009.



## Appendix F. Symbols of the Ancient Swastika



Appendix F-1. Sandpainting of the Diné whirling logs or arms in the form of the ancient swastika symbol. This sandpainting was at the Great Council Fire Unity Conference. Photo courtesy of William Dunning.



Appendix F-2. Column on the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, IL, shows the Diné swastika just below the six-pointed Star of David. This is the “crystal hogan” that Alfred Kahn, Jr., referred to his interview. See Chapter 9. Photo courtesy of Jim Johnson.