

Emerging  
from  
the  
Chrysalis

Studies in Rituals  
of Women's  
Initiation

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GN 483.2 .L56

Harvard University Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
and  
London, England  
1981

## Emerging from the Chrysalis

s identified with the sun by virtue of its spherical shape and the me placed on top of it. Were this not sufficient, the identification suggested to the initiate with a leading question, and she then rmed it for all the audience by her response.

I was with this homology in mind, then, that the girl and her attendant left the pandal for a tree outside. The tree, of course, could be just any tree but had to be a coconut tree, and it was here that equation of coconut and sun was pursued to greatest advantage. If the coconuts hanging from the tree's branches were also seen as sun, then the tree itself could only be the cosmic tree—a common age in India and in the general history of religions—which stands the center of the earth, supports the heavens, connects all the rims of the universe, and provides food for all living creatures.<sup>36</sup> On more pedestrian level, one should recall that the traditional occupation of the Tiyyar caste is toddy-tapping, that is, the procurement ap from a related species of palm tree, which was then sold to lers for use in the preparation of liquors and candy.<sup>37</sup> In a very sense, then, Tiyyar livelihood and well-being depended on the n tree in its terrestrial and its cosmic sense. The initiate stood at very foot of this all-important tree and poured water on its roots, ng it life and strength, thus helping to secure the welfare of her ple and support the entire cosmos, a task entrusted only to the t prestigious figures by other cultures—the king in Mesopotamia, the Norrs or Fates in ancient Scandinavia.<sup>38</sup>

Among the Tiyyar, however, this awesome responsibility was delated to each girl as she came of age. She was able to assume this responsibility by virtue of her initiation, being no longer a girl, but a an. Having been incomplete and underage, she was made whole, ect, and pure. She was made mature in the course of the ritual, became ready to take on responsibility for nothing less than the ntenance of the entire universe, something she began by pouring or on the roots of a coconut tree.

Tiyyar woman in north Kerala had many responsibilities. She expected to bear children who would continue the matrilineal and to raise them until they were old enough to return to their stral home. She was expected to feed her family, and all cooking done by women only. Also, unlike the Nayar woman, she was expected to do a great deal of agricultural work, and most of the hanging was in her hands.<sup>39</sup> In all these ways she supported life and ined the creation, and the tali tied round her neck was the sign she was prepared for these responsibilities.

## Chapter

# 3

## Kinaaldá: Becoming the Goddess

Among the Navajo a young girl's first menstruation is cause for general rejoicing, because it indicates that she is ready to bring forth new life.<sup>1</sup> As Gladys Reichard put it, menarche "is regarded as the fulfillment of a promise, the attainment of reproductive power."<sup>2</sup> Physiological maturity alone, however, is not sufficient for the fulfillment of this promise. The girl must also be ritually transformed, made over, before she takes her place as a woman. Puberty is a precondition for the performance of the initiation rite called *Kinaaldá* ("first menstruation," or perhaps "house sitting," with reference to the initiate's stay within her family hogan),<sup>3</sup> but it is this rite—performed for each girl at her first two periods—that is believed to bestow the power of bearing children. Frank Mitchell, one of the most knowledgeable Navajo informants, observed that "the ceremony was started so women would be able to have children and the human race would be able to multiply,"<sup>4</sup> or, as a more detached observer rather blandly put it, "Its obvious intent is to prepare the girl for future motherhood."<sup>5</sup>

The Navajo religious system is extremely rich in ceremonial, and there have been numerous attempts to classify its various divisions. The Navajo themselves differentiate two major "song ceremonial complexes" from the rest of their various chants, and set these in marked opposition to each other. The first is known as "Enemyway," and it is used in rituals of exorcism, warfare, and healing, among others, being designed primarily for the overcoming of adversity in one form or another. The second group, known as "Blessingway," is used in rites whose emphasis is on the creation or preservation of a state of harmony, peace, and well-being: those for the birth of a child, the erection of a hogan, a wedding, and so forth.<sup>6</sup>

Each of these song cycles recounts an elaborate mythology believed to be particularly relevant to the rituals governed by that cycle. Enemyway tells of the twin culture heroes and how they vanquished all manner of threatening monsters, while Blessingway deals with the birth of a goddess, Changing Woman (also known as White Shell Woman or Turquoise Woman in certain contexts),<sup>7</sup> detailing how she was born, grew to maturity, and became the mother of the twins whose exploits are related in Enemyway. Blessingway thus seems to have a certain logical priority over Enemyway, and the Navajo regard the former as the most important of their chants, on which Enemyway and all others ultimately depend. In the words of Long Mus-tache, "It is the spinal column of songs."<sup>8</sup>

Of all the rites based upon the Blessingway cycle, none is more important than the Kinaaldá, regarded by some as the most important of all Navajo ceremonies.<sup>9</sup> As a part of the Blessingway complex, Kinaaldá is directed toward the obtaining of good fortune, happiness, and perfection; all mention of anything related to illness, conflict, or unpleasantness is strictly forbidden.<sup>10</sup> In the course of the ritual, which lasts four nights and five days, only Blessing Songs are sung, "which are the holiest,"<sup>11</sup> and all the ritual events are patterned after those of the first and second Kinaaldá, which, according to Blessingway, were performed for Changing Woman.

Most of the ceremony takes place inside the initiate's family hogan. On one level, this hogan is simply the regular family dwelling, and as such familiar and comfortable for the kinaaldá girl. But in the course of the ritual it takes on new significance as a result of the songs that are chanted. It is extremely difficult for us to comprehend the importance of these, given the gulf that separates our world-view from that of the Navajo, and a full treatment of the importance of song in Navajo ideology could fill volumes.<sup>12</sup> Briefly, however, the Navajo analysis might be summarized as follows: Knowledge is regarded as the fundamental support of the universe, and as such it contains inescapable creative power. As a rule, this knowledge finds its expression in thought, which in turn is expressed in speech, the highest form of which is song. To put it in the terms the Navajo use, speech is the "outer form" of thought, and thought the "inner form" of speech, while thought and knowledge also stand in the relation of outer form : inner form to one another. It thus follows that the speech of one who has full knowledge and has perfected his or her thought is rich in creative power and can effectively remake the world. The chief singer at any ritual is expected to be such a person, and his or her songs—which are largely traditional and drawn from mythic lore—re-create the world of the present in the image of the world and time of myths.

An "all-night sing" fills the final night of the Kinaaldá. The first songs sung are called Hogan Songs, which were composed for the Kinaaldá of Changing Woman, according to Blessingway. By means of these songs, the mythic characters First Man and First Woman sang the primordial hogan into existence.<sup>13</sup> Hogan Songs of the present repeat this event, and the singer's words simultaneously secure the continued existence of the family hogan, make it holy, and identify it with the first hogan, which was located at Emergence Rim, the place where the Holy People first issued from a series of underworlds onto the earth's surface. In one Hogan Song, Frank Mitchell chants:

*heye nene yana* (invocation)

I fully understand it, I fully understand it,  
I fully understand it, I fully understand it.

Now with my doorway, now with my door curtain,  
the house has come into being it is said.

I fully understand it, I fully understand it,  
I fully understand it, I fully understand it.<sup>14</sup>

Having started at the doorway, he goes on to construct the frame and crossbeams through song, fills the hogan with necessities (fire, food, dishes, broom, bedding, and so forth), and adds the prototypes of luxury (soft fabrics and jewels). Finally he concludes:

Now long life, now everlasting beauty,  
were brought into the interior, it is said.

I fully understand it, I fully understand it,  
I fully understand it.

I fully understand it, I fully understand it,  
I fully understand it, it is said.<sup>15</sup>

The hogan is thus transformed into the first hogan by the knowledge and speech of the singer. Its space becomes sacred space, and all who enter it once again stand at Emergence Rim. Through this experience, they themselves are also transformed and take on something other than their normal workaday existence—becoming nothing less than the gods and Holy People who dwell at Emergence Rim. This is most important for the initiate. Once inside the hogan, she has her hair combed so that it hangs down her back fixed with an archaic form of thong, and she is dressed in ceremonial finery—a special sash and jewelry of turquoise and white shell being particularly prominent—in order to make her over in the image of Changing Woman.<sup>16</sup> This dressing is accompanied by, or perhaps better yet, accomplished by songs, as for instance the following, in which the initiate is identified as the child of Changing Woman and is dressed and ornamented like Changing Woman herself:

Now the child of Changing Woman,  
 now she has dressed her up,  
 In the center of the Turquoise house,  
 now she has dressed her up . . .  
 Turquoise Girl, now she has dressed her up,  
 Her turquoise shoes, now she has dressed her up,  
 Her turquoise leggings now she has dressed her up,  
 Her turquoise clothes, now she has dressed her up . . .  
 She is decorated with jewels, now she has dressed her up,  
 She is decorated with soft fabrics, now she has dressed her up,  
 Behind her it is blessed; now she has dressed her up,  
 Before her, it is blessed; now she has dressed her up,  
 Now the girl of long life and everlasting beauty,  
 now she has dressed her up.<sup>17</sup>

Once she has been dressed, the girl is given a rigorous massage by several older women of known good character. This action is repeated at various times throughout the Kinaaldá and is referred to as "molding" the initiate, a practice based upon the belief that at the time of initiation a girl's body becomes soft again, as it was at birth, and she is thus susceptible to being literally re-formed by the efforts of those around her.<sup>18</sup> Keith reports one extremely old woman she knew who attributed a newly painful leg to a fall she suffered during her Kinaaldá sixty years earlier.<sup>19</sup>

After all this preparation, the kinaaldá girl is ready to undertake certain actions required of her. Standing at her ceremonial position in the western end of the hogan, facing east, she greets a series of visitors, each of whom she lifts upward, thus imparting some of the power of growth with which she abounds at this moment in her life.<sup>20</sup> This done, she leaves the hogan to run a race with other young people along a prescribed pattern: eastward from the hogan toward the sun, a sunwise turn (clockwise or deasil), and a return westward to the hogan, with the initiate always in the lead. The race is, in effect, her pursuit of the sun.

Later in the day the kinaaldá girl runs again, and for the next three days she runs three times each day. On these days she has little to do except run and grind corn for the enormous cake (*alkaan*) that will be consumed on the morning of the fifth day. Running and grinding are both strenuous, and the girl is expected to work hard at them. Part of the reason for this is the explicit desire to make her industrious in later life, and the inclusion of such requirements moved Harold Driver to classify the Kinaaldá as belonging to the "work complex" type of female initiation in North America.<sup>21</sup> But underlying this apparently mundane motive is an essentially religious perception: that

*birth of a new kinaaldá*

of initiation as a time of rebirth during which the individual is created anew. Just as she may be physically "molded," so also may her character be re-formed, and it is toward this end that her labor is directed.

All of these actions are directly patterned on those of Changing Woman at her Kinaaldá, as related in Blessingway. She, too, had her hair combed, was dressed, was "molded," ran, and ground corn. Wyman describes the initiation of the goddess as a "prototype ceremonial,"<sup>22</sup> and, according to Blessingway traditions, upon the completion of this first Kinaaldá the Holy People in attendance announced, "This ceremony which has been performed for Changing Woman will be [for] people in that shape, all of us [future Navajos] will be in this shape,"<sup>23</sup> which is to say that forever afterward the rite would be performed as it had been established in the beginning.

On the fourth day of the ceremony, work begins on a part of the ritual that is given only slight mention in the myths, yet which is of the greatest importance. Some of the men present dig a large circular pit, as much as six feet in diameter, to the east of the hogan, and a fire is kept going inside it all day. Toward evening the fire is allowed to die down, and the ashes are raked out. The kinaaldá girl places a cross made from four husks of corn at the center of the pit, with points oriented to the cardinal directions. From this cross, the women lay a network of husks over the bottom of the pit with all of the tips pointing sunwise, and an enormous quantity of sweet cornmeal batter is poured in until the pit is filled. This batter is made from the corn that the kinaaldá girl has been grinding and from corn ground by other women. Water, sugar, and raisins are added, and also a bit of corn pollen, "the emblem of peace, of happiness, of prosperity."<sup>24</sup> The initiate herself mixes this batter, but others carry it to the pit and pour it in, being careful to pour it in a sunwise circular direction. Once the batter is all in the pit, the initiate blesses it with ceremonial meal, scattered in a sunwise circle.<sup>25</sup> The batter is covered with husks, in the center of which the initiate places another corn-husk cross oriented to the cardinal points. Moist earth is shoveled in to cover the batter, a fire is built up on top and kept going all night long to bake the batter fully.

By the time the fire has been rebuilt it is the evening of the fourth day, when the Kinaaldá moves toward its climax. Beginning around eleven o'clock all those involved in the ceremony assemble at the family's hogan, where they spend the entire night singing and listening to the sacred Blessingway songs. Seating in the hogan is rigidly ordered (Figure 4). In the west are the kinaaldá girl and the chief singer, who leads the evening's action. In front of them is a blanket on which are

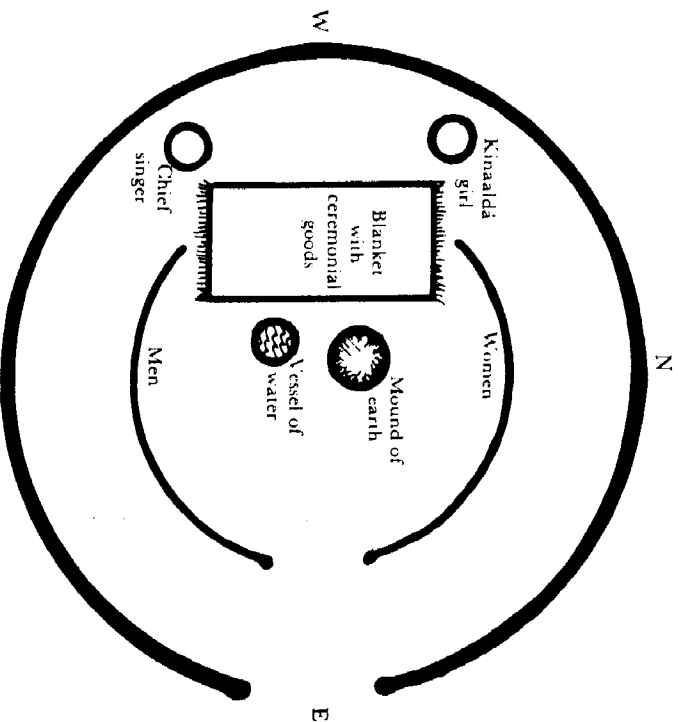


Figure 4. Plan of the hogan as arranged for the all-night sing. Adapted from Frisbie, *Kinaaldá*, p. 49.

items to be blessed. In the hogan's center are a mound of earth and a pail of water, representing those fundamental elements. To the north sit all the women, to the south the men. The east is left open, and the doorway to the hogan is located there; at dawn the first rays of the sun will enter through this door, just as Sun came to Changing Woman through her hogan's eastern door at the beginning of time.

Once all the participants have arrived the hogan is blessed with corn pollen, which is then passed in a sunwise circle so that all in attendance may bless themselves. Singing begins with the Hogan Songs, of which there are two sorts: Chief Hogan Songs, used in a girl's first *Kinaaldá*, and Talking God Hogan Songs, used in her second. Of the two, the Talking God Hogan Songs are perhaps the more interesting. Frisbie observes:

The Talking God Songs progress as follows: the house where the Blessing Way Ceremony is taking place first becomes a ceremonial hogan, a sacred place. This house is next identified with that of a particular deity . . . By Song No. 13, the house has become that of Changing Woman (and White Shell Woman), and this deity is

moving toward it. In Song No. 25, she reaches the house, which is now thoroughly beautified and sanctified through decorations, various kinds of prayer offerings, and the presence of many deities. At this point, the person referred to in the song text is no longer "she"; instead, it is "I"—an "I" which is now completely identified with the chief *Kinaaldá* deity.<sup>26</sup>

The text of the dramatic Talking God Hogan Song 25 reads in part as follows:

*haize naye yana* [invocation]

With my sacred power, I am traveling,

With my sacred power, I am traveling,

With my sacred power, I am traveling.

At the back of my house, white shell prayer offerings are placed;

they are beautifully decorated;

With my sacred power, I am traveling,

At the center of my house, turquoise prayer offerings are placed;

they are beautifully decorated;

With my sacred power, I am traveling . . .

All about my house is Talking God; He is beautifully clad;

With my sacred power, I am traveling;

All about my house is Hogan God; She is beautifully clad;

With my sacred power, I am traveling . . .

With beauty before me, I am traveling,

With my sacred power, I am traveling,

With beauty behind me, I am traveling,

With my sacred power, I am traveling,

With beauty below me, I am traveling,

With my sacred power, I am traveling,

With beauty above me, I am traveling,

With my sacred power, I am traveling,

Now with long life, now with everlasting beauty, I live.

I am traveling,

With my sacred power, I am traveling.<sup>27</sup>

Other songs follow: the "free singing," in which anyone may offer a song, and the Twelve Word Songs which wipe out any possible errors in the preceding steps of the rite. When these songs are concluded the sun is rising, and the chief singer introduces the Dawn Songs or Washing Songs. The latter name is due to the fact that while they are sung the hair and the jewelry of the *kinaaldá* girl are washed—that is, the features by which she has been physically identified with Changing Woman are cleansed and renewed. A final race is run, accompanied by Racing Songs which chart the initiate's progress on her course. Another Twelve Word Song brings the all-night sing to a close.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the singing, the chief goal is the identification of the initiate with Changing Woman, as most dramatically announced in the following Twelve Word Song:

I am here; I am White Shell Woman, I am here.  
 Now on the top of Gobernador Knob, I am here.  
 In the center of my white shell hogan I am here.  
 Right on the white shell spread I am here.  
 Right on the fabric spread I am here.  
 Right at the end of the rainbow I am here.<sup>29</sup>

When the singing has concluded, the participants bless themselves again with corn pollen and leave the hogan for the pit in which the cake has been baking all night. Once unearthed, the cake is cut into pieces, the first being taken from the eastern edge, with the knife always traveling in a sunwise direction. As the pieces are lifted out, the kinaaldá girl gives one to everyone, although she herself may not taste of it, despite the fact that throughout the ceremony she is forbidden to eat everything except foods made from corn.<sup>30</sup>

Most Navajo regard the ceremony as complete when the alkan has been served and eaten, but there are a few steps that follow.<sup>31</sup> The initiate's hair is combed again, to the accompaniment of Combing Songs, and her body is painted with white clay, an upward motion always being used. She then paints the cheeks of all those who desire it, again using an upward stroke to extend some of her superabundant powers of growth to others.<sup>32</sup> Painting Songs are sung, and afterward her body is given a last molding. All these actions were also a part of the Kinaaldá of Changing Woman, as related in Blessingway.

Some time later, when all have departed, either one small piece from the center of the cake or four pinches from the pieces adjacent to the center are buried in a hole dug at the center of the pit. With regard to this gesture Frank Mitchell observed, "The cake belongs to the earth; these pieces are buried as a sacrifice to the earth and as an offering . . . That is done in order to be thankful for the harvest and for raising corn on the earth."<sup>33</sup>

Virtually all the actions performed in the Kinaaldá actively repeat the events of Changing Woman's Kinaaldá. That ceremony was the first such rite ever performed, and thus established the pattern for all to follow.<sup>34</sup> Performance of the rite in the present, however, is more than just faithful imitation of a traditional model. Rather, the happenings of the first time are re-created by means of the ritual songs and actions: the family hogan becomes the first hogan, the guests at the all-night sing become the Holy People, and the kinaaldá girl becomes Changing Woman.

The importance of this identification has been noted by many authorities,<sup>35</sup> and Driver maintained that it is one of the central features of women's initiation among the Athabaskan tribes of the American Southwest, a group that includes the Navajo. Driver's interpretation, however, seems rather pale and pedestrian: "During the entire ceremony she [the initiate] impersonates a culture heroine in the hope that she will become as virtuous and successful."<sup>36</sup> No doubt virtue and success are desired and are one goal of the rite, but the initiate gains a good deal more than these mundane personal benefits by ritually becoming—not just "impersonating"—Changing Woman.

Changing Woman herself is an extremely complex figure. Probably the most important of all Navajo deities, she has also been called the most fascinating of them by Gladys Reichard: "No matter how much we know about her the total is a great question mark. She is the mystery of reproduction, of life springing from nothing, of the last hope of the world, a riddle perpetually solved and perennially springing up anew."<sup>37</sup> Her name, which might be translated more literally as "the woman who is transformed time and again," is given in recognition of a peculiarity of her life cycle: she grows old and becomes young again with the flow of the seasons.<sup>38</sup> One might thus interpret her as an allegory of the seasons, but she is more, being also related to the earth and vegetation.

Slim Curly said, "Thereby the earth, when vegetation appears in the spring, becomes as a young woman clothed in a new dress, whereas harvest in the fall lets her appear as a declining old woman. White Shell Woman is, in reality, the earth which changes in summer and becomes young again, then relaxes or dies off in winter." He called the earth, "Changing Woman Happiness" for summer and "Changing Woman Long Life" in winter.<sup>39</sup>

Here, vegetation is regarded as the dress of Changing Woman. Elsewhere, the connection is portrayed as even closer, the cycle of the crops being seen as "a function of Changing Woman's annual rejuvenation,"<sup>40</sup> or as a gift from the goddess to humanity: "She called the people of the clans her children and promised them corn of all colors and plant seed; so now when corn doesn't grow and ripen, women, too, will not give birth, for all seeds and corn originate with White Shell Woman."<sup>41</sup> This last text hints at the connection of human and vegetative fertility, both of which originate in and are controlled by Changing Woman. But a still stronger point could be made: all fertility is hers, for as First Woman said of Changing Woman, "Whatever is on the earth's surface, and the means of making life possible, have all been given into her charge."<sup>42</sup>

A summary description such as this, however, only begins to give an idea of Changing Woman's complexity. In order to better appreciate it, it is helpful to consider her mythology, pieces of which are related in both Enemyway and Blessingway. In Enemyway it is told that Changing Woman appeared at a crucial moment in world history, being born shortly after the Holy People emerged to the earth's surface from the last underworld below. At that time the Holy People were being exterminated by various monsters that had come into being "through the fault of the women."<sup>43</sup> It seems that certain women had conceived monsters while masturbating: a woman who masturbated with an elk's horn produced a horned monster, one who used a feather gave birth to a monstrous eagle, and so forth. These monsters grew rapidly and preyed mercilessly upon the Holy People, threatening them with extinction.<sup>44</sup> It was to rectify this situation that Changing Woman was born so that she might become the mother of the hero twins, who would ultimately exterminate the monsters. This is stated explicitly in Enemyway and certain versions of Blessingway, although properly no mention of the monsters should appear in the latter.<sup>45</sup> Some informants thus offer a more general motivation for Changing Woman's birth, such as Frank Mitchell's oblique statement that "some were not keeping things holy as it should be."<sup>46</sup>

Although this last statement may appear to be mere euphemism, something more subtle is at work: the observation and preservation of the separate ritual categories of Enemyway and Blessingway. Although more veiled than the other, Frank Mitchell's statement makes the same point in terms acceptable within Blessingway: Changing Woman was born to bring propriety, safety, and civilization into existence. Seen thus, she represents the triumph of cosmos over chaos, humanity over monsters, and productive, mature sexuality over the dangers of adolescent masturbation. Here, as in numerous other mythologies (for example, Hesiod's *Theogony*), birth by parthenogenesis is understood to be extremely dangerous, producing one-sided monsters who lack the balance of those creatures born out of the union of the sexes.

For her part, Changing Woman was conceived and born in miraculous fashion. River Junction Curly begins the story as follows:

Gobernador Knob [one of the sacred mountains located around Emergence Rim] was covered by dark clouds, they say. Its peak was enveloped with dark clouds all over. A black fog was also with this. It [the peak] could not be seen as it sits, they say. There were also rainbows floating around and some red sun halos appeared, they say. Sunbeams also extended, they say. This was discovered at

dawn, they say. It was merely like that and it was watched for four days, they say. This was being watched from these holy places for four days, they say. People wondered why this was like that. "There must be some explanation," they said when it was discussed.

This conjunction of cloud and mountaintop is clearly meant as a sexual union, complete with attendant fireworks. Most informants have interpreted it as the joining of heaven and earth, and some have pushed the analysis further, seeing cloud and mountain peak as the "outer forms," or external representations of earth and sky, the "inner forms" or underlying essence of earth and sky being the true parents of Changing Woman.<sup>48</sup> In any event, Changing Woman was born at the end of the four days and was found on top of the mountain by First Man, who went to investigate the strange happenings.

Earth and sky are presented as opposite entities in Navajo myth and iconography. Earth is female; sky, male; earth, below; heaven, above; earth faces eastward, having dawn for her headplume; sky faces west, with twilight for his.<sup>49</sup> Sandpaintings of the pair show Mother Earth containing sacred plants, particularly corn, in her body, while Father Sky's body is filled with the sun, moon, and stars. Yet for all their differences, they appear quite similar and are joined close together by a pollen path (Figure 5). Their mating, then, is a *hieros gamos*, a sacred marriage in which complementary opposites are united, and Changing Woman is the product of this union.

Taken to the home of First Man and First Woman, Changing Woman grew to maturity in a remarkably short time (as little as four days in some versions)<sup>50</sup> and the first Kinaaldá was held for her, with all the deities in attendance, at Emergence Rim—the center of the earth and also its vagina, from which the Holy People first issued forth. At the end of the ceremony the gods proclaimed that every future kinaaldá must be performed just as was that of Changing Woman. In one version of Blessingway, however, Changing Woman herself established her kinaaldá as the model for all to follow, telling the first Navajo, "After this, all the girls born to you will have periods at certain times when they become women. When the time comes, you must set a day and must fix the girl up to be kinaaldá; you must have these songs sung and do whatever else needs to be done at that time. After this period a girl is a woman and will start having children."<sup>51</sup>

By virtue of her kinaaldá Changing Woman became ready to have children, but her fertility was not limited to this alone.<sup>52</sup> At the outset of her initiation it was said that "this one shall now be made holy [so that] in the future, life can be regulated by her,"<sup>53</sup> and she was told that if all were done correctly "there will be birth. Vegetation, as well

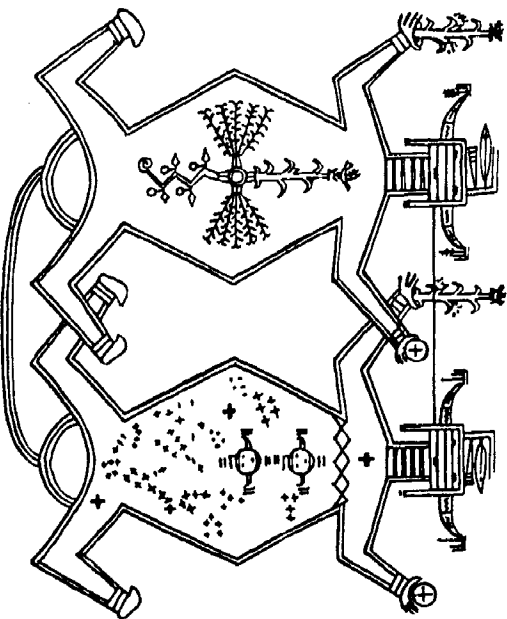


Figure 5. Sand painting of Mother Earth (left) and Father Sky (right). The two figures are virtually identical. Their fundamental unity is also stressed by the pollen path, symbol of prayer, that connects their mouths, and the lines that connect their genitals, signifying their sexual union. From Newcomb, Fisher, and Wheelwright, *A Study of Navajo Symbolism*, p. 19.

as all without exception who travel the surface of the earth, will give birth, that you will have gained."<sup>54</sup> All fertility thus depends upon that of Changing Woman, which was won through the Kinaaldá. As a replication of Changing Woman in the present, each kinaaldá girl bears the same responsibility and holds the same powers.

Changing Woman's initiation thus prepared her to support the birth of all things, and the drypaintings made in conjunction with Blessingway show her ritually attired with loose hair, ceremonial sash, and whithshell jewelry, flanked by high corn as an emblem of her universal fertility (Figure 6). On the most immediate level, however, she was made ready to become the mother of the hero twins who would rid the world of monsters. Their story of how she conceived them, however, is no less complex than that of her own conception.

Accounts vary somewhat, but all agree that the sun was the father of the firstborn of the twins, Monster Slayer. According to some a sunray entered the vagina of Changing Woman while she was working, and according to others Sun appeared to her as a handsome youth with whom she lay.<sup>55</sup> More detailed accounts state that the Sun spoke to her while she was running the third of her races, thus pro-

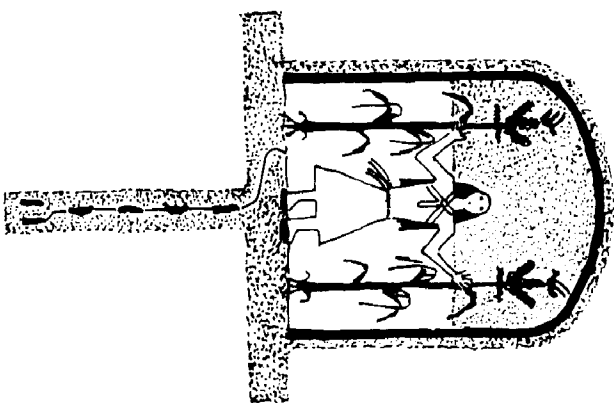


Figure 6. Sand painting of Changing Woman. The goddess, dressed in ceremonial garb—loose hair, belt, necklaces (one assumes the thong to be in her hair, but this would not be visible from a full front view)—stands under a blue and yellow sunray arc, flanked by tall corn. Such paintings are very rare, being made only for Blessingway ceremonies. Only four have ever been collected, and those were given to Maud Oakes with the greatest reluctance because "they are very holy." Usually two such paintings are made together in a cornfield, the first for a man and the second for a woman. Together they are expected to ensure good crops and rain. From Wyman, *Blessingway* (copyright 1970), p. 75. Adapted by permission of the University of Arizona Press.

viding a rationale for the initiate's running toward the sun three times each day.<sup>56</sup> Still others make Sun a youth who approached Changing Woman and told her to prepare a circle of boughs with an opening to the east and lie there with her head to the west, so that he might come to her—a detail that explains the seating arrangement at the all-night sing.<sup>57</sup>

Having lain with Sun—whom Reichard wrongly characterizes as "an idealized philanderer," due to his ability to appear to any woman at any time—Changing Woman became pregnant with Monster Slayer.<sup>58</sup> The paternity of the second twin, Born for Water, is somewhat ambiguous, however. One version of the myth tells that while



bathing after her tryst with Sun, Changing Woman allowed a moon-beam to shine on her vagina, but most others state that during her bath she allowed water to drip into her genitals and conceived as a result of this.<sup>59</sup> In any event, nine days later she gave birth to the twins. Blessingway has little to tell of their exploits, being concerned with peaceful things only, but Enemyway picks up here to tell how they rid the world of monsters. The story of Changing Woman and how she became mother of the twins, however, is crucial to both chant cycles, and she is the one character who figures prominently in both, being in this regard yet again a fusion of opposites.

This ideology of Changing Woman as a being in whom contraries are merged undergirds the stories of the twins' conception, for both variants tell how a union of opposites took place within her body. In one, the union is between the two heavenly luminaries, sun and moon. In the other (which seems to be older, in view of Born for Water's name) two opposing elements are joined—the celestial, fiery sun and the terrestrial, moist water. Both elements are necessary for life, and Changing Woman provides the matrix in which they can merge and be productive.

In this image of *coincidentia oppositorum* Changing Woman plays something of a passive role, being little more than a catalytic agent who makes possible the union of other elements.<sup>60</sup> But the myth is often viewed from a different perspective, in which the role of water or moon tends to be minimized.<sup>61</sup> When this is the case, Changing Woman's character is brought into bolder relief, and she herself is perceived as the opposite force brought into union with the sun. Together they form a second-generation union of opposites after Earth and Sky, much as Kronos and Rheia form a second-generation union of opposites after Uranos and Gaia in Greek mythology.

Changing Woman's chief concern is fertility of all kinds—the ebb and flow of birth, death, and rebirth—and in this respect she is similar to the sun, who is also much concerned with the bestowing of new life and with the rhythms of plants and seasons.<sup>62</sup> But if the two are to be grouped together in this regard, there is another way in which they must be seen as opposite or complementary forces. The sun may be understood as the embodiment of downward motion, whose beams originate on high and descend toward the earth bearing warmth, energy, and life. In contrast, Changing Woman is the embodiment of upward motion, growth from the earth up toward the sky. This power she imparts to vegetation and humanity alike, as seen in two moments from the Kinaaldá ritual: the initiate's lifting of others to make them grow, and the painting of her face with an upward stroke, which is said to aid the growth of plants.<sup>63</sup> The initiate is able to

communicate this force because within the context of the rite she is Changing Woman.

This identification of the initiate with the Changing Woman of myth is the most important general theme of the Kinaaldá. It is accomplished through songs, through the initiate's dress and coiffure (compare Figure 6 and Figure 7), and through the conscious repetition of the first Kinaaldá. As a result, all fertility comes to depend on



Figure 7. Kinaaldá girl running one of the ceremonial races. In this picture, the girl's ceremonial garb is evident: necklaces, jewelry, hair hanging loose, held only by a thong partially visible above her left shoulder. In all these particulars, she repeats the dress of Changing Woman. Based on a photograph in McCombe, Vogt, and Kluckhohn, *Navaho Means People*, p. 59.

the kinaaldá girl: her own, that of her people, of the crops, and "everything that exists on the surface of the earth." Civilization, too, depends on her, for her future children are implicitly identified with the hero twins.

All of this follows from consideration of the Blessingway myths, noting their close connections to the steps of the Kinaaldá. But there is one event in the ceremony that is given scant mention, if any, in Blessingway, but which is nevertheless of the utmost importance: the preparation of the sweet corn cake (alkaan).<sup>64</sup>

The symbolism of this cake is extremely elaborate. Given its shape, color, and relation to fire, it must be seen as a solar image, a conclusion reinforced by informants' statements that it is baked as an offering to the sun, out of respect for the sun, or—most significant of all—"so it will be like the sun."<sup>65</sup>

This solar cake is baked in a subterranean pit—that is, within the body of the earth (earth consistently being considered female and sun male in Navajo thought).<sup>66</sup> On one level, this is reminiscent of the way in which the cake is made through the cooperative labor of the sexes, the pit being dug by men and the batter prepared and poured by women. Beyond this, in view of the identification of the family hogan with the first hogan, it is perhaps not too daring to see the pit from which the cake is taken as identified with Emergence Kim, the womb of the earth.<sup>67</sup>

If the extraction of the cake thus recalls the emergence of the Holy People, it also suggests the growth of the plants, for the alkaan is made of corn, the most sacred of all plants, and representative of the whole realm of vegetation.<sup>68</sup> By itself, corn is suggestive of life; in the sweet corn cake, it represents a happy and blessed existence. One also must consider the corn-husk crosses, which provide a sacred orientation, pointing to the four quarters and themselves located at top and bottom along the central axis.

The cake is thus an extremely complex symbolic cluster. It contains sun and earth; male and female; the Holy People, first of all beings; corn, and by extension all vegetation; the cardinal points; zenith and nadir. These diverse elements are integrated in an image of perfect totality, and the festive distribution and consumption of the cake after the rigorous all-night sing serves to integrate all the participants into the social totality as well.<sup>69</sup>

There is, however, one participant who does not join in this totality, but stands apart from it. This is the kinaaldá girl, who is forbidden to taste the cake but who serves it to the others, almost as if it is her own product she is offering.<sup>70</sup> In a sense, this is the case, for through the Kinaaldá she has become Changing Woman, become the

earth, become the power of fertility in all things, and become upward growth. If the cake has been produced in the womb of the earth and emerges from that womb, it has been born from the initiate's womb as well. And if the cake is to be understood as an image of perfect totality, life, and well-being, these qualities now have their origin in her, just as they have always had their origin in Changing Woman.

When the Kinaaldá has been completed, the initiate is considered ready to marry and to have children.<sup>71</sup> Like her Tiyar counterpart, the Navajo woman occupies a place of great importance and respect in society. Descent is determined through the maternal line, and residence is regularly matrilineal.<sup>72</sup> Ownership of the land belongs to women, insofar as one can speak of "ownership" among the Navajo, and the planting of crops is women's work, although men may assist.<sup>73</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton argued that Navajo respect for women was one of the chief factors in the Navajo's resistance to Christianity: "The Bible speaks only of a male God and of a society where authority and responsibility centers chiefly in men. Navahos miss Changing Woman, perhaps the principal Navaho divinity, and the whole feeling for the position of women embodied alike in their own social organization and religious lore."<sup>74</sup>

The perception is an astute one, but a stronger point could have been made. Social and religious factors are not separate, but inextricably tied. Respect for Changing Woman and respect for women in general are one and the same, for each woman is Changing Woman, and becomes so through performance of the Kinaaldá rite.