

The Legend of the White Buffalo

One summer a long time ago, the seven sacred council fires came together and camped. The sun was strong and the people were starving for there was no game. Two young men went out to hunt. Along the way, the two men met a beautiful young woman dressed in white who floated as she walked. One man had bad desires for the woman and tried to touch her, but was consumed by a cloud and turned into a pile of bones.

The woman spoke to the second young man and said, "Return to your people and tell them I am coming." This holy woman brought a wrapped bundle to the people. She unwrapped the bundle, giving to the people a sacred pipe and teaching them how to use it to pray. "With this holy pipe, you will walk like a living prayer," she said. The holy woman told the Dakota/Lakota/Nakota about the value of the buffalo, the women and the children. "You are from Mother Earth", she told the women. "What you are doing is as great as what the warriors do."

Before she left, she told the people she would return. As she walked away, she rolled over four times, turning into a white female buffalo calf. It is said after that day the Dakota/Lakota honoured their pipe, and buffalo were plentiful (from John Lame Deer's telling in 1967).

There are slight variations of this story in each community today. The belief is that the holy woman was sent from the Buffalo nation with the sacred pipe and instructions on how to care for it, to the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota people. She

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brought the seven sacred rites to our people. With these, she gave instructions to the men on how to dance the Sun Dance, how to fast for a vision quest, instructed them in the sweat bath (Inikagapi), the Taking of Relatives (Hunkapi) and reminded them to always treat women with respect.

She instructed the women on how to conduct the spirit-keeping ceremonies and told them to remember her in the coming of age ceremony (White Buffalo Calf Ceremony). She told women it was their job to take care of the dead, how to be good mothers and grandmothers.

The examples brought to our people are the essence of our Dakota people. The virtues that govern our conduct are bravery, generosity, patience or long suffering and moral integrity. Teachings were reinforced on industry, humility and proper parenting for the women.¹

(from Families First: EHANA Dakota HOKSIN ICA YAPI)

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¹ *Families First*, 1999.