

GHOST DANCE SONGS

The songs that various Native American peoples composed to accompany the dances of the Ghost Dance religion resembled the songs that had traditionally accompanied "round dances," communal dances in which, as the following drawings from the Comanche and Sioux indicate, the dancers held hands and moved in a loose circle. Ghost Dance songs would originate when a dancer fell into a trancelike state and upon regaining consciousness expressed in a song what he or she had seen in the spirit world. As each dance would almost surely give rise to new songs, each tribe's repertoire was constantly changing—although some particularly appealing songs were repeated again and again, and in some cases made their way to other Indian nations.

Ghost Dance songs embodied what each people took to be the teachings of the Indian Messiah, Wovoka, but the songs also made mention of aspects of the daily lives and traditional customs and ceremonies of the various native tribes. Thus references to important berries; to gambling wheels and gambling sticks involved in various games; to the sacred pipe, the crow, or the eagle; and to specific activities of the men or the women all appear in the Ghost Dance songs.

James Mooney (1861–1921) of the Bureau of American Ethnology studied the Ghost Dance religion and, in 1896, published a massive work titled *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. Mooney not only interviewed Wovoka but conducted extensive interviews with people from many Indian tribes who had participated in the Ghost Dance. An accomplished ethnographic observer familiar with Sioux languages (he had published *Siouan Tribes of the East* in 1894), Mooney is a careful observer and his commentary is richly descriptive.

Printed here are ghost songs from the Arapaho and Sioux. We have provided examples of musical notation as a reminder that these were songs sung as a circle of dancers moved slowly hand in hand. All the selections printed here are from James Mooney's *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, edited and abridged by Anthony F. C. Wallace (1965).

Songs of the Arapaho¹

[Father, have pity on me]²

Moderato.

A . ni' - qu ne' - cha - wu' - na - ni', a . ni' - qu ne' - cha - wu' - na - ni';
 a - wa' - wa bi' - qā - na' - ka - ye' - na, a - wa' - wa bi' - qā - na' - ka - ye' - na;
 i - ya - hu'h ni' - bi - thi' - ti, i - ya - hu'h ni' - bi - thi' - ti.

1. The Arapaho are an Algonquian-speaking people whose northern branch occupied the present state of Wyoming and whose southern branch lived in present-day Arkansas. The Arapaho share many of the traits of the Plains Indians and were particularly close to the Cheyenne. Unlike the Cheyenne, however, the Arapaho maintained generally

friendly relations with the whites.

2. This is the most pathetic of the Ghost-dance songs. It is sung to a plaintive tune, sometimes with tears rolling down the cheeks of the dancers as the words would bring up thoughts of their present miserable and dependent condition [Mooney's note].

TRANSLATION

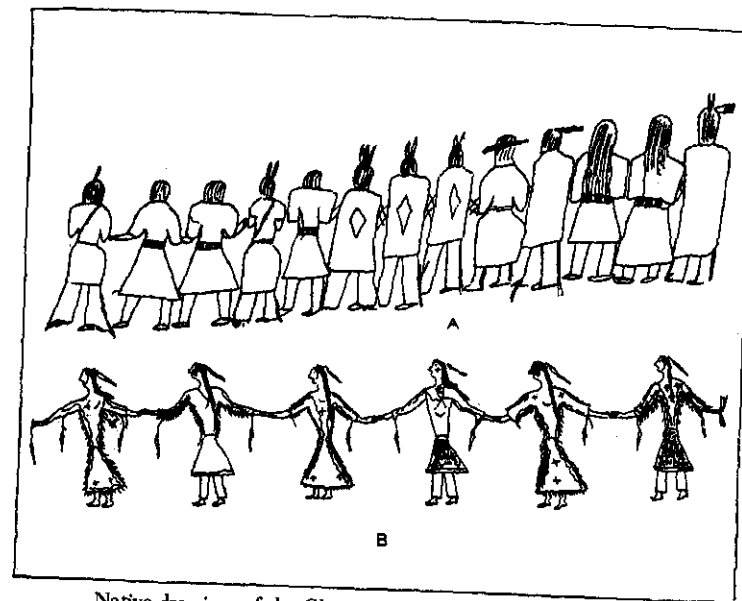
Father, have pity on me,
 Father, have pity on me;
 I am crying for thirst,
 I am crying for thirst;
 All is gone—I have nothing to eat,
 All is gone—I have nothing to eat.

[When I met him approaching]³

He! Nā-ne'th bi'-shi - qa' - wā. He! Nā-ne'th bi'-shi - qa' - wā. Nā' - ni - sa' - na
 nā' - ni - sa' - na, Nā' - i - na' - ha't - dā' - bū' - naq, Nū' - i - na' - ha't - dā' - bū' - naq.

TRANSLATION

He! When I met him approaching—
 He! When I met him approaching—
 My children, my children—
 I then saw the multitude plainly,
 I then saw the multitude plainly.



Native drawings of the Ghost Dance. A, Comanche; B, Sioux.

3. This song was brought from the north to the southern Arapaho by Sitting Bull. It refers to the trance vision of a dancer, who saw the Messiah

advancing at the head of all the spirit army. It is an old favorite, and is sung with vigor and animation [Mooney's note].

Songs of the Sioux

[The father says so]¹

A'te he'ye e'yayo!
 A'te he'ye e'yayo!
 A'te he'ye lo,
 A'te he'ye lo.
 Nitu'ñikañshi'la wa'ñiyegala'ke—kta' e'yayo'! 5
 Nitu'ñikañshi'la wa'ñiyegala'ke—kta' e'yayo'!
 A'te he'ye lo,
 A'te he'ye lo.
 Ni'takuye wañye'gāla'ke—kta e'yayo'! 10
 Ni'takuye wañye'gāla'ke—kta e'yayo'!
 A'te he'ye lo,
 A'te he'ye lo.

TRANSLATION

The father says so—E'yayo!
 The father says so—E'yayo!
 The father says so,
 The father says so.
 You shall see your grandfather—E'yayo'! 5
 You shall see your grandfather—E'yayo'!
 The father says so,
 The father says so.
 You shall see your kindred—E'yayo'!
 You shall see your kindred—E'yayo'! 10
 The father says so,
 The father says so.

[Give me my knife]²

Mila kiñ hiyu'michi'chiyana,
 Mila kiñ hiyu'michi'chiyana.
 Wa'waka'bla-kte—Ye'ye'!
 Wa'waka'bla-kte—Ye'ye'!
 Oñchi he'ye lo—Yo'yo'! 5
 Oñchi he'ye lo—Yo'yo'!
 Puye chiñyi wa'sna wakaghiñyiñ-kte,
 Puye chiñyi wa'sna wakaghiñyiñ-kte,
 Oñchi heye lo—Yo'yo!
 Oñchi heye lo—Yo'yo! 10

1. This is the opening song of the dance. While singing it, all the dancers stand motionless with hands stretched out toward the west, the country of the messiah and the quarter whence the new spirit world is to come. When it is ended, all cry together, after which they join hands and begin to circle around to the left. "Grandfather," as well as "father," is a reverential term applied to the messiah [Mooney's note].

2. This song brings up a vivid picture of the old Indian life. In her trance vision the old grandmother whose experience it relates came upon her friends in the spirit world just as all the women of the camp were engaged in cutting up the meat for drying after a successful buffalo hunt. In her joy she calls for her knife to assist in the work, and says that as soon as the meat is dry she will make some pemmican [Mooney's note].

TRANSLATION

Give me my knife,
 Give me my knife,
 I shall hang up the meat to dry—Ye'ye'!
 I shall hang up the meat to dry—Ye'ye'!
 Says grandmother—Yo'yo'! 5
 Says grandmother—Yo'yo'!
 When it is dry I shall make pemmican,³
 When it is dry I shall make pemmican,
 Says grandmother—Yo'yo'!
 Says grandmother—Yo'yo'! 10

[The whole world is coming]⁴

Maka' sito'maniyañ ukiye,
 Oya'te uki'ye, oya'te uki'ye,
 Wa'ñbali oya'te wañ hoshi'hi-ye lo,
 Ate heye lo, ate heye lo,
 Maka o'wañcha'ya uki'ye. 5
 Pte kiñ ukiye, pte kiñ ukiye,
 Kañghi oya'te wañ hoshi'hi-ye, lo,
 A'te he'ye lo, a'te he'ye lo.

TRANSLATION

The whole world is coming,
 A nation is coming, a nation is coming,
 The Eagle has brought the message to the tribe.
 The father says so, the father says so.
 Over the whole earth they are coming. 5
 The buffalo are coming, the buffalo are coming,
 The Crow has brought the message to the tribe,
 The father says so, the father says so.

3. Dried beef, which is toasted and then pounded into a hash; it may be eaten with sugar, fruit, or mesquite pods.

4. This fine song summarizes the whole hope of the Ghost dance—the return of the buffalo and the

departed dead, the message being brought to the people by the sacred birds, the eagle and the crow. The eagle known as *wañ'bali* is the war eagle, from which feathers are procured as war bonnets [Mooney's note].

WOVOKA

c. 1856–1932

Quoitze Ow, known most commonly by his boyhood name Wovoka (the Wood Cutter) or his adoptive name Jack Wilson, was a Numu (Paiute) Indian, born in 1856 or 1857 at Walker Lake in present-day Nevada. Although he had earlier experienced trancelike states and visions, Wovoka's Great Revelation came to him on New Year's day of 1889 when he fell into a coma, perhaps induced by scarlet fever.