

Thoughts for Tribal Communities Interested in Creating a Resource Similar to the Lakota Worldview for their Community

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A CONVERSATION WITH



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How would you describe the Lakota Worldview?

We developed the process we call the Lakota Worldview from the spiritual teachings of where we came from. We are on a journey. Every individual has a specific purpose for which they come to earth. Everybody has a role.

The journey is supposed to be smooth. There are ceremonies and rituals put in place to make a smooth journey on this earth. However, there are interruptions – severe, life altering events. What do we do in those times? What do we do in response? Being healing-informed (instead of trauma-informed) in response to a temporary, impactful event where we focus on the healing, not the trauma, is important.

We put all of this into words – the cultural worldview, in our case, the Lakota Worldview. We developed this so others can

access it. Everything is in a circle. We have gone away from our teachings – many times by force. We are moving back to the teachings.

How could or how has the Lakota Worldview been put into action in your community?

There is always more work that needs to be done and put into action. These are some ideas from our community:

- Using the Lakota Worldview in the **healthcare system** could provide young women with insight into the spirit they carry and the ceremonies that can be put in place to fulfill roles.
- In the **school system**, they look at the first stage of life. How do we respond to this child? What did this child experience and what do we put in place if their family is not able to provide? This can include a healing ceremony, spiritual purification ceremony, and providing Lakota names for children who had been exposed to trauma. What are ways that the school can stand in for their family until the family can fulfill their role?
- **Head Start** is screening children using the Lakota Worldview, asking, “How do we provide ceremonies if the child did not receive them earlier?”



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR TRIBES

- We hold **Teca Woapiye Wicoti Healing Camps for Lakota Youth** in the Black Hills for five days, for pregnant women and children up to age 11. We prioritize children who have experienced trauma. 150 people attended in 2017. Our 2016 evaluation data showed that children and adolescents who participated experienced positive growth in belief in their own capabilities, Lakota cultural identity, caring for their community, and hope for a brighter future.
- **Anpo Wicahpi (Morning Star) Pine Ridge Girls' School** incorporates traditions and adapts them to use in their programs and organizations. The school hopes to give this knowledge back to families and extended families so they can pass these traditions on to their children.

How did you start this process?

By making offerings. I was against a brick wall in the 1980s. I (Ethleen) was the director of residential substance abuse center on the reservation. Children were using counseling, care plans, substance abuse education. We added the Purification Lodge Ceremony. Still, after 2-3 months, they were often back to using.

I made offerings and sought spiritual and cultural guidance. What the children, their families, and the community had experienced had hurt their spirits. While we were doing the things according to our traditions that we knew about, we could not do what we didn't know about.

I was taken down the path spiritually by the hand symbolically. My eyes were opened about what we do not know and about how to adapt our ways in response. Many families do not have this knowledge and these ways. The elders said, "You're not a program director, you're a relative to these children." When I began working in this way, it became more natural to relate in these ways.

I had to understand that many people did not have this opportunity of participating in their traditions. We had to figure out how we would do this in a program context – since we are not a family. We changed the program name to a Lakota name, so the program reflected our Lakota culture. Little by little we changed things, like:

- We would have the children write down what has hurt them on paper. Then they can burn them in the Purification Lodge. The children go in the lodge, then we wipe down their aura – spiritual residue. We burn the sage. We burn the clothes they wore that day. They put on new clothes and this represents renewal.
- We would ask ourselves, do they have a name?



What would you say to someone from another community who is interested in doing this?

Every tribe has a worldview, an approach, their ceremonies, and rituals. Develop something which can then be used in schools, child welfare, and health centers. Go out there and put down tobacco, spiritual food, look at the hills, ask the ancestors to guide you. And they will come help you to identify what your community's beliefs and traditions were in the:

- What are the traditions surrounding the first stage of life (Pre-birth to 12 years old)
 - When a baby is born, are there any practices or blessings?
- What are the traditions for your village?
- What are the traditions in the second stage of life? (12 to 21 years old)
 - Are there ceremonies for young men or women who are entering adulthood?
- Are there teachings related to the third stage of life?
 - Becoming a parent?
 - Marriage ceremonies? (21 to 50 years old)
- Are there traditions related to the fourth stage of life and transitioning to becoming an elder? (50+ years old)
 - Ceremonies honoring elders?
 - Ways of passing on teachings?
 - Returning to the spirit world?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Lakota Mental Health First Aid Model – Tawacin Oгна Otokaheya Owiciyakiya Pi. A Lakota Healing-Informed Care model in response to experiences of trauma and exposure to trauma. Richard Two Dogs and Ethleen Iron Cloud-Two Dogs, December 2016.

The Lakota Worldview: Smooth Journey

Visit the Capacity Building Center for Tribes' YouTube Channel to view this video narrated by Rick and Ethleen:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iblNfIPm_Sc

