

# Mother Earth Spirituality

- New Age Worldview adds two elements:
- Animism:
  - Animal spirits
  - Totem animals
  - Power animals:
    - Bear: strength, resourcefulness, protection
    - Owl: perception, wisdom, instinct
    - Wolf: sensitivity, guidance, truth
    - Eagle: intuition, inspiration, achievement
- Nature-based
  - Mother Earth spirituality theology = reverence for Earth as Mother
  - Social activism:
    - Anti-pollution; pro-native issues such as protection of burial sites, etc., anti-war



# “A Vision of Hope”

- Mother earth spirituality is based on premise that First Nations spiritual teachings can help the entire world find an ecologically sustainable, peaceful global society...

“Hope”

# Varieties



- Three Main Types:
- Tribal Reconstructionist
  - Native peoples attempt to reconstruct & revive own tribe's spiritual traditions
  - Added elements include concern for environmental & social justice issues
- Pan-Indian Spirituality
  - Native people's adoption of generic "Sioux" inspired spirituality to replace lost traditions
  - Political component – American Indian Movement (AIM) uses Mother Earth spirituality to foster two goals: 1) develop sense of pan-Indian identity that transcends tribal lines; 2) distinguish lands, rights, religion of native peoples from non-Native – "whites" excluded from rituals
- New Age Mother Earth Spirituality
  - Native & Non-Native people's attempt to practise spirituality inspired by Native (primarily Sioux) traditions
  - Appropriate for any person drawn to earth-based, environmentally sound, healing-oriented spiritual tradition

# Primal Shamanism

- 4<sup>th</sup> “type” of Mother Earth Spirituality
- Draws on world’s shamanic traditions (not just Native American)
- Michael Harner, author The Way of the Shaman (1980)
- Foundation for Shamanic Studies (1983)
- Does NOT stress reverence for Mother Earth, but does provide training in shamanism for many non-Natives who DO practice Mother Earth spirituality



Michael Harner

# Bear Tribe Medicine Society

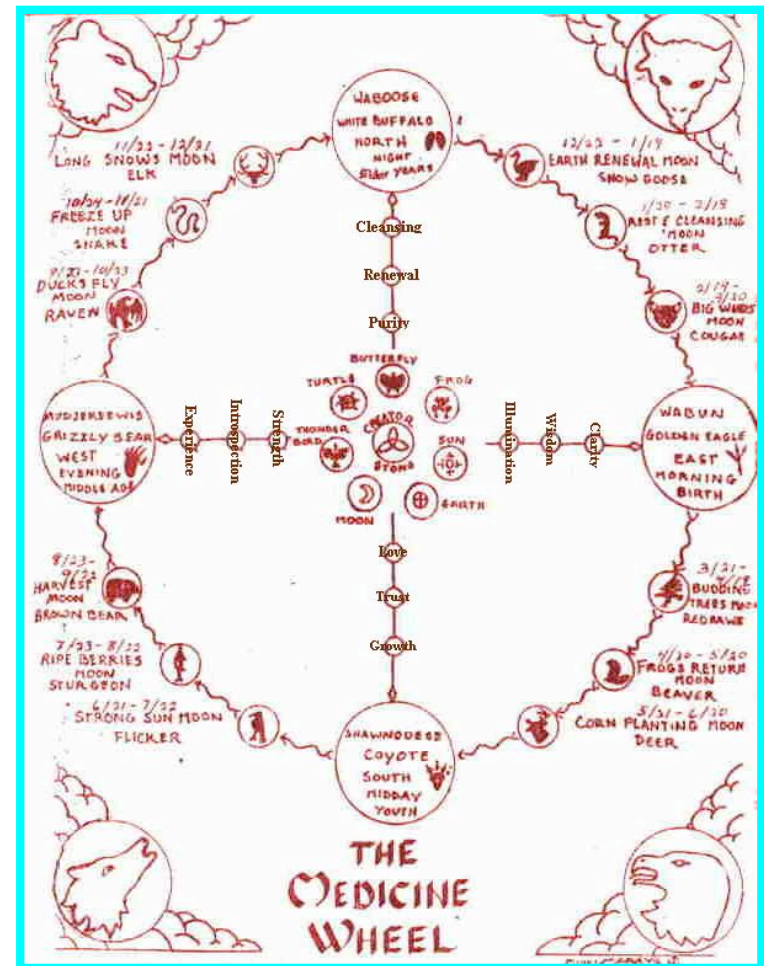
- Sun Bear (Vincent La Duke) born 1929 (Ojibwa)
- Sun Bear's Vision (age 4): bear surrounded by globes of many colours, who touches his hand
- Sun Bear's interpretation of Vision: called to unite peoples of all colours in spiritual goal to heal earth.
- Bear Tribe Medicine Society founded in 1966
- Society now headquartered in Klamath Falls, Oregon: holds yearly cycle of festivals & training program in shamanic techniques.



Sun Bear & successor Dixie Wind Daughter

# Rituals: Medicine Wheel

- Key proponent = Bear Tribe Medicine Society
- Weekend long ritual
  - Participants “smudged” (sage, sweetgrass)
  - Build circle of 36 stones, representing sacred places in the universe
  - In centre of circle, buffalo or other animal skull placed, symbolic of Creator & centre of universe
  - Participants make “tobacco ties” & place them in circle with prayers for healing the earth
    - Ties made in one of four cardinal colours (west/black; north/white; east/red; south/yellow)
- Other events at Bear Tribe Medicine Wheel weekends: sweat lodges, healing sessions, classes on shamanism, herbal ore, etc.
- Key topic: Earth Changes
  - Earth has been poisoned, she is attempting to cleanse herself of the poisoning
  - This will lead to weather changes, earthquakes, etc.
  - Medicine wheel will help earth cleanse herself by representing image of perfectly aligned universe



Sun Bear's vision of a medicine wheel with symbolism

# Rituals: Peace Pipe Ceremony



- Based on Sioux legend of Buffalo Calf Woman giving Pipe to Sioux people
- Pipe filled with tobacco or red willow bark
- Pipe offered to east in honour of new beginnings, south for growth & healing, west for darkness & release, north for courage, strength, truth
- Pipe also offered to Earth, to thank for bounty, & sky, to thank Father Sky (Wakan Tanka)
- Pipe then lit, passed from person to person. Smoke held in mouth, not inhaled
- Smoke represents truthful worlds, truthful actions, truthful spirit
- Peace pipe ritual precedes other rituals of Mother Earth Spirituality Movement

# Rituals: Sweat Lodge Ceremony

- Key proponent = Wallace Black Elk (Lakota Sioux)
- Purification (& healing) ceremony
- Often precedes other rituals (such as Vision Quest or Sun Dance)
- 8ft x 12ft approx. lodge built of bent saplings, covered with blankets or branches
- Pit dug in centre, to hold heated rocks
- Water is poured over rocks, to produce steam, which purifies participants



Wallace Black Elk

# The Four Endurances

- Four cycles of sweat lodge ceremony:
  - Participants enter lodge, meditate & pray
  - Heated rocks brought in: glow of rocks = only light in lodge
  - Water poured to create steam, & leader offers prayers offered for peace, knowledge, wisdom, healing
  - 3 more dippers of water poured, followed by drumming & singing & prayer to Wakan Tanka
  - Participants then focus on/pray for goal of each endurance: first for contact with spirit world, second for courage, third for wisdom, fourth for healing.
  - Brief opening of door flap to let cool air in, then closed
  - Cycle repeats 3 more times



# Rituals: Sun Dance

- **On first day:**
- Cottonwood tree is cut, after asking permission & explaining why necessary.
- Tree placed in dance circle with peace pipe; coloured banners (4 cardinal colours, plus blue for sky, green for earth) are tied to tree.
- Twelve branches tied to tree.
- Participants undergo sweat lodge ceremony.
- **Days two & three:**
- Begin with sweat lodge ceremonies.
- Ritual clothing, red paint, sage wreaths around wrists, ankles, head.
- Dancers follow Sun Dance leader in dancing around pole from dawn to sun set, blowing whistles



Ed McGaa (Eagle Man)

- Key proponent = Ed McGaa (Eagle Man) (Oglala Sioux)
- Primarily confined to native participants
- Four day long ritual

# Sun Dance: Day Four

- **Day four:**
- Same as days 2&3, but on this day male dancers have the flesh of their chests pierced and are attached to ropes tied to pole
- Symbolic of union with sky, earth – willingness to give all to heal earth
- Women do not have chests pierced – already sacrifice via pain in childbirth
- Final dance steps: dance in towards tree, & out again four times. On fourth time, lean back & tear skewer from flesh – breaking umbilical ties to earth.



# Other Rituals

- Vision quest – private ritual, 24-48 hours, fasting, search for vision
- Giveaway Blanket – give a gift to the blanket, take one away (mirrors Native practice of redistribution of goods – wealth is shared)
- Making of Relatives – blood brother/sister ritual – spirits of four directions called to witness exchange of blood (today, sometimes other symbolic binding is used – bound hands, or joint sacrifice of cherished objects given to charity)

