



A traditional Peyote tepee is the preferred meeting place of the Native American Church. In the foreground is piled the wood supply for the night, a pail for use in the Morning Water ceremony, a water-filled drum and a small box containing religious paraphernalia.

## The Native American Church Meeting

Stewart Brand

*Anthropologist: "What goes on at the meeting?" 6-year-old Menomini girl: "People sing." "What else do they do?" "Sit up all night." "Why do they go to the meeting?" "They belong there, that's why."*

There is always a reason for a meeting. Someone may be sick or hurt. A son is in Vietnam. The kids will be going away to school. It is someone's birthday.<sup>3</sup> So-and-so is being honored. It is Easter, or Memorial Day, or July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's. The reason will be mentioned and given prayer at the meeting.<sup>3</sup>

Someone puts up the meeting. The man and his family decide when and where it will be, ask a roadman to lead the meeting, extend the invitation for people to come help out, set up and arrange the meeting place,<sup>4</sup> and act as hosts to the gathering. The sponsor usually will be an officer at the meeting, often cedarman. In the morning people will give money and presents to help with the cost.

The meeting place is wherever is handy and appropriate — in a regular tribally-shared place, in a tipi or special hogan on the land of the family putting up the meeting, or in their house if it is winter.

1) J. S. Slotkin, "Menomini Peyotism", Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 42, Part 4, 1952, p.610. Dr. Slotkin's early work is the most detailed account of the peyote meeting in the literature. The following remarks are taken from his recorded conversations with the leaders and members of the Native American Church, Menomini Branch. Page references are given. Reprinted with permission.

2) "If we did what the Lord wants us to do, we don't have to take no medicine. But we can't do that; we've got too many things wrong with us. That medicine is to enlighten your mind." 581

3) "The Indians, they had medicine for everything else, but they never had this before. And where did this medicine come from? It just seemed to pop up from nowhere. And the people got to use it, and then, the first thing you know, they realize that it's medicine for the soul." 617

4) "I noticed that the Peyote bag you used was made of two American flags." "Oh, we done that when the war was breaking out. When my brother, my cousin, he went across. And I thought about him. So I made that bag myself, see; just I respect that much, I think about that much of my brother. So I make that bag myself, on account of him, just to think about him in those days, to get along good, out there." 652

5) "According to your church, what is the right way to live?" "Well, you got to be good to everybody. Treat them good. That's the way they understand." "How are you supposed to treat them good?" "Love them, full." 646

6) "Nowadays, if I go to a meeting, I go because I'm a member and I go to fulfill my part in that wheel I was talking about — in that spoke. If I do my share, the whole wheel is going to turn evenly, if I do my share." 609

On Saturday people gather in the afternoon and early evening to chat and have something to eat<sup>6</sup> and some coffee. They are nicely dressed, wearing things that are special to them. Meanwhile the drummer carefully ties up the water drum. He may add a few ashes from the fire of the last meeting to the water before laying the deerskin head, newly soaked, over the three-legged metal bowl of the drum. Seven round stones, sometimes marbles, are pocketed inside the deerskin around the rim. The rope ties to them and passes tightly under the drum back and fourth making a symmetrical star of rope on the bottom. The fireman has already cut and meticulously piled clear-burning hardwood just outside the doorway of the circle.

The meeting is mandala-form,<sup>5</sup> a circle with a doorway to the east. The roadman will sit opposite the door, the moon-crescent altar in front of him. To his left sits the cedarman, to his right the drummer. On the right of the doorway as you enter will be the fireman. The people sit around the circle. In the middle is the fire.

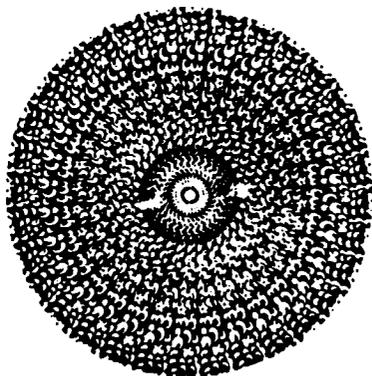
A while after dark they go in.<sup>7</sup> This may be formal, filing in clockwise around the circle in order. The roadman may pray outside beforehand, asking that the place and people and occasion be blessed.

Beginning a meeting is as conscious and routine as a space launch countdown. At this time the fireman is busy starting the fire and seeing that things and people are in their places.<sup>8</sup> The cedarman drops a little powder of cedar needles and

7) "They know that they are all one; no one is different from another; they are all brothers and sisters; that alone is what they now know. Great Spirit placed them on this earth which he made, that alone is what they now know." 573

8) "When the medicine starts to work we, always say it's almost like a person; somebody walks in, see? We consider it that way. Peyote, the spirit of Peyote, the spirit of God, comes in amongst us. We feel that there's another party in amongst us, and while He's in session here, you see, He's going to use these tools here; we want to put all the reverence we can in them, so we smoke them good, see?" 667

9) "Now, what does the whistling itself mean?" "That's calling everybody to attention, that's the way I take it." 664



bark on the fire and waves the aromatic smoke with his feather fan toward the roadman who purifies the peyote and his various implements with four sweeps into the smoke. The drummer does the same with his drum. The people wave smoke toward themselves, inhale it deeply, and appear to wash gently in it. The roadman blows a shrill eagle bone whistle four times to bring everything together. (Some do this outside the circle from the four directions.) He prays and places a perfect, large peyote button on a bed of sage on the altar.<sup>9</sup> With this the meeting is officially begun. It will stay begun till he takes the peyote chief off the altar in the morning.<sup>10</sup>

Everyone gets purified with cedar, sage, and tobacco before the peyote. The roadman passes a branch of sage to the left (everything clockwise, following the sun)<sup>11</sup> and each person tears off a sprig, crushes it, and rubs the sweet clean smell on his face, hands, and body. Some keep the sprig for use later. Bags of Bull Durham are passed and everyone rolls a prayer cigarette. The fireman goes around with an ember, ideally cedar, to light the cigarettes. Each person prays to himself, inhaling in the pauses of his thought, letting out his smoke to join the rest going out the smokehole above.<sup>12</sup> With the conscious breathing each person finds his own quiet. When they have finished, the fireman collects the butts and places them at each end of the moon.

The peyote is passed.<sup>13</sup> It may be green buttons, dried buttons, powder, mash, or several of these. Green peyote tastes better but is less effective. Powder goes down quicker. Mash, rolled into

10) "What does the Peyote Chief mean?" "Well, that's the chief; okemaw, what they call it. He watch everything, anything; everything what you say, well, it goes in there." 651

11) "That smoke comes up; well, it's going — it's just the way everything goes. The song, it's going, with all that power, like that cedar smoke; going, going up." 653

12) "The medicine is sweet, real sweet. You get it so, it's so strict, that it's pretty strong; you think it's bitter, but it's sweet. But that's how strong it is, that sweetness; and you think it's bitter." 620

13) "It has got a taste all by itself; it doesn't taste like candy or nothing like that." "I didn't think it tasted bad." "No, no! It's got a peculiar taste all by itself, I say. Some, they don't like that. Well, there's another point there. The way the old folks used to say, a person living a bad life has got a snake in him; that's what they say, snake in him. And that's the one that disagrees with that medicine; oh! it don't want you to swallow it. That's what they say; I don't know how true it is." 668

14) "You say you fill yourself up with Peyote?" "On the average I use between twenty-five and thirty. And you will know that I'm just a little above the average. I'm a heavy user, of my group here. We have a lot of old members that don't use very much of it; three or four, maybe, or maybe six; maybe eight, even; if they went eight, well, they surprise me. But I happen to be one of the heavy users, because I'm interested. I want to see what is there to see, you know; what is there to feel here. If the presence of God is in this room, I want to feel it. I want to see, even; I'm anxious to see the Almighty God. If Peyote can do it for me, I want to see it." 616

PSYCHEDELIC REVIEW

little balls, goes down quickest. In all cases, the white fluff should be removed. There is usually a pot of peyote tea, kept near the fire, which is passed occasionally during the night. Each person takes as much medicine as he wants and can ask for more at any time. Four buttons is a common start.<sup>14</sup> Women usually take less than the men. Children have only a little, unless they are sick.

Everything is happening briskly at this point. People swallow and pass the peyote with minimum fuss. The drummer and roadman go right into the starting song. The roadman, kneeling on one or both knees, begins it with the rattle in his right hand.<sup>15</sup> The drummer picks up the quick beat, and the roadman gently begins the song. His left hand holds the staff, a feather fan, and some sage. He sings four times, ending each section with a steady quick rattle as a signal for the drummer to pause or re-wet the drumhead before resuming the beat.<sup>16</sup> Using his thumb on the drumhead, the drummer adjusts the tone of his beat to the song. When the roadman finishes he passes the staff, gourd, fan and sage to the cedarman, who sings four times with the roadman drumming. So it goes, the drum following the staff to the left around the circle, so each man sings and drums many times during the night.

There are four special songs, which are sung by the roadman at the start, at midnight, for morning water, and to end the meeting. These and others are in no recognizable language. Still others are in the local Indian language. Some

15) "What do the songs mean?" "Oh, they mean something good. Like saying a prayer. We ask Almighty to help us. And some songs, they thank, you know. Almighty is glad, that all them songs is different. They come in new all the time; every year, new ones." 661

16) "The songs got lot of meanings. There's some that praising, praising God; some is prayers, asking. So, whatever songs a person has got the urge to sing, well, he uses it. "This may be a silly question, but how do you know the difference between them, when you don't know the meaning of the words? They're not in Menomini." "It is a silly question. Before we use some song, there is a lot of process in catching a song. Maybe you'll know it after a while. It seems that you've heard different ones say that we see something. Well, if you listen to a song long enough, pretty soon you'll get into the thing, and then your mind will get adjusted to the curves and manipulation of that song. Pretty soon you got the meaning. Every utterance must have some meaning, in any language; if you utter it long enough, you'll get that meaning. But this way, we use medicine to help us." 662

17) "If you want a song of your own, you got to use a lot of this stuff, and it comes to you. They travel in the air; they come, come to you." 631

18) "This Peyote is also like a game, a kind of game. These that can hang tough to the finish, that's a good reflection on their daily life and character, see? That's a kind of game. You notice some, they don't go out at midnight, even; even that means something. If a person can stand it without going outside, that's a reflection on his life and character, a good reflection; it's going to help him. It'll show up on the last round." 666



Photo: Saskatoon Star-Phoenix

A flour sack containing Peyote buttons is passed around at the beginning of a meeting and each member takes four buttons. In some cases forty to sixty buttons may be consumed during the twelve hour period of a meeting.

are unique, having been taught to an individual by peyote. At non-Indian meetings there are usually some learned Indian songs and a good many traditional religious or unlikely English songs adapted to the meeting.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes the person with the staff sings alone. Sometimes others join him. Occasionally instead of singing a person will have something to say or a prayer to offer. In any case, he is encouraged to express himself.

The abiding tone of the meeting is one of easy decorum, of humility, of reverence, of respect.<sup>18</sup> It is a ceremony. There may be laughter or tears, however; reverent is not solemn.

Since the work of the meeting is largely in the individual, there is a specific courtesy.<sup>19</sup> You do not speak, usually, unless you have the staff. You do not move around much. If you want to go out you gesture to the roadman and go only when you get his permission. Then you go clockwise around the fire, never stepping in front of anyone who is singing, smoking or praying because your shadow would interrupt between him and the fire. You do nothing that would trespass on another or detract from the meeting's unity. You attend to your own meditation and to the shared effect of the meeting.

Gradually, as the peyote takes effect, the meeting gathers power.<sup>20</sup> This seldom takes the form of overt behavior. One becomes more awake, more sensitive to the fire, the drumbeat, the circle, the overall harmony, and one's own disharmonies. If you feel ill you simply go ahead

19) "Your mind is more delicate when the medicine's working on you; the least little movement is a disturbance, a distraction. Same way with singing or drumming or praying. Any odd movement going on is a distraction." 668

20) "The first round, you're your natural self. And as the medicine begin to work, then the purpose of the meeting seems to — what would you say — accelerate your songs, some way. And then, when the medicine is really got a good hold, possibly on the last round, and that's when how you stand with Peyote; how you stand with God." 663

21) "I know when I sat up, I felt something coming out; I wanted to heave; and the minute I saw the can, and I did, all my sickness came out with the medicine. And as I sat there, I looked around. I knew just where I was, and I knew what was going on. Then I knew it was daylight; I turned around, and looked through the window back of me. I could see the sun coming up, real bright, over the hill. As I looked at the sun, I could see a man standing there — a real pretty picture — when this man came closer and closer, he had a smile. And I looked at him; I knew who he was. That was Christ. He spoke to me, said I was going to live." 618

22) "Now, it seem like this radio, they got messages, millions of them, travel all over the world, like that little crystal, sound on there. Well, there's a central point, too, above somewhere; there's a beam, small, of a light that's brighter than anything in this world; It's got kind of small thread go to this person; that comes from God. I'm just trying to explain on there. Then you hear a voice; maybe it's in your own tongue. And they say God is creator of all languages in this world; whatever language you



Photo: Saskatoon Star-Phoenix

The Fire Chief is an important official at a Peyote meeting. Besides tending the fire, he guards the door.

and throw up in front of you or in a can and the fireman will matter-of-factly clean it up. Evidently you needed to clean yourself out.<sup>21</sup> Sage or cedar smoke will help you get back to business.

The first major change of events in the hours after starting is midnight water call. The fireman carefully cleans around the fire, then when the roadman has the staff and is singing, the fireman goes out and brings back a pail of fresh water. He has this smoked by the cedarman, then kneels back down with a cigarette and prays. He may remind people what water is in our lives. When he is through he passes the pail to the left with a cup for everyone to have a drink.<sup>22</sup> The drummer gives some water to his drum. With a fan the roadman sprays a little water on the peyote chief, on the staff and rattle before he himself has any. After drinking is the time for people to go out of the circle for a few minutes if they need to. Seeing the bright circle of people from out in the darkness is particularly impressive for many. At non-Indian meetings it has been found advisable to have one person go out at a time, accompanied by the fireman. As each person returns he stands before the fire and is ceremonially brought back into the circle with incense smoke by the cedarman.

After midnight the meeting gets down to work.<sup>23</sup> The roadman or cedarman may remind everybody of the purpose of the meeting. What is to be accomplished, individually or mutually, is now undertaken. The singing and praying will

best use every day, why, He speaks to you that way. But you don't hear anybody walking alongside of you; you don't hear that; it's a message; you don't see anybody; it's a spirit." 631

23) "When it's after twelve, you can feel it's coming. When you eat medicine, you can feel it, feel it, feel it's kind of moving, something, when you eat medicine. If you don't eat it, you know nothing . . . That's good music, after you eat medicine . . . After twelve, after drink water, everything's set again. After everybody come in — and go in again — just sit still . . . That's the time your prayers, too, come. What you want, you ask for it, right there. Like it's open, everything." 668

24) "I came to that meeting, and rapped on the door, and the leader said, "Come in." I walked in, and very politely the leader says, "Offer that young man a chair. He's a visitor. He's been to school, and he's not used to sitting down like us Indians here. This young lad, he's been to school, he's been way up in school, and it would be a shame to put him down on the floor." The leader said that. I felt kind of honored, you know; and at the same time I know that that leader is a smart guy, you know; he's rubbing it in now, you know. Well, I took that chair, and I sat down there, you know. And I wasn't very comfortable, you know; sit there a couple of hours, you know; and I looked to find a place on the floor, where I could sit; sit like the rest of them. Finally the leader spoke to the waiter, "See if you can't fix that young lad up a place to sit down so he can sit amongst us." The leader came up to me, "It's kind of hard to sit on the chair, isn't it?" I said, "Yes." "Well, maybe I would make a nice soft seat for you, so you could sit there." I said, "I think I would." And down I sit, then. And, well, somehow I was kind of sleepy, you know; I'm sleepy. Leader called the waiter

take on increasing intentness as the meeting moves toward the event of three o'clock.

The effectiveness of a meeting, especially after midnight, owes much to the clarity of its organization.<sup>24</sup> The peyote helps the people. The ceremony helps the peyote. The roadman helps the ceremony. The other officers of the meeting help him.

The roadman is not a medicine man. If he has power he does not use it except sometimes to doctor. What he does have is authority; his job is administration. He knows by experience how the ceremony must be conducted and he knows by sensitivity everything going on in this meeting. He is responsible for keeping it on the road. Like a lens he does not make the energy, he transparently focuses it and directs it. His talents are experience, humility, and clarity.

The cedarman's job is a loving one. The cedar smoke he wields gives blessing. If he knows when to use it, he can help cleanse or heal someone in trouble. Often he voices or applies the directions of the roadman in administration of the meeting. He is a spokesman for the purpose of the meeting.

The fireman is strength. He sits across the fire from the roadman, in eye communication with him. He moves as much as the roadman doesn't. Besides scrupulously tending the fire, he keeps the door, periodically cleans the altar and floor, and attends to people who need attention. Tirelessly, unobtrusively, the fireman takes care of

and said, "Waiter, pass that young lad some of that Peyote. Maybe he'll eat it." The waiter got up, and came around with the dish." "You care for any Peyote?" "Sure, I'll eat some Peyote." "How many do you want?" I think in terms of white man; when they buy something, or when they want to sell something, it's always something like by the dozen. "Well, I think I'll start out with a dozen right away." The leader said, "You can have four." "What good is four going to do? Give me a dozen!" . . . I want to be a sport, you know . . . "All right. Sure. I'll give you a dozen." And they give them to me. Well, I chew them, and eat them down, like nobody's business. And finally the dish comes around again, and the waiter came over and said, "Maybe you want to eat some more?" "Sure. I'll eat some more." "How many do you want?" "Give me a handful," I said; "You people don't even eat Peyote, around here. You come to a Peyote meeting, and I don't see none of you people eat any Peyote. I'm doing all the eating, here. Give me a handful!" I said. So they put a handful there. I started to eat it. Well, that's the way I done. Then all night long, the leader kept his eye on me. I don't know for what reason; I suppose, I just came back from school, and maybe he thought I wouldn't be able to sit still long enough, you know, so that I couldn't participate in their meeting here, maybe pray, or something like that. Maybe he had the feeling I was going to — when I got tired sitting down, that I'd go back home and go to bed, or something like that. So he kept his eye on me. I suppose if I wanted to get up, he's going to tell me, "Sit back down; stay here in the ceremony." That's the way I took it, so I stayed." 615

25) "That medicine don't really work right away, before midnight; so the blaze, well, I just try to keep it comfortable in there; well, light and

PSYCHEDELIC REVIEW

things. As coals form in the fire he brushes them around to the altar side to form a second altar of embers.<sup>25</sup> It is here the cedar incense is dropped.

The drummer watches after the heartbeat of the meeting.<sup>26</sup>

As the staff moves around and around the circle every person touches it and the drum as they go by. The man holding the staff is getting the power.<sup>27</sup> Singing or praying, it is his meeting until he relinquishes the staff to the next man. No one will interrupt him. Only rarely will a woman hold on to the staff to say something, almost never to sing. One view on this custom which is so difficult for whites is that the women knew, therefore they have less to say.

As the night wears on, from time to time someone asks for tobacco to roll a prayer cigarette, which the fireman lights.<sup>28</sup> Peyote is called for, and the tea goes around again. After midnight people have their own feather fans out and may move them in time with the drum. Someone weeps and there is a shared sense of relief. The person with the staff is saying something from his heart and people respond quietly "m-hm".<sup>29</sup>

Three o'clock is the crisis of night. It is not a time. It is the dark moment which many do not recognize until it is passed and getting lighter.<sup>30</sup> Getting to it and past it is a shared accomplishment. The roadman announces it is three o'clock.

From now until dawn the meeting is an unhurried appreciation of the growing light.<sup>31</sup> Nothing

comfort; the fire up so it's comfortable. And then towards morning, when everything gets going good, when the singing gets going good, and everything; then I like to keep it up, because I believe, myself, that that blaze, you know, it's a spiritual thing. When I say my first prayer in there, that's the closest resemblance I can have to visualize the Holy Spirit. Just like it did in biblical times. And oftentimes, when I look at the blaze, I could see little crosses in there, somewhere; it reminds me of the Holy Spirit; it's with us. Well, that's what I ask, at the beginning every time I make a fire; that the Holy Spirit be with us, and teach us himself his ways, according to our individual problems. So that's the way I handle it." 658

26) "Well, the sound of the drum, that keeps a person feel more lively; something like that. While you say, while you pray, prayers is strong, all them. This drum, it helps anything going, saying." 650

27) "When there's a good singer there, that's really giving out, you know, a good drummer, just giving the best they got, well, maybe the sick person will kind of quiet down; maybe he'll enjoy the singing that much more, see, and give that medicine a chance. Maybe he won't think about his sickness; he'll give that medicine a chance to work, you know." 657

28) "I heard somebody praying, and I got curious — the medicine work on me — gosh! It sound all right, this man was praying. Well, when I find out, that was myself; I heard my own prayer there." 634

29) "There's a feeling comes in the meeting, and it's kind of a holy feeling, the presence of the Spirit of God, is in the midst of these people. You



Photo: Saskatoon Star-Phoenix

Pictured in deep meditation cre, from left to right, William Russell, state president of the Montana church organization, Frank Takes Gun, the international president and Dr. H. Osmond, psychiatrist.

changes overtly. The fire keeps and the drum keeps, through the smokehole the stars keep. The most emotional time is over. This part of the meeting understands.

Comprehension has much to work with.<sup>32</sup> Beside the unique events of the night, there is the rich symbology of the ceremony in which "everything represents". There is the central fire and the central smokehole of stars toward which the smoke travels. There is the circle of faces, the circle of the peyote chief, the circle of sky, of earth, and of the year.<sup>33</sup> There is the number four, of the four directions, the four seasons, of completion, of Here.<sup>34</sup> There is the altar, called the Road, showing the clean way to travel a life.<sup>35</sup> Its crescent is also the wings of a bird, morning bird, waterbird, eagle, phoenix rising from the fire. To finish the meeting will come water of the earth and food of the earth, brought by a woman.<sup>36</sup>

After the sky has paled and the meeting has demonstrated its completion to him, the roadman asks the person appointed peyote woman to go and get ready for morning water call.<sup>37</sup> If some women or children stayed in the house during the night, they join the meeting now. The roadman sings the morning song, and peyote woman returns with water and a ceremonial breakfast of corn, fruit, and boneless meat. She is smoked by the cedarman and given a cigarette. By dawn light she prays, giving thanks and reminding people where things come from. In her, the Earth speaks.

feel that presence, you know; it makes you want to pray deep in your heart." 616

30) "That three o'clock stop, they smoke all the people. You see them, how they do that; burn incense, and then smoke all the people. We always feel that that's the time when the spirit is really near to us; all our prayers that we are asking, that we may be benefited by it. Same way when you smoke tools; this is official; everyone can get this blessing from that prayer. That's why they do that at three o'clock." 669

31) "Some of them, they say that the great teacher Peyote teaching forever. They never find it, where it end; it's forever, the Peyote. That's the way they find out, them Peyoters, old Peyoters. Even next meeting I go, I'll find something; next one, I'll find something. Keep on going like that; you'll never get to end. There's no end to it; it is forever." 645

32) "When you all sit there, when you see that fire going, mean's that's God. Pointing to God, that fire; that's the way I find out. You got to try to go that way." 649

33) "Why four?" "Everything's four. When they start to eat Peyote, four; then they start four times songs; and then they whistle, four." "Why is everything in fours?" "Four. It's from God, that four." 659

34) "What does the Half Moon mean?" "That's the way. The Indians, they found out that's a road." 648

35) "What does the bird mean to you?" "Well, it's a sort of a pure, pure symbol. That's the way I take it, see? I should say that a sign, a pure sign, pure." 670



Photo: Saskatoon Star-Phoenix

Peyote Woman, who represents the mother of the universe, brings in a pail of blessed water. She pours a bit on the ground to show their dependence on the earth and water for life.

The water and the food go once around the circle. Various individuals have a prayer to offer or honoring remarks to make.<sup>36</sup> The roadman sings the quitting song, blows the eagle bone whistle four times, and takes the peyote chief off the altar. By now the sun is shining in the doorway.

As the food goes round again there is mutual congratulation and a good deal of joking, especially about any mistakes made in the ceremony during the night. Meanwhile the drummer unties the drum and the roadman carefully puts away his gear in a feather box.

Re-entry is conscious and gradual. After a friendly while in the circle people stand up and wander out to get coffee. They chat or nap or have something to eat until late in the morning. Then as rich a feast as the family can afford is laid out. Everyone stuffs, lolls around, thanks the roadman and the other officers and the family who put up the meeting, and eases out into Sunday.

Manifestly, the success of the peyote meeting as a spiritual event and psychedelic format is no longer of interest only to Indians. Its development by them during the last 100 years was the intelligent response to the pressures of culture change. Now, in mid 20th-century acceleration, we all share the trial of culture change. Non-Indians also are developing a psychedelic response.

In the necessary turmoil to come we can expect some, afraid of psychedelics, to scapegoat the

36) "Water, that's why we're living." 644

37) "Next morning, go outside, and geel seems to me it's clear; everything is clear. Feel good in that air; I feel good. And that's what happened to me, that time. I was glad. When I used that Peyote, I know that's Almighty; that's his law. That's what I say, that time, I think. I see it. I join in there, someplace, safest way. I'm glad I went in there; I'm glad. I feel real good; I'm glad I join in there." 606

38) "What does fanning your drummer mean?" "Thanks."

39) "Kind of against, the government, see? Against it! . . . Let them do it. Almighty God, what He's got in His mind, nobody can stop Him. You can't go that way. The government can't stop Him. That isn't the first time against God. It's been that way ever since the world was made. All ways, against God. Everybody's been like that. And it's still that way, here. And my mind come to realize about it. You can't stop it. Nobody can stop it. Because it's God; it belong to God. He done it. He do it, and He do it every day, today, here." 639

40) "These Indians you know, they've been poor, all this time. The foundation of that, seems like it's kind of a big root, or something like that. There's all kinds of those little roots, all kinds. Like a tree, or something; a tree. And all kind of branches; there's all kinds of those little twigs in there. It's got all kinds of those laws in there, like that. But over here, down to the Indian, he ain't got that. But those little twigs, there's an end to them, here. Seem like you getting that far; the white people, they getting so, they kind of tangled up in there. And pretty soon they'll want to hide this Indian, want to hide that foun-

dation. I wonder who they're hiding it from?" 622

41) "Is God a white man or an Indian?" "Well, He's a man."

Indians.<sup>39</sup> Most will ignore them. Some will imitate them. Some will learn from them. Only the last will respect.

The way to learn about peyote is go to a meeting. You will learn the most and impose the least if you go alone with an Indian friend who can explain what is going on and tell you how to act.<sup>40</sup> Whites are talented trespassers. Indians live together by an elaborate and unspoken courtesy which others too often take advantage of, tromping in blind to the hospitality and unaware of their trespass.

A Cherokee said recently, relating to outsiders at stomp dance, "A person could come in there and take the drum away from me. What do you think I'm going to do, grab it back? He's the one mixed up. He could walk right over the tables kicking plates every which way. People wouldn't do anything to stop him. They might look at him.

This attitude, common among Indians, is the invisible corollary to the visible rules and discipline that are characteristic of the peyote meeting. Indians let. They assume you know the rules and are ready to handle the consequences of going outside them. They expect your mistakes will teach you better. They respect your ability to figure it out and they will not interfere with your self-education.<sup>41</sup>

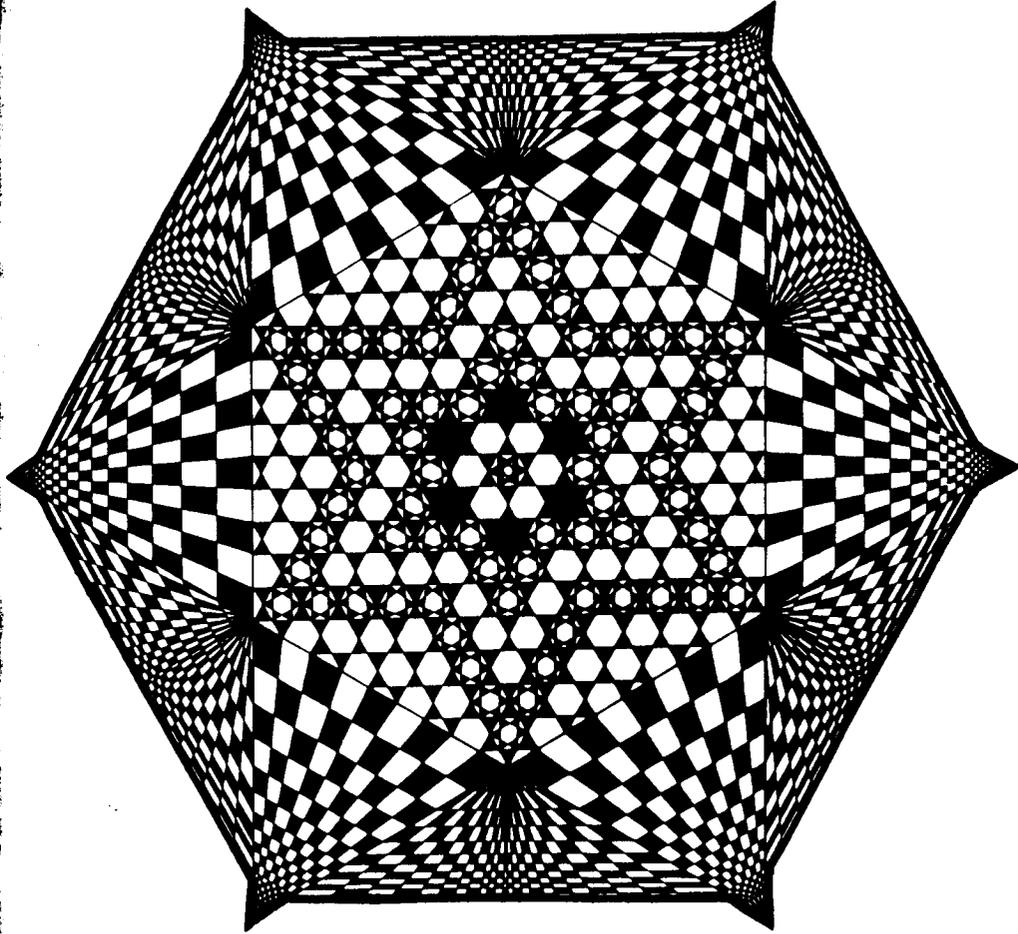
The ceremony works for the peyote works for the people. When peyote is teaching and a man is travelling with his own truth, the meeting is there to let that happen.



The official peyote dealer for the Native American Church dries the green tops of the plant at his home near Laredo, Tex. Photo courtesy of C. B. Duetts



Painting by Mati Klarwein



Drawing by Jacques Kassemach