The White Buffalo Calf Woman Story

Early one morning two men went hunting. They had walked a long distance from their camp, when they saw a woman coming toward them. Soon a woman dressed in a white buckskin dress stood before them. She was very beautiful. The one man thought she must be sacred. The other man had inappropriate thoughts about her. The woman told the man with the inappropriate thoughts to come to her.

As the man came near the woman a white cloud covered them completely. When the cloud cleared away the man’s bones lay at the woman’s feet. The woman said to the other man: “Return to your camp and report what you have seen. Tell the people that I am coming to bring them a message. Put up a tipi for me and make things ready for my visit.”

The next morning the woman arrived carrying a bundle. She entered the camp walking sun wise and went into the council lodge. The woman sat down in front of the Chief and then took a pipe from her bundle. She told the Chief: “You are to receive this sacred pipe for your people. Use it for good purposes. Smoke the pipe when you pray. Have the people make similar pipes to pray with.”

The woman stayed with the people for four days. During that time she taught them how to use the pipe and about Očeti Šakówiŋ* (O-cheh-tee Shaw-go-ween) customs. She reminded them that all of creation is related and all must be respectfully treated as relatives. She told the people if they follow the ways of the Očeti Šakówiŋ* then life on earth will continue.

On the fourth day the woman told the people: “I have done what I was sent to do. Now I will leave the sacred pipe with you and go. In the future I will come again.”

The people watched the woman leave. When she had gone a short distance she turned to look toward them and sat down. Soon after, the woman stood up and the people were amazed because she had transformed into a black buffalo calf. The woman walked further, laid down, and rolled over. When the woman stood up she had transformed into a red buffalo calf. Again the woman walked further, laid down, and rolled over. That time when the woman stood up she had transformed into a yellow buffalo calf. Once again the woman walked further, laid down, and rolled over. When she stood up the woman had transformed into a white buffalo calf and soon after she disappeared.

From that time on, the sacred pipe brought by the Ptehincala San Win has been kept by the Očeti Šakówiŋ* people. The white buffalo calf pipe is currently kept by Arvol Looking Horse of the Cheyenne River Reservation.

*Očeti Šakówiŋ is the traditional name for the Dakota/Nakota/Lakota nation. Dakota/Nakota/Lakota, which means “those who consider themselves kindred”, is used in reference to the people and the language dialect they speak.