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Title:
Concepts of Spirit in Prehistoric Art According to Clifford Duncan, Ute Spiritual Elder

Abstract:
This paper is a discussion about 'spirit' and ceremonies of spiritual nature. Representations of the Bear Dance at Shavano Valley petroglyph site are interpreted according to the Ute Indian traditions. Clifford Duncan, Ute tribal elder contrasts what he believes to have been prehistoric world views with the contemporary Ute world views. Clifford talks about his concept of 'spirit' from his life long study of rock paintings and petroglyph sites he has visited with Carol Patterson.
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Introduction:
Ute History

The Ute Indians ranged across much of the northern Colorado Plateau beginning at least 2000 years B.P. The very name ‘Ute,’ from which the name of the state of Utah was derived, means "high land" or "land of the sun." The Ute language, Southern Numic, belongs to the Numic group of Uto-Aztecan languages shared by most of the Great Basin tribes. The Utes, however, included mountain-dwellers as well as desert nomads.

Bands in the mountainous eastern regions subsisted by hunting large game and by fishing, while bands in the arid western and southern regions adapted to their environments by wandering widely and taking advantage of the periodic abundance of food and material resources in different eco zones. The arrival of Utes in the Four Corners area came later, but most anthropologists agree that by 1500 A.D. they were well-established in the region.

Once they obtained Spanish horses and livestock from the Pueblo peoples of northern New Mexico, the Ute began to raise horses, cattle and sheep, and to begin raiding and trading. In eastern areas in particular, Utes became respected warriors and important participants in the southwestern slave and horse trade. In the north, they remained largely independent of colonial control until the arrival of Mormon settlers, who pressured the Utes to settle down and farm.

Prior to their acquisition of horses the Ute traveled on foot, moving through known hunting and gathering territories on a seasonal basis. Men hunted deer, antelope, buffalo, rabbits, and other small mammals and birds. Women gathered seed grasses, piñon nuts, berries, roots, and greens in woven baskets, and processed and stored meat and plant materials for winter use. Ute families lived in brush wickiups and ramadas in the western and southern areas and used hide tepees in the eastern reaches of their territory. Of all the Ute bands, only the Pahvant were cultivating food plants at early contact.
The Ute band that live in Western Colorado were called the Tabeguache derived from a descriptive Ute term, Mogwatavungwantsingwu, which means "cedar-bark, sunny slope people." The Tabeguache Band was the largest Ute band, consisting of 500 to 1,000 or more who came and went in extended family groups with leaders of their own lodges. These nomadic hunters and gatherers traversed a territory that included the Gunnison Valley, the Uncompahgre Valley, San Luis Valley, the Upper Arkansas, and South Park. The Upper Arkansas area was a crossroads where they hunted, and gathered food. The natural resources of this region made it a popular place to camp, with plenty of grass for their horses, plus timber, pinyon nuts, berries, seeds, and game.

When pioneers first arrived in this region, the Utes they met were generally Tabeguaches. Even after the Treaty of 1868 had consigned them to land west of the Continental Divide, the Tabeguache Band continued to travel through the Upper Arkansas Valley and South Park to Denver and elsewhere for another decade.

With the treaty of 1868, the Utes had a new agency called Los Piños, northwest of Cochetopa Pass and south of Gunnison. Because the location was unsatisfactory, for numerous reasons including its position outside the reservation boundary, the agency was moved to a site south of present-day Montrose in the Uncompahgre Valley. There, the Tabeguaches became more commonly known as Uncompahgre Utes. While living in that area, some farmed, but they still hunted and wandered at will.
Soon, the presence of white miners, in the San Juan Mountains within the reservation, exacerbated problems. In the aftermath of the Meeker Incident in northwestern Colorado, all of the Uncompahgres, which included Tabeguaches with familiar names like Chipeta and McCook and Shavano, were moved to the Uintah reservation in Utah. The Uncompahgres/Tabeguaches became leaders in the consolidated Uintah and Ouray Reservation. (Simmons 2005)

Believing that staying in one place meant certain starvation, the Northern Utes resisted agrarian settlement. As the Mormons appropriated more and more of their land, the Utes retaliated with a series of raids against isolated Mormon settlements. The Walker War (1853-54) signaled the beginning of the "open hand, mailed fist" Indian policy of Brigham Young – feeding when possible, fighting when ever necessary. In 1869 the northern Utes were forcibly removed to the Uintah Valley Reservation. They were joined by the White River Utes from Colorado in 1881, and by the Uncompahgre Utes to the adjoining Ouray Reservation in the following year.

In 1905 the U.S. Government allotted new reservations and opened the remainder for white entry. Each Ute received an 80- to 160-acre plot for farming and access to a communal grazing district. Allotment reduced Ute land holdings by over 85 percent and limited the potential for a successful livestock industry. Construction of expensive irrigation projects did little to improve Ute farming and led to extensive leasing and alienation of yet more land. Increased oil and gas development on reservation lands in the 1970s and early 1980s benefited the Northern Utes in the form of jobs and severance taxes. They also received money and stored water in return for the diversion of their watershed runoff for the Central Utah Project (Southern Ute web site 2005).

Present-day Utes occupy a tiny fraction of their former territories. The Northern Ute live on the Uintah-Ouray Reservation near Fort Duchesne in northeastern Utah. The Southern Ute live on a reservation in the southwestern corner of Colorado near Ignacio. The Ute Mountain Ute are descendants of the Weminuche band who moved to the western end of the Southern Ute Reservation in 1897. Their reservation is located near Towaoc, Colorado, and includes small sections of Utah and New Mexico.
Clifford Duncan is a Northern Ute elder and the tribe’s retired historian. He is an artist, a former museum director, and currently the cultural resource advisor to the Northern Ute tribe. He was born into a traditional family and lived all his life on a reservation except for a few years while he was in the armed forces during the Korean conflict. He has lectured at many conferences and various colleges and universities and traveled abroad to countries including Chile, Peru, Norway, Greece, France and Germany on behalf of the Native American Traditions. He lives near Roosevelt, Utah.

For nearly eight years, Carol Patterson has been accompanying Clifford to many petroglyph sites in Western Colorado and eastern Utah. She has captured on tape Clifford’s interpretation of Ute and proto-historic Ute petroglyph sites. The spiritual nature of these sites is of primary interest and Clifford is candid on explaining just what he understands from a traditional Ute perspective. The following are quotes from Clifford from 2009 to 2013 concerning Ute spiritual beliefs pertaining to rock art.
Rock Art

Clifford: “Take it into consideration that times have changed. The prehistoric way of thinking by the Native Americans was different than it is today. We should try to look at the rock art from both prehistoric and historic world views. We may not be accurate, because today we are looking at the rock art from only our present day perspective.”

“Rock art is something sacred and that is because it has a spirit. This is what made my parents and relatives always say to the younger ones not to bother the rock art sites of the Moquich.”

“My parents would say that you should stay away from these places and don’t touch them. So after awhile you begin to feel that what they say is real, a way of life, and that you should always leave them alone. They have nothing to do with you. They are associated with life after death.”

“A lot of people want to know what a rock art panel means ‘up front’ and spend a lot of time trying to figure it out. But we are told not to bother with all that because it’s depicting a different world. Perhaps they thought that you would disturb a spirit of another world. This could be bad. So most of us don’t pay much attention to rock art. The meaning is behind rock art. It has to be interpreted from the point of view of the author or people putting it there. Those people were not just ordinary, they had some kind of special experience or background to produce those drawings. You can’t just draw something like that just for the sake of drawing. Only the trained people oriented to the spiritual aspects can make the rock art.”

“What draws me to rock art are two things:
First, that whatever those drawings are suppose to represent, for this place, is for the life on the earth as it is today. Second, it is like an identity – it is serving that purpose too. To say: ‘People were here’. This is their story of the beginning, from these people, in a certain place.

“The spirit is within the rock art and it shows a story that is talking to us. So you listen to the rock art. You listen with your soul and you listen to it with your eyes barely scanning the panel as you look into it. What you are receiving is this….. After you have pulled it out, there are other things attached to it. So you are actually trying to break it down into smaller bits that you can understand.”

“You say to the rock art, “I want to feel what you feel”, yet you’re scared, so you hold back. So you find other ways to understand what it means. For example, I would take some Indian paint and I would put it on my body, somewhere. Then I would say “protect me from evil” By saying this, it also means that I believe the rock art is bad too. But if I said, “Protect me so I can do it right.” Then it means if I don’t do it right, it can harm me. So these things are part of how I approach rock art or what I call ‘sacredness’.”
“Sacredness can mean glorified. But lots of people think sacredness means you feel peaceful all over your body, your mind, your soul. Perhaps that is what it is, I don’t know, but I often look at it, like it contains both. So I have to pass through whatever is there, and if it shows negativity, I still have to keep going to reach the other side.”

“After I have studied rock art over a period of time I begin to feel relaxed and at ease with what I see. Then, I say, I think I have completed my journey. Each rock art panel is a journey. Every little thing that you see is a journey. It could be just one little drawing or one drawing that contains a lot of little things; it could be made to throw you off and cover something simple that is really there.”

Figure _3___ Cross Mountain petroglyph site with Clifford talking to the petroglyph

“So using a long description of what I think rock art is, I see that it is sacred. It’s alive, and tobacco is my way of communicating with the spirit. I find that it too needs the same to communicate with me. So I give tobacco to say thank you and also for blessing the lands, and other things around there. Sometimes I use cornmeal. Some people use cornmeal or corn pollen, to open a pass from you to the light or you to whomever you want to communicate with. They use it in a straight line. When they get through, they rub it off, and that closes the pathway.”

“By that I also mean that as long as rock art remains somewhere in the world, it is doing something. That’s why I want to record and document it, because you have a chapter to add in their history. That is what it is for. Then I make my offering.”
Shavano Valley Rock Art Site

Clifford Duncan was born on the Uinta/Ouray Ute Reservation in Utah, but his father was an Uncompahgre Ute. Clifford returns to the Uncompahgre Plateau in Colorado many times each year. Shavano is one of his favorite places to visit and remember the teachings of his parents and pay respects to the spirits of his ancestors and those spirits who still dwell in this site. The petroglyphs are highly symbolic and difficult to interpret by an outside culture. But in this case, Clifford has provided a Ute perspective. The following are conversations Clifford has shared concerning the Shavano site.

“If I go to Shavano, I begin with an introduction to the ‘people who live there’. I become it in order to see it. See it as part of the creation of the world.” .... “What I am looking for is a thinking pattern. What is it that is hidden in that picture? Those drawings are depicting something that is still there—still faintly there today. They have a spirit that throws out a certain feeling if you are looking for it. It is just a matter of unlocking yourself from the inside to read it.”

The petroglyphs are on the northeast rim and slopes of Shavano Valley, about five and a half miles west of Montrose, Colorado. Shavano Valley is a 7 mile long valley oriented north and south between the Uncompahgre Plateau on the west and Spring Creek Mesa on the east. The rock art site is located on the southwest corner on the edge of the Shavano Valley. A gentle graded trail winds up 200 ft to the rim where the petroglyphs are located. The cliff is composed of Dakota and the petroglyphs are found on the cliff face and on detached boulders that have tumbled down the slope.

Figure 4 Carol Patterson and Clifford Duncan looking at the Shavano Valley petroglyphs depicting the Bear Dance using signlanguage symbols.
The Shavano Valley Petroglyph Park was used by early prehistoric hunter/gathers and more recently by Ute bands because of the presence of artesian springs and game trails that crossed back and forth through the valley from the Uncompahgre Plateau. Ancient Ute trails converged at this site, one running off the top of the mesa down to the valley, and others that ran up and down the valley, and east and west through the Plateau.

![Figure 5 Archaic component of the Three Bear’ Panel.](image)

Archaic hunters and gatherers portrayed their trails and plant resource collection areas in a trail map shown here. These fainter pecked lines are earlier than the bear and tree motifs that can be seen below.

**Three Bears Panel at Shavano Valley**

The ‘three bears panel’ is the principal panel of the site. It is found on a vertical sandstone cliff face on the rim of Shavano Valley. There is a well drawn ‘bear’ shown in profile. Below this bear are two more bears and two trees. The one on the right is hard to distinguish, but the second one resembles a bear with a short tail. There are small dots representing ‘tracks’ leading up to this bear, from a natural crevice in the rock face. This is a convention used by Native people called “rock incorporation”. Natural features of the rock are used to
illustrate concepts such as ‘caves’ or ‘mountains’ or ‘canyons’ as part of the narration. This panel is an illustration of a bear that comes out of its cave and walks up to a tree and stands there holding it.

Figure __6__ Three bears panel at Shavano Valley petroglyph site.

This panel has at least three episodes of production on the surface. The first episode is archaic and consists of a thin line that fork at the top. A small stick figure human is seen walking up the far right line, with a pack on his back.

Figure __7__ Three episodes of rock art on this panel.
The second episode of production of this panel is that of the Bear climbing the tree and the elevated Bear. These elements are characteristic of dense pecking and of note are the three roots descending below and the fork at the top of the tree.

The rock incorporation of cracks and crevices is used to refer to the natural features in the landscape that are important in a creation story. The small dots represent the bear’s tracks as he emerges out of a cave and goes up to the tree. The crevice also mimics the tunnel cave below. Together the tracks may indicate ‘emergence from the Underworld in the spring’.

![Figure 8: Bear with flexed paws and spit coming out of its mouth showing ferocity and power.](image)

The elevated bear is drawn ‘diagrammatically’. That is, it is shown in profile, (side on) but its paws are shown front on. This is a technique commonly used in picture writing to give clarity to the identity of the subject. The author wants the viewer to know it is a bear, and not a squirrel on a tree.

Diagrammatic illustrations are not meant to be viewed as ‘naturalistic’. A majority of the indigenous picture writing around the world and especially in North America use this technique to describe something, rather than just draw a picture of it. It is referred to as “drawing what one ‘understands’ rather than what one ‘sees’. There are dots coming from its mouth that may represent blood.

“Sometimes (during the Bear Dance), the Utes would apply red paint around their mouth to look as though blood were dripping from the jaws, suggesting the ferocity of the bear” (Densmore 1972, 57).
The third episode is that of a cruder tree and bear. There are no roots or a fork at the top
of the tree. A horse has been added also that seems to extend out of the second bear’s
head, as a ‘name glyph’ used by Plains Indians. These elements, the tree, bear and horse
are produced with an iron tool that would have been available in the late 1800’s.

Figure 9 __ Left; roughly pecked tree and bear, and right; roughly pecked horse.

Shavano Valley Petroglyph site is a world class rock art site with the added value of its
access to native interpretation. It is still within the memories of the Ute people who know
and understand the symbolism exhibited there. It has well preserved petroglyphs from the
Late Archaic to Historic Ute era. The Bear Dance is the central theme and is specific to
Ute cultural traditions during the 18th and 19th Century. After the relocation of the
Uncompahgre Utes in 1881.

“Places like Shavano have symbols of bear paws. A bear normally walks on all fours. But
when there is something interesting, or something that a bear wants to see, it will stand
up.”
“The bear is always connected to something, either by sight, body or the spirit. That is
why the bear stands up. But when there is something interesting, or something that a bear
wants to see, it stands up. That is why he leaves his prints on the wall, because he was
standing up. The bear prints on the wall mean that they are talking about something.”

Sometimes we see a bear standing upright to a tree. Today, people try to interpret that,
but who is to know. The only way to interpret it is through a spiritual connection. That’s
my way of looking at it. When you are through studying books on rock art the way you
are suppose to study it, try studying it through your soul.”
Figure 10. Bear paw at Shavano, bear and tree at Shavano, Ute painting of the bear and tree.

The Tunnel Cave
The Tunnel Cave has very old engravings on the walls and suggests a mythological theme of the underworld. The south panel has serpentine lines and distinct Bear paw tracks. The north wall has linear motifs are reminiscent of passages and bridges.

Figure 11. The Tunnel Cave at Shavano Valley rock art site has very old engravings on the walls and difficult to see. Viewing is best at mid day when sunlight illuminates the walls. Some are very faint and old and demonstrate the great age of some of these panels.
A Wolf or Coyote faces toward the lines. The tunnel cave may be the equivalent to the underworld realm where spirits go after death. The underworld is also similar in concept to the underground cave that Bear hibernates in through the winter, and emerges from in the spring. “The path to the other world followed the Milky Way but was sometimes described as an underground passage ending with a bridge over a terrific chasm…” (Hultkrantz 1957:78). “The domains of the dead lie in the south, north or west and are situated on the other side of the ocean or up in the sky.” The ruler is Wolf, for the Ute and Southern Paiute…. Wolf and the Father have been interchangeable concepts…. Wolf has to wash the newly dead and even escort them to the other world” (Hultkrantz 1986, 637).

Figure _12_. The ‘tunnel cave’ may be metaphoric for a womb like portal from which the bear emerges from the underworld (hibernation) to upper world.

The ‘Tunnel Cave’ petroglyphs may be related to ancient creation stories. A wolf or coyote is featured along with many linear motifs, animal tracks and Bear paw prints. “In Numic mythology the brothers are known as the big and little wolf (that is, coyote) or “the wolf brothers.” Wolf appears occasionally as a cultural hero and is generally a benign and responsible fellow, a kind of a mythological counterpart to the Supreme Being. Coyote, besides being the greedy and licentious character described in myths, is responsible for many cultural institutions and natural conditions. He secured the fire and the pine nuts, released the game impounded in a cave, caused death to occur, and imparted to man knowledge of arts and crafts” (Hultkrantz 1986, 638).

Caves and other named localities, which remained sacred sites for shamanistic power quest are believed to have served formerly as entrances to the legendary underground pathway. The recurrent theme in these stories is the adventures of a hunter following a wounded animal to the lower world and his return after a time spent with the dwellers down below.
The Ute buried their dead in rock crevices and cave entrances. The passage to the underworld was known as *Na-gun-tu-wip*, where departed spirits dwell. When passing through, owls hoot, wolves howl in the distance and grizzly bears’ foot prints can be seen in the sands. At the end of the passage a bridge crosses to the “beyond the chasm” (Pettit 1990,73).

Clifford: “From the Ute perspective, Man has to walk through darkness for a long period of time and then walk into the light, and then back into the darkness. Like the sunrise, the sun rises out of dark and then sets into the dark. Some of our beliefs are this: The spirit is born and told to travel in total darkness for nine months inside your mother. Then you are born into this world from your mother and born into the light. Prior to that, you don’t remember. I don’t believe there is energy that is invisible that has no beginning; they all have to have a beginning somewhere. Beyond beginning is another beginning. So that is what makes ‘spirit’ come to this world. When a family becomes civilized, in so called civilization they began to write and record things, and that is what keeps man in this light, in a limited light.”

“Life could be like that. In the period we call Fremont, the Fremont could have had a beginning like that too. Dark after we had light, that was a long period of time and then we had light. It is during this time of light that they put this information on the rocks.”

**Ute ‘Cosmic Tree’**

Clifford on the Tree: “The tree is the birth place of certain rituals and it has power. The bear, emerging out of hibernation, comes out and marks the tree, and while he’s doing that, there are songs that come out of the tree. The tree is related to the bear, and he is related to the tree. Songs are coming out of the tree, because in the spring time fresh new life is coming out of the tree. That is where the bear gets a new song and creates the bear dance.”

“The petroglyph of the bear and the tree may depict a man wearing a bear skin and climbing a tree which appeared like a ladder. The bear can climb to the top of the tree, because they are wise, and they hibernate and create a role model for how to live with the earth. The people must share the resources with the bear.”

Shavano Valley petroglyph site has a remote petroglyph perched high up on the rock face. It is a “tree” motif and a ‘butterfly’ like motif. But both motifs have “roots” on their stems that are the key to their identities. The tree on the left is a “cosmic tree” similar to the one found in the Bear Panel. It has three roots below it and a fork at the top. It is repeated to the right, again with three tiny roots below and a fork at the top, with three arcs around it.
Clifford:
“The tree is a birth place of certain rituals, and has the power. The bear, upon coming out of hibernation, comes out and marks the tree, and while he’s doing that, the songs are coming out of there. The tree is related to him, and he is related to the tree. And songs are coming out of there, because in the spring time, that fresh, new life is coming out of that tree and that’s what gives him that new song and creates that bear dance.”

“The tree represents vegetation and all things that grow. At the beginning, it was the animals that were the teachers for early Native Americans as to what was right and what was wrong, and what types of plants were for medicinal use.”

“My grandmother told me that life is like a tree and each branch is a gift a person is born with. In his life time all that remains is the very top of tree. That is the place of little container that we are born with and that never dies so it comes with us when we leave. If we get to the top of the tree there is an amazing sense of happiness, like we have never known, and we will want to have that happiness all the time. This is what we all yearn for in our lives.”

Figure 13: Cosmic Tree and Levels of the Universe
Dr. James Goss studied the language and mythology of the Southern Utes for over 50 years. He writes:

Five is a very important ritual number for the Ute. Five colors match the five levels of the Cosmos. These in turn are matched by five shamanistic clans. Each clan “boss” is the “boss” of the logically appropriate level of the Cosmos. Eagle rules over the white world of the sky. Mountain Lion rules over the Upper earth, the cold world which is lighted by the yellow light of sunrise. Wolf rules over the Center Earth of grays, greens, and blues, the focus of the primary vegetation. This is the main realm of man, too, where the greatest variety of resources is available. Weasel is the ruler of the Lower Earth, which is red, dry, and warm, with occasional oases which open to the Underworld. Rattlesnake rules over the Underworld, the domain of darkness under earth and water.

The color symbolism matches perfectly,
Eagle has white markings and feather tips,
Mountain lion is tawny yellow
Gray Wolf, his younger sister Gray Fox, and his sister’s son Coyote are gray, the central flux of all colors,
Weasel is reddish brown
Rattlesnake is relatively dark.
(Goss 1972)

The Ute view the cosmos as a series of circular planes. This comes from the experience of looking out at the horizon that forms a semi circle around the viewer. The Upper world and the lower world logically follow this model. The way in which to diagram the three cosmic realms bisected by an Axis Mundi would appear like this.
Figure 15. The 5 levels of the universe, 3 terrestrial with tree forking at the sky world and roots penetrating the underworld.

The tree at the center of a ceremony or painted composition is part of a body of myths, rites, images and symbols which together make up what is called ‘symbolism of the Centre’ by Mircea Eliade. (1964) He believes that through time, man has always had an obsession with the origins of things and it is reflected in all mythologies. In the symbolic language of myth and religion, the tree acts like a vertical axis, the ‘cosmic axis’ or ‘axis of the world’ (Axis Mundi) which connects the cosmic zones of Sky, Earth and Underworld. It descends through the discs of the earth into the world below. This idea of the cosmic axis and the ‘center of the world’, is extremely ancient (Fourth or third millennium BC) and widely diffused around the world.

This is a diagrammatic illustration based on the circular horizon that appears to the viewer. Each arc corresponds to one of the three levels of the Earth, according to Ute cosmology. The fork at the top penetrates the Sky World, and the roots below penetrate the Underworld. All together it represents the 5 levels of the Ute Cosmos.

This petroglyph is purposely placed out of reach for the general public. It is for this reason there is no trail to it. Its place up high on the cliff wall, and adjacent to a natural porthole or passage through the cliff to the top is purposeful. It signifies the spiritual nature and its simplicity indicates a highly symbolic nature.

The tree roots are key to the identification of this image. It is the roots that penetrate the underworld while the fork at the top of the tree penetrate the sky world. The three levels of the earth are bisected by this tree.

To the Utes, the tree is sacred in many parts of Ute culture. The sacred tree was used by the bear as part of a transformation between worlds. The tree possesses all kinds of Indian medicine. (Duncan 2005).

Clifford: “In rock art, the bear and ritual is symbolized by the bear paw. The songs for the dance were inspired from the sound of thunder in the sky. The singing is about that. The women select a partner. On the last day is the appearance of the bear, a man with a cape and bear head. People dance to one side and say “the bear is coming”. Kids hide behind their parents. The bear comes into the corral and moves all around while the dance is going on. Then a man comes to the center of the circle to east, singing a song, rhythm and sound. A woman dresses up in buckskins goes to the center of the enclosure and holds her hands up. She becomes the “bear” and the bear is the “tree”. The woman dances around the man (bear), several times. The song ends and the bear/man goes away. The last night of the Bear Dance, they dance all night into the morning. The sun comes up and they all line up and face the East. The medicine man says prayers and fans each one and then excuses them. Then our parents go home. They take a branch of willow and walk around the house, talking to the “little ones” the crawling things,. They say “bugs, we are going to live here with you. You help us, and we help you. We all live close to nature”. certain place.”
The Ute Bear Dance
The Ute Bear Dance is called *mamaqui mawats*, meaning to dance forward and back or *mamaqui niqap*, “Forward-backward dance”. (Opler 1941:25)

It is believed that the Bear Dance is originally a Ute dance. It was practiced by all Ute bands at the time of contact, performed in the late winter toward the end of February or beginning of March. Each band has invited others to participate. The host band provides food and builds a large circular brush enclosure for the dance. The Bear Dances lasted from 4 to 10 days and consisted of a group of men playing musical rasps (a notched stick and un-notched stick) that was placed on the top of a drum resonator. This encouraged the dancers by stimulating them to dance. It imitates the calls and sounds of the bear as it emerges from hibernation in early spring. (Jorgensen 1986)

The Annual Ute Bear Dance was held in the spring at the first sound of thunder; about the middle of March. But preparation was made all winter: around the campfires the storyteller told tales of the way of life and the singers practiced songs which had come in dreams. As the time came near the men prepared the Bear Dance corral and did other necessary work, while the women made the family’s clothes for the dance. The bands would come and set up camp. After a long winter the festivities began. The men and women would enter the corral wearing plumes that signified their worries. At the end of the dance on the fourth day, the plumes would be hung on a cedar tree at the east entrance of the corral and they would leave their troubles behind.

The form is almost identical to the pre-contact version of the dance except that menstrual lodges for pubescent are no longer constructed near the brush-enclosed dance grounds. The Ute Bear Dance was slightly altered in the 1870s and 1880s, only to be restored to a form close to the original by the 1890s.

“When the bear dance can be many things to many people. It can be a celebration of the arrival of spring, or it can be a healing ritual practiced only by a shaman, who was born into the role. Then again, it can be the equivalent of a modern-day Sadie Hawkins Day dance — call it ladies’ choice.”

“When I was a boy, you might hear thunder in February or March. It means there’s a change in the weather so you hear thunder rolling. It’s a noise that tells us the bear is rolling over in its den, and it’s getting close to spring.”

Because his maternal grandparents lived in this part of the Yampa Valley, Duncan calls himself Yampatika.

He said that as a boy, he did not know the spring ritual as the bear dance, but the Mo wakawi — literally, back and forth dance.
The members of the band form a large circle with an entrance on the east, symbolizing the circle of life, he said. The women are seated on the east half and the men on the west half of the circle.

“The women control that dance as far as selecting partners,” Duncan said.

A line of dancers forms in the middle of the circle, shuffling their feet forward and back until the sun comes up.

Traditionally, a shaman prays for the group and blesses each person with an eagle wing. When the dancers return to their homes, the male head of household in turn blesses each member of the family.

In the modern era, Duncan said, the blessing ritual of the bear dance has been left out of the ceremony and the dance has become more of a social event. Still, the dancers seek to tell a story with each step they take. (Clifford Duncan to Tom Ross 2011)

The origin of the Bear Dance is told this way. Two brothers were hunting in the mountains and stopped to rest. One of the brothers saw a bear clawing and singing as he danced around a tree. As one brother went on to hunt the other watched the bear, who taught him the dance and the song. The bear told him to teach this to his people as a sign of respect for the bear's spirit which gives strength. (Jorgensen 1986).

Clifford Duncan tells another version:
“The Bear Dance is called “mo waka wi” in Ute. Laterally “forward/back” dance. The lady imitates the bear. A woman was kidnapped by a bear and she had a child. The child ran away and got back to the people. The people want the mother back to the tribe. The brush arbor or circle has the bear (man in a bear skin) in the middle. The woman dances toward the bear. She likes it. It’s a seductive dance. These are old stories. The Bear, Circles, are all old. The Bear is not just an animal. It has spiritual powers. A person gains power from the bear. In the old days, the Grizzly was abundant in this land. It was a made person. It possessed objects for rituals. We make objects but must get permission from the bear to use them.” (Duncan 2005).

“Certain bears can climb a tree, but other can’t. A Black bear can climb a tree, but Grizzly won’t, because he doesn’t’ know how to climb. So you have to pick out which one you want. The Grizzly is more powerful in that way, and is given the tobacco. That’s why they were given tobacco in that pipe” (Duncan 2011).
Figure 16: The Bear Dance scene painted on buckskin is detailed showing the corral, people seated at a table playing moraches, (bear growlers), 12 pairs of men and women in facing dance lines with male “whippers” (Cat men) at either end, seated spectators on both sides of the corral entrance, fruit on a table beneath a leafless tree, a White man facing the spectators, and a girl clothed in a blanket peering into the corral at the right of the entrance. Collected about 1890-1900 by Thomas Mckee. Colorado Historical Society 1894.170.

“This skin painting at the Ute Indian Museum depicting the Bear Dance shows the line of dancers in the middle. At the top are the musicians seated around a resonator or hollow table, playing the marches, and a “tree” stands near them. On the other side near the entrance is another “tree with a forked top” (Clifford Duncan 2010).

“Goshutes have a story of two youths, hunters who went out into the woods and they heard the bears in an open space surrounded by pine trees. They watched from a hill. They heard the songs the bears were singing; rum rum rum. They listened to the song, and they caught it. Then they picked up another song the bears were singing. They took the songs back to the village and sang the songs and then created a spring celebrating. Then one year during the time of that dance, the bear came back to the village prowling around looking for that song. A woman is singing it and she gave it back to the bear.” (Clifford Duncan 2010).
“The dance is held in a large circular brush corral of cedar trees gathered every year by the men. The corral entrance faces the rising sun in the east. Two cedar trees are positioned on either side of the entrance just inside the circle. Men sit on the north side of the circle, and the women sit on the south side. The singers sit under a brush shelter at the west side of the corral with their long metal resonator and their notched sticks that make a noise like a bear growling or thunder rumbling” (Pettit 1990).

“If someone should fall in exhaustion, the dance chief would revive both of them by rubbing the musical rasp on their bodies. The dance terminated with a feast sponsored by the host band” (Pettit 1990, 92).

“The dance is in imitation of the bear as he steps forward and backward with each thrust at a standing tree. Altogether this creates a rhythm which quickens the flow of blood in the body and renews the zest for life” (Annabell W. Eagle, Southern Ute Drum in Pettit 1990, 93).

Clifford:
“Animals all have a special gift. Pachuk – is Otter, and he lives in the water, swims like a fish. comes out of the water, goes out on the land, plays on the land, and does many things. When Otter gets to the water, he rolls around, and is very playful. So many Indian medicine men really like that animal, and connect to Otter and say, “I want you to be my teacher.” You have to talk to these animals in such a way that they will become your teacher. You say, “Teach me how to talk to people, or teach me how to doctor this sickness, or teach me how to identify plants. Teach me about signs I should watch for Animal teacher.” You select the animal you like, maybe magpie. Then say; “Magpie, I have come to you, I want you to teach me how to read rock art.” Over time they will come and say ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or else you are not ready. Most of the time you are not ready.

“Mountain sheep in rock art are different. You (Carol) as a person, have studied many drawings of sheep, and learned they are not all the same. They are different in many ways. They are telling a story to you, and eventually you will pick up the idea that they are not really what you think they are. They are people. People are animals. Animals are people. They tell you what the people are doing.”

“Rock art when it deals with animals are really talking about something that is not really dead. Rock art is not a place of dead drawings. They are very much alive. The animals depicted make it alive. When I look at bird or certain animal, I will talk to that animal like an Elk and say “well, I am not supposed to do this, but I can talk to you, so you can listen to me for awhile.” Then I go on and talking to it. It is actually communicating with me. A lot of people say praying, but it is not. You are actually throwing it out to the rock. That’s what the difference is. We’ve picked up this idea of praying and its sacred, but we only use praying at certain times. In this case it is actually talking and communicating.”
“When we walk to these rock art sites, a song always comes into my mind and I start humming that sound,” explains Duncan in a soft voice. “I am throwing that up into that area. It kind of clears the way for me. So, it’s like a prayer.” Duncan has the patience of one used to explaining Indian ways to people with lots of questions. (HCN, Josh Daniels 2010).

**Spiritual Discussion**

“When you start thinking about that you center your thought on what is really your existence. Is it a spirit that brought you here or is it inside the body? You have two that are parallel. Then you start thinking about it in that manner. The spiritual part of the human is actually coming from the past into this world and into the beyond, so it is an everlasting spirit. While here on this earth it takes on a body. The importance is that on the spiritual side you will find that all things on this earth do have spirits. They are exactly the same as all living things in this world. They all have a spirit and that’s why when a Native American is procuring plants for medicinal uses, and if it is a plant that’s going to be used for healing, it has to contain a spirit also. So they relate to that plant not only as a plant but as a spirit. It is the spirit of that plant that’s going to do the healing. It’s the spirits that are going to be part of whatever we do in life. Those were the teachings of my great-grandfathers. You have to actually take it step by step because it all cannot be acquired overnight. It has to be taught from the very first day of their life on this earth and then it goes step by step. There is no workshop in this world that will teach you in a matter of a weekend or a few weeks. All the things that you must acquire will take a life time of teaching.”

![Figure 17 Clifford talking to Polly Schaafsma. A little lizard jumped up on his shoulder (twice). Clifford calls lizards his spirit helper.](image-url)
“So the respect for humans then is on the spiritual level, not as a person. You don’t just look at a person as being a person, you have to look within that person and know how they feel. My father used to say that the color of the skin does not really make a difference because the color of that spirit comes first and you will have to learn how to recognize what is inside the person. But we’re in a world that the first thing that we do in the morning is look at ourselves in the mirror. In the mirror you are really looking at the surface of your face, your body, not your spirit. Its the spirit that is behind that face or inside that body so you have to learn how to pull that out and look at that first, when you look at that mirror.”

“ That’s the way I was taught. Its the same way with sacred space. When we are going to perform a certain type of ritual or ceremony, we create a sacred space. We do that by bringing all spiritual things into one world, and we say, this is a spiritual space and this is what we are going to use this for. Upon completing that ceremony, what we came together to do, we then have to close that space up. Yet it’s the same world. It is how we look at things that are invisible, and learn how to see with that invisible eye, rather than this eye. These are the teachings of my elders and my ancestors, who passed it on to the next generation. There are very few of us now who are actually part of that world so this is my explanation as to how we should respect people. This is what we have to be part of, and coming to the conclusion that I am part of the universe, I therefore belong to the universe and everything that is here I am part of. I am not separate. This is something that we all have to strive for.”

**Song is a Spirit**

The Song is a spirit. It moves like thinking, like a thought. From this to this, it jumps around. So one day you’re are sitting there and it jumps into you. And the song says “Sing me”. So you sing it. Two minutes after you get through with that, its gone, you don’t remember, because it’s a spirit, its gone away. So that’s why I catch that and put it in a tape recorder. And it doesn’t get away from me, and I keep going back to that, and I’ve got it. And I say, “Ok I’ve got you, you are a spirit, and I want you to teach me how to be like you.”. So that song becomes part of me and I sing it. That’s how that goes.

Same way with books, you read books but you don’t catch it. Then when you are sleeping and you wake up in the night and you say, that book said this. Then you go back to that

Figure 18. Clifford playing the flute
book and say, “let me see that,” and you go back to that page and it becomes clear then what that book is saying. It works that way. Its that spirit of those words jumping into you. You never forget that after that. That’s how that works.

**Sacred Landscape**

The songs I sing are an opener. They open things. Songs derive from landscape. Songs derive from sounds of nature. If a certain place feels a certain way, there is a song for that. It comes into your mind and you start singing. It is a means of exploring. We get to this site and you tell me the site is on top of that hill. A song comes into my mind I start singing that. I start humming that sound. What I am doing is throwing that up into that area - kind of like clears the way for me. So, its like a prayer. Each place has its own song. Especially Indian songs we don’t have words. We call them chants. People say it doesn’t make sense. *Heeyaayaaa*. It is not even a word. But it has to be repeated the same way every time. A song can be the sound of a wind. You go up into the mountains and sit in area with lots of pine trees and the wind blows through there. It is singing and you pick up on it. And when you sing it, it brings back the feeling of that place. That is why we sing songs in each place. It is not really planned. It just appears. I like it. I like songs. I think that is why I do that… In ceremonies we say we don’t own a song, *the song owns you*. Don’t say you own that song – that is the wrong way of thinking. I don’t own the land, *the land owns me*. That is the way of looking at life prior to the Europeans. How could you own something that owns you? Kind of like “this is my god” rather than god saying “this is my child”.

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