

Concerning the spiritual significance of the number four, Tyon declared:

... the Lakota grouped all their activities by fours. This was because they recognized four directions: the west, the north, the east, and the south; four divisions of time: the day, the night, the moon, and the year; four parts to everything that grows from the ground: the roots, the stem, the leaves, and the fruit; four kinds of things that breathe: those that crawl, those that fly, those that walk on four legs, and those that walk on two legs; four things above the world: the sun, the moon, the sky, and the stars; four kinds of gods: the great, the associates of the great, the gods below them, and the spirit kind; four periods of human life: babyhood, childhood, adulthood, and old age; and finally, mankind had four fingers on each hand, four toes on each foot, and the thumbs and the great toes of each taken together are four. Since the Great Spirit caused everything to be in fours, mankind should do everything possible in fours.⁶

Expounding on the *wakan* character of the circle, Oglala holy man Thomas Tyon noted:

... the circle [is] sacred because the Great Spirit caused everything to be round except stone. Stone is the implement of destruction. The sun and the sky, the earth and the moon are round like a shield, though the sky is deep like a bowl. Everything that breathes is round like the body of a man. Everything that grows from the ground is round like the stem of a tree. Since the Great Spirit has caused everything to be round mankind should look upon the circle as sacred for it is the symbol of all things in nature except stone ... For these reasons the Oglala make their tipis circular, their camp circle circular and sit in a circle in all ceremonies.⁵

LAKOTA BELIEFS

Color:

Although the Lakotas believed that there were many *Wakanpi*, they nevertheless considered all of them embodiments of a greater, intangible unity. As Little Wound lucidly observed, "*Wanka Tanka* are many. But they are all the same as one."¹⁶ Lakotas associated the *sicun* of each *Wakanpi*, whether good or bad, with a color. According to Sword, "Red is the color of the sun; blue, the color of the

moving spirit; green, the color of the spirit of the earth; and yellow, the color of the spirit of the rock. These colors," he continued, "are for other spirits. Blue is the color of the wind; red is the color of all spirits. The colors are the same for the friends [*Wakan Tanka*] of the Great Spirits. Black is the color of the bad spirits."¹⁷

Among the sixteen *Wakan Tanka*, the Lakotas most revered and loved *Wi*, the Sun, ranking him first among the Superior Gods, and chief of the *Tobtok kin*. They believed this because of his high station and his special love for the Lakota people, *Skan* (the god of energy) had granted him the holiest of colors, red, as his emblem.¹⁸ According to Tyon and other Lakota holy men: "Red is the color that belongs to the Sun ... This color is evoked by shamans, and represents the coming and the going of the Sun. When one wears red the Sun is pleased and will listen to such a one. The Indians are red, so they are the favorite people of the Sun. The Sun provides everything for them."¹⁹

How four Lakota societies
were formed.

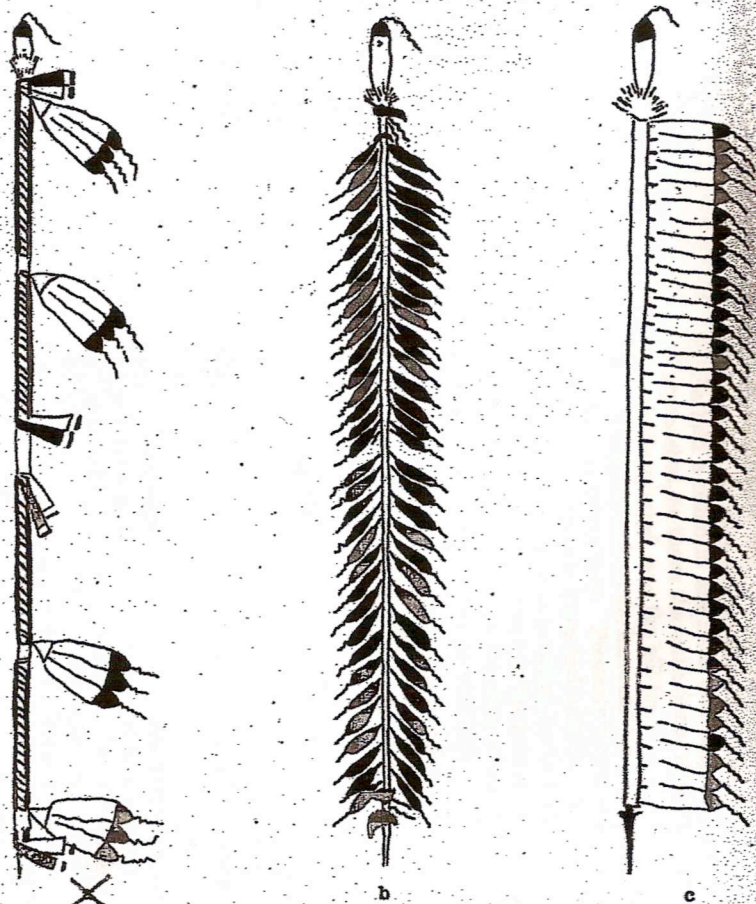


Fig. 3. Lances. a, Wic'itika. b, Kangi yuha. c, Cante tinza. a has a double shaft and spiral wrappings of red and white strips. Drawn by Thunder-bear.

Oglala themselves. According to tradition there were at the start four societies, the tokala, cante tinza, kangi yuha, and miwatani. This myth as narrated by Thunder-bear runs as follows:—

Once a war party of four men was out near the Black Hills, walking along. They saw a large wolf running about as if at random. He carried something in his mouth. He came up to the top of a hill when he turned into a man. This they thought mysterious, but took him for an enemy. They threw down their robes and rushed for him. As they came nearer, they saw that the mysterious man carried a lance. He held a rattle in one hand and sang a song as if to raise his courage. As they approached, he threw the rattle down, thrust the lance into the ground, and running back disappeared over the hill-top.

The party took up the lance and the rattle, but pressed on to see what had become of the mysterious man. Presently they saw him standing on the opposite side of a stream with another lance and a rattle. Then he began to dance and sing tokala songs. Now, they were mystified, but rushed him again. As before, he threw down the rattle, thrust the lance into the ground and vanished over a hill-top. When they followed up, they saw him standing as before, but with a miwatani lance. He sang some of the songs. Then he vanished.

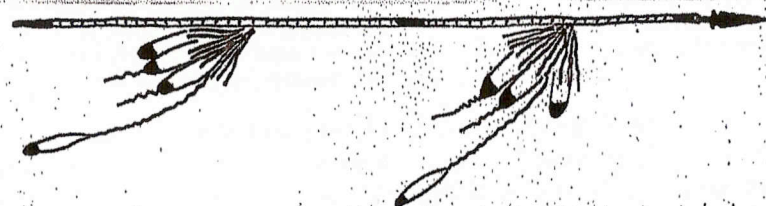


Fig. 6. Tokala Lance. Drawn by Thunder-bear.

Once again they saw him, but now with a kangi yuha lance. Everything happened as before, except that as he ran he became a grey wolf and waited. The four men approached and stood around. The wolf said, "My brethren, I give you these charges and obligations. You shall head four different societies: cante tinza, tokala, miwatani, and kangi yuha. Go home and each set up a tipi within the camp circle; the kangi yuha to the north of the door, the cante tinza to the south; the miwatani at the north rear, the tokala at the south rear. The cante tinza shall make lances of ash, the tokala of willow, the miwatani of box-elder and the kangi yuha of cherry. Now, go home."

So the four men set out bearing their lances. They were four days on the journey and on the fourth night camped in sight of their people. That night the wolf appeared again: "Before you reach your camp send two men ahead. Tell the people to move camp, to go toward the north, to a nice flat near a stream. As you camp there many buffalo will come from the north and on the following morning you shall kill many of them. As the camp is being moved you are to keep out to the rear. When the four tipis are ready in the new camp, you may come in and enter them."

While they sat out in the rear waiting for the new camp to be pitched, a man came up and sat down at their left. He was painted with blue and red stripes, wore a crow-wing hair ornament and carried a wooden staff about an arm long. He said

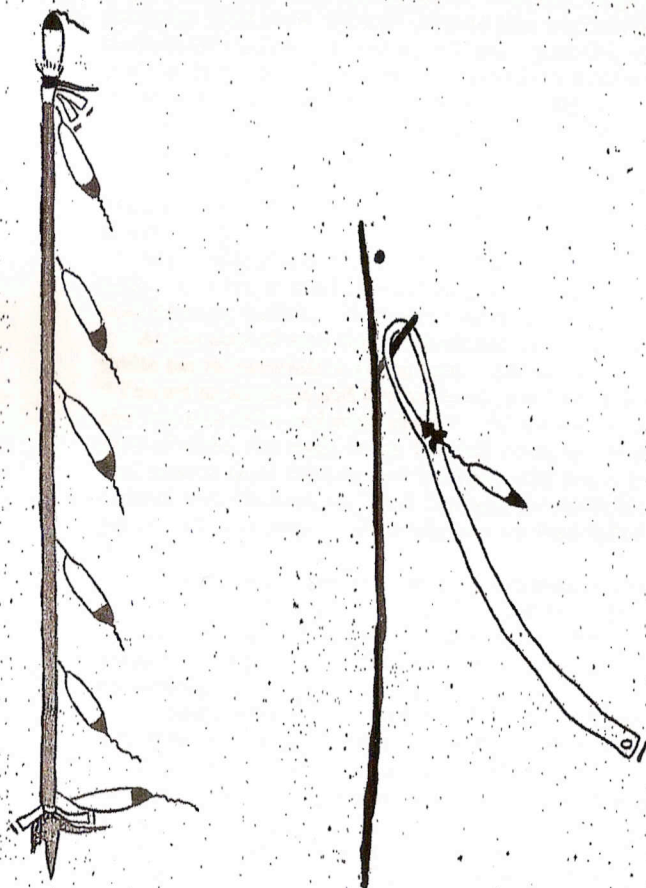


Fig. 4. Kangi yuha lance.

Fig. 5. Sash and supporting Stake used in the Miwatani. Drawings by Thunder-bear.

On several occasions in the preceding discussion we have called attention to the distinctions between akicita and other societies as recognized by the

"I came here to be your friend. You received these lances that you might become powerful for the good of your people. Cante tinza, you should have a whistle like this (the staff). Tokala, here is a rattle for you. Miwatani, you also shall have a whistle. Kangi yuha, you shall have a rattle. (This places the rattles and whistles opposite each other in the camp circle.) For decorations on the lances, the chief birds shall be the eagle, spotted eagle, osprey, owl, crow, magpie, and large hawk. Cante tinza, you shall tan otterskin well and wrap your lance with it. Tokala, you paint your lance red and arrange four bunches of feathers with four different kinds in each bunch. Miwatani, you paint your lance red and decorate at one place with owl feathers. Kangi yuha, you shall have a lance as long as a man and decorate it with crow and magpie feathers continuously from top to bottom, an eagle tail feather at the top and a spotted-eagle tail feather at each of two intermediate points.

Also I have asked men to place two calf skins at the tipi for the cante tinza; for the tokala, the same; for the miwatani a bunch of wing bones for whistles; for the kangi yuha two calf skins; and for cante tinza, a wolf skin; an antelope skin, to each of the four tipis.

The insides of the tipis, I have ordered strewn with sage grass, very thick at the back. You are to teach the different songs and the dances. All winter long there shall be many buffalo. Now, you may enter the tipis."

At the door of each tipi was stationed an old man. Each leader directed one to invite ten representative young men. All sat down to a feast. Cante tinza said, "You get an antelope and two calf hides, feathers of the eagle, spotted eagle and owl, also two otterskins and some sinew." Tokala ordered feathers of hawk, magpie, and spotted eagle, also eagle down, two calf skins, an antelope skin and sinew. Miwatani ordered eagle feathers, owl feathers, wing bones, paint and sinew. Kangi yuha ordered crow feathers, eagle tail feathers, two calfskins, an antelope skin, dark blue paint, and some sinew. Four virgins were then called in to dress some buffalo calf skins.

Toward evening four strange men were seen approaching. The leaders ordered all to sit still. Just at dark a man entered each tipi bearing a straight pipe filled with tobacco and placed it before the leader. Each said, "The one who gave you these things, sent us here to teach you the songs. You have been given long life and great power. Now stand up."

"You shall make five more lances like these. Then no enemy can overcome you. You shall use drums, whistles, and rattles. Now, I shall teach you the songs."

First, they sang ten songs and then two more. After one singing each was learned. In order they were: three songs, three dance songs, three songs, and finally three dance songs.

Now, the cante tinza had four lances wrapped with otter fur, two short lances, painted red with a buffalo horn on the end. From the buffalo rawhide two sashes were cut and decorated with eagle feathers; one sash was painted blue and the other red.

"Now, I shall instruct you how to go to war. First, you will meet a herd of buffalo, pursuing them will be four men. These you shall kill; each society to kill one with a lance. Now, I shall go away. When lances are being made you must be very careful. Take eight days for this work. I shall return each evening to instruct you."

Then, the man turned into a gray wolf and ran out through the camp passing out at the opening in the circle.

So all went out and gathered material to begin their eight days' task. They made the lances as ordered. For painting them the cante tinza uses a pinkish red; tokala, yellow; miwatani, red; and kangi yuha, dark blue. For eight nights the work went on. Thirty more young men were invited to join each society. The tokala made a globular rattle with a fox skin guard; they painted it yellow. The miwatani painted red, wore a bunch of owl feathers on a stick for a hair ornament, hung whistles on their necks and carried rattles of dew-claws. The kangi yuha painted dark blue and had four rattles for the singers.

On the evening of the seventh day the instructors said, "All will be completed by morning. You must select the best young men to hold the lances. Then you must march around the camp, dancing before the tipis of chiefs. On the ninth day you shall kill the four enemies."

All these instructions were carried out. Early in the morning one saw a herd of buffalo approaching. (They were also instructed that a white buffalo would be in the herd and that, if it was killed, the buffalo would always follow the camp.) So they killed buffalo and then the four enemies as predicted.

Now, there was great rejoicing in the camp. At the fourth evening the four strange men came again. Now, they directed that there should be two men with short lances, who in battle should thrust their lances into the ground and not run back. The tokala two lance men shall stand far apart with the members between. The kangi yuha have two lance men in the middle and one at each end of the line.

These and all other instructions were handed down.

The main points in this agree with the versions rendered by some other informants. It implies an original similarity in function and, hence that all four were akicita organizations. Though it is claimed that later the miwatani ranked with the older men and was not called upon for akicita service, it took in boys and young men. Reference to our statistics fails to show any age differences. Therefore, though this point cannot be settled, it appears likely that the exemption from akicita service and the different mode of selecting candidates was a later development. However, as we are here concerned with the functions of these societies, we have accepted the classification of the Oglala themselves. As noted we have found it generally consistent with the data collected on the various organizations.

Notwithstanding the myths there are historical traditions for the origin of many societies. It is said that the ihoka came from the Crow, the miwatani from the Mandan, and the wiciska from the Cheyenne. We have found nothing among the Crow to suggest the ihoka. As to the wiciska which is sometimes called the shield bearers, the Cheyenne afford no parallel. Thus, while there is no good reason for taking these traditions seriously, it is interesting to note that similar organizations were attributed to the Crow by Lewis and Clark (a, Vol. 1, 130).

As stated elsewhere the Oglala were formerly divided into four independent camps with slightly different forms of government. The tendency was for each of these to organize duplicate societies, except in the case of