

## Navajo Chants

Navajos possess a very complex system of ceremonials. Father Berard Haile, in his studies of these ceremonials, distinguished between rites (in which a rattle is not used) and chants (in which a rattle is used as an accompaniment to the singing). It seems that this is not an absolute criterion on which to make this separation, but the distinction between those he placed in each category is quite clear to the Diné. Based on this classification system, there are two major rites: the Blessingway



[Hózhóǵí] and the Enemyway ['Anaa'ǵí], which have a different focus than the chants. The Blessingway [Hózhóǵí] is used frequently by the Navajo [Diné], often for no reason other than that they have not had one recently. It is, as the name implies, a blessing ceremony and is used to ensure good luck and prosperity. The Enemyway ['Anaa'ǵí] is used to exorcise the ghosts of aliens, violence and ugliness and is derived from old ceremonials used to protect warriors from the ghosts of those they had killed.

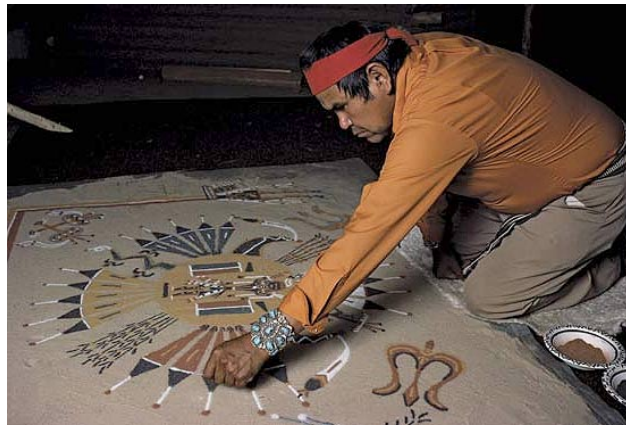


The chantways focus on curing and can be performed according to one of three rituals: Holyway, Evilway [Hóch'ǵí] or Lifeway ['linááǵí]. The Holyway rituals act to restore health to the "one sung over" by attracting good. The Evilway [Hóch'ǵí] chants exorcise evil and the Lifeway ['linááǵí] chants are used to treat injuries caused by accidents.

Sandpainting ['iikááh] ceremonies are a part of all Holyway ceremonies and

most Evilway [Hóch'ǵí] ceremonies. They are not used in the Lifeway ['linááǵí] ceremonies. However, it must be noted that many of the songs used in the chantways occur in the Blessingway [Hózhóǵí] ceremony and, in fact, originated there. The Blessingway [Hózhóǵí] is the backbone of the songs in the entire Navajo ceremonial structure. Every chantway ends with the chanter setting down his rattle and singing at least one song from the Blessingway to "justify the chant, insure its effectiveness, correct inadvertant omission of essential song and prayer words, correct errors in sandpaintings ['iikááh] and in cutting and coloring prayer sticks or "just for safety's sake!" Some chants use many songs from the Blessingway [Hózhóǵí] while others only close with the twelve word Blessingway song.

In Navajo religion the term Hozho refers to a positive or ideal environment. The phrase "long life, in accordance with happiness and harmony" occurs in most ritual songs and prayers and even more clearly exemplifies the Navajo ideal. "The goal of Navajo life in this world is to live to maturity in the condition described as hozho, and to die of old age, the end result of which incorporates one into the universal beauty, harmony, and happiness" (ibid., p. 573).



Illness is thought to be a state of "ugly conditions" that results from the patient's contact with something "dangerous. Four factors can produce sickness: (1) natural phenomena such as lightning, wind, and thunder; (2) some kinds of animals, including bears, deer, coyotes, porcupines, snakes, eagles, and fish; (3) coming into contact with ceremonial paraphernalia at

inappropriate times; and (4) ghosts of Navajos, aliens, or witches. Illness may result from a direct attack, in which case the "weapon" or "arrow" of the animal. Alternatively, lightning is thought to lodge in the person's interior, or the "in-standing one" or the wind of a dangerous animal, a natural phenomenon, a witch, or a ghost may enter the body and become temporarily or permanently the "wind within one" of the person again causing illness. The process of curing during a Navajo "sing" thus entails removing the "ugly things" (anger, weapons, or even the "in-standing one" that has entered the patient's body) if the person is to regain the state of hozho.







Anthropologists have identified twenty-four chant complexes with only about eight well known and frequently performed in recent times. There has been little agreement among either Navajo consultants or anthropologists as to how these chants might be ordered into a system. The Navajo Blessingway is, however, one of the central ceremonies. Its myth recounts the events of the Navajo creation

after the Emergence, and the activities of Changing Woman play a central role. The Blessingway ceremony, two nights in length, is used to enhance and preserve a state of hozho or blessing. The Kinaalda, or girl's puberty rite, is another ceremonial that uses Blessingway songs and re-enacts Changing Woman's first menstruation.

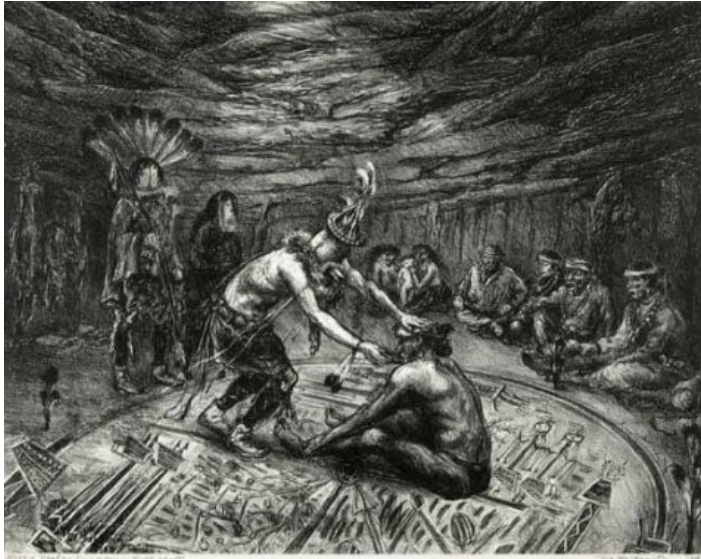
The Enemyway ceremony, in contrast, is designed to counteract contact with non-Navajos and to exorcise their ghosts. It may be related to earlier war ceremonials and is now classed with another ceremony labeled as Evilway. An Enemyway ceremony lasts three nights and much of its symbolism revolves around war and the exorcism of "ugly things".



Other chants (Shootingway, Beautyway, Mountainway, Nightway, and Navajo Windway, to name a few) are dominated by one of three ways of performing the chant: Lifeway, Evilway, and Holyway. The Lifeway chant is used to treat injuries resulting from accidents; in it, the person who is undergoing treatment is painted red, the color of flesh and blood, which symbolizes a return to life and health. Evilway ritual is characterized by techniques for exorcising native ghosts and for chasing away "ugly things." Most chants are performed according to Holyway ritual, which is directed toward the Holy People and is concerned with the energizing of good and the restoration of the patient.



Navajo Holyway chants are two, five, or nine nights in length (a "night" being counted from one sunset to the next). They consist of component ceremonies strung together in a specified order. Many chants include a bath, a sandpainting ritual, a sweat and emetic ceremony, and an all-night sing on the last night. Each component ceremony is composed of ritual chants that are directed against the



etiological factor (for example, bears, snakes, or lightning) causing the illness that the ceremony is designed to cure.

The Navajo model of the cosmos as laid out in the creation myth is expressed in the setting of the ceremony itself. The chant takes place in a Navajo hogan, which is circular like the horizon. Movement during a ritual is always clockwise or "in the direction of the sun." Men sit

on the south side of the hogan; women sit on the north side. The singer sits on the southwest side and the patient, when resting, sits on the northwest side. The east (where the door is located) is associated with dyin; prayer sticks and other offerings are deposited toward the east. The north is associated with death and evil and objects that have been pressed against the patient in order to remove them are deposited toward the north. Each chant uses color and directional symbolism as a condensed code for ordering and interpreting the myriad of ritual actions that are performed during the chant.

During the sing, the singer uses a number of ritual objects -including (1) the fetishes that are a permanent part of his pouch, (2) the objects constructed during the chant (e.g., prayer sticks and sand paintings) partly from the singer's supplies and partly from materials (such as ground stone, yucca root, and corn meal) obtained by the patient's relatives according to the singer's specifications, and (3) medicines prepared during the chant from the singer's supply of pollen and plant materials. During the chant, ritual objects are combined with several kinds of ritual actions: presentations to the Holy People, actions that identify the patient with the supernatural, and actions of removal that rid the patient's body of "ugly conditions." Identification with the Holy People takes place through actions of "applying to" or "taking in"- for example, pressing articles from the singer's pouch against the patient's body to make him or her dyin. Other important ritual actions include feeding the patient "sacred food" or herbal medicine, pressing the sand from the supernaturals depicted in a sand painting on parts of the body, and inhaling the dawn's breath at the very end of the sing. There are also several actions that remove "ugly things": for example, the "unraveling ceremony" (where feathers or herbs are bound in bundles with strips of yucca, pressed against the patient, and then yanked off.)

