



Why did the Lakota people pray to a **BUFFALO GOD**?

Many generations ago, long before Sitting Bull's grandfather was born, there were over 60 million buffalo on the American Great Plains. Imagine a vast ocean of horns and fur moving across the land. Since the great buffalo herd ate as much as one billion pounds of grass per day, it was always in search of fresh pastures. The tribes lived alongside them, following the herd wherever it roamed. To Lakota, buffalo were the source of spirit and life.

Lakota people had a deep respect and affection for nature, and would never kill a buffalo without first asking the Buffalo God to receive one as a gift. They would don the God's horned headdress, dance, pray and sing in order to make contact with the spirit world. Only after the Buffalo God had been worshipped would warriors ride out to hunt the herd.

The Lakota were thankful for the sacrifices buffalo made for them. In return, they made sure to use every part of the animal—from brains to bones—once it had been killed. In this way, the tribes honored the great Buffalo Spirit.

After the Battle of Little Bighorn, the U.S. Army began killing the herds. They reasoned that if buffalo became extinct, the Lakota would be forced to move onto the Reservation. By 1884, the great herd—once over 50 miles wide—was close to total extinction. But the buffalo did not die. Thanks to conservation efforts, today over 100,000 of them still survive, living in the wild.





RETURNS AGAIN was Sitting Bull's father. He had a special ability to make good medicine, and his people believed he was able to speak with the animals. When Returns Again was a young warrior, he encountered a very special buffalo. This majestic beast approached him and slowly began to grunt. Returns Again listened very closely, and heard these fateful words:

"Tatan'ka Iyota'ke"

..."Sitting Bull." Returns Again suddenly understood that he was in the presence of none other than the Buffalo God! He knew that this great spirit had given the name "Sitting Bull" as a gift. Someday, Returns Again would give this gift to his only son.

Returns Again was a master of the four Lakota virtues: bravery, generosity, fortitude, and wisdom. He was also a deft warrior, skillful with bow and arrow and able to ride his horse with ease. Alongside his Lakota brothers, Returns Again hunted buffalo and helped defend his camp from rival tribes.

In 1857, Returns Again was killed in a battle between the Lakota and Crow. Sitting Bull also fought in the battle, but arrived too late to save him. Though Sitting Bull would miss his father, he knew Returns Again had fought well, died with honor and would live on in the spirit world to watch over his family and their tribe.





HER HOLY DOOR was Sitting Bull's mother. She grew up in the Old Ways, following the buffalo on the Great Plains. When she was a girl, Her Holy Door was eager to learn how to become a good Lakota mother and wife.

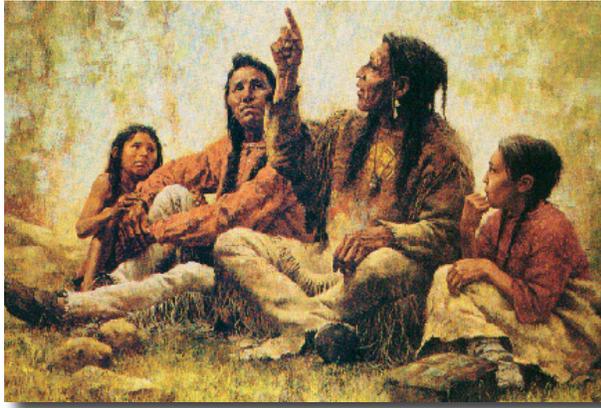
Women were essential to the survival of any Lakota community. Although the men were hunters—providing buffalo for food, shelter and tools—the women were responsible for most aspects of daily life. In a Lakota village, women raised the children who were well loved and cared for, not only by their own mothers but also by all of the women in the tribe.

Lakota women also made all clothing and shelter for the tribe, preparing and tanning the buffalo hides for use as blankets and teepee covers. The great buffalo herd was always on the move, and so were the Lakota. Every time the village moved, Her Holy Door and the other women packed the teepees and gathered the children for the voyage ahead.

Her Holy Door was married to a Lakota warrior and medicine man—Returns Again. When, in 1857, Returns Again died in battle, Her Holy door went to live with her only son, Sitting Bull.

As the Battle of Little Bighorn began, Her Holy Door hid in Sitting Bull's lodge with his wives and children. The battle raged outside, but thanks to her, all remained calm inside the lodge. Sitting Bull had foreseen a great victory over the Wasichu, and his people trusted his vision. Though Sitting Bull's vision was true, Her Holy Door would never see peace between her people and the Wasichu. She died in 1884 with the war far from over. But Her Holy Door's spirit—and the values she held dear—lives on through the generations of Lakota women she has inspired.





FOUR HORNS was Sitting Bull's uncle. He was known as a storyteller and keeper of Lakota lore. When Sitting Bull was a boy and still known as "Slow," his uncle shared these words of wisdom with him:

"A Lakota may tell a lie once, but if he does, who will ever believe him again?"

Four Horns lived in the Old Ways and learned his values from the generations of Lakota who had gone before him. He knew that only through his stories and his good example would these great ideals and customs survive.

Four Horns was also a brave warrior. One day, while fighting a battle alongside Sitting Bull, Four Horns was shot in the back. He lurched forward, but managed to hold onto his horse and did not fall to the ground. Although he was very badly injured, he did not cry out in pain. Sitting Bull helped his uncle to safety, and Four Horns survived to fight in the Battle of Little Bighorn years later.

After the Battle at Little Bighorn River, U.S. Cavalry chased the Lakota out of the Black Hills and north into Canada. Times were tough in the "Land of the Great Grandmother," but Four Horns became a leader of his people there. He got along well with the Canadian policemen, and understood the laws of their land.

Four Horns was also a talented artist. Here is a picture he drew of Sitting Bull attacking a Wasichu frontiersman.

Four Horns died in 1887 on an Indian reservation. He had seen many Winters, lived by the Lakota virtues, and led a good, full life.





GOOD-VOICED ELK was a respected Lakota warrior who led the war party where Sitting Bull—still a 14-year-old boy named Slow—first counted coup.

Having proven himself in battle long ago, Good-Voiced Elk had no trouble gathering a war party when, one day, he decided to steal ponies from a neighboring Crow tribe. Even at 14, young Slow longed to fight in battle and protect the tribe's sacred ground. So when Slow caught up to the war party, Good-Voiced Elk convinced the boy's father—Returns Again—that it was time, now, for the boy to raise his bow in battle. Slow charged out of the bushes ahead of the others, and facing a Crow warrior's arrow, bravely struck the enemy with his coup stick. Good-Voiced Elk's trust in Slow had been rewarded, and he looked on as the young warrior grew into a wise and skillful chief.



In June of 1876, Wasichu soldiers attacked the Lakota camp. Sitting Bull had foreseen this battle, so his warriors were well prepared. Good-Voiced Elk, now a tribal elder, did not join in combat that day. Too old now to make war, he instead advised and prepared the young warriors before they rode into battle. Empowered by his wise words, the Lakota were able to bravely defeat the Wasichu at Little Big Horn.

Although he may not have realized it at the time, history would remember Good-Voice Elk as more than just a warrior. Many years after the victory at Little Big Horn, he spoke with historians trying to piece together details of the battle. Good Voiced Elk's memories survive today, recorded in history books to help future generations understand the Lakota's struggle, brief success, and eventual defeat.

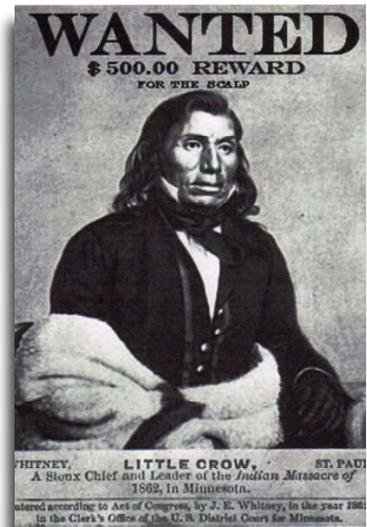


Descended from a long line of chiefs, **LITTLE CROW** became a leader of his people when his father died in 1834. Like the ancestors who came before him, Little Crow inspired courage among the warriors of his tribe.

Little Crow was a master of the four Lakota virtues: bravery, generosity, fortitude, and wisdom. He was also a deft warrior, skillful with bow and arrow and able to ride his horse with ease. Leading a band of Lakota through territory that would one day become Minnesota, Little Road did his best to ensure that his people remained united and safe.

As Wasichu began to settle on Lakota land, Little Crow believed he must remain on good terms with them in order to protect his people. He agreed to a treaty that gave much of the tribes' hills and grasslands to the White Man. But soon Little Crow saw that the Wasichu were not acting honorably—and vowed to take action against them.

From then on, Little Crow led attacks against the settlers. In response to these uprisings, the U.S. government offered a reward to any citizen who killed and scalped a Lakota. One day, Little Crow was picking berries with his son when Wasichu, looking to claim this money, discovered them. As Little Crow fell—murdered in cold blood—he took comfort, knowing that his son had escaped to safety.



In June of 1876, Wasichu soldiers attacked the Lakota camp. Sitting Bull had foreseen this battle—in a vision from the Ancestors—so his warriors were well prepared. Little Crow, looking on from the Spirit world, empowered his people as they prepared for battle. With the Ancestor's strength and wisdom in their hearts, the Lakota were able to bravely defeat the Wasichu at Little Big Horn.



DRINKS WATER was a great Lakota medicine man who lived and died long before Sitting Bull was born. His were the Old Ways, living with a deep connection to Great Spirit and the land. When he was a child, Drinks Water loved to listen to his Lakota elders speak. These chiefs and medicine people seemed to know so much. Some were even able to cure the sick!

The Lakota believed that all living things have invisible spirits to guide them. When a Lakota boy began to grow into a man, he would separate from the village and go on a Vision Quest. The purpose of this quest was to make contact with a spirit guide. This spirit guide would usually appear in the form of an animal that would help lead the boy into manhood. Those who felt a particularly strong connection to this spirit world, like Drinks Water, would often become the medicine people of their tribe.

Because the Lakota felt that the spirit world was so powerful, they would consult Ancestors or guides whenever the tribe faced a problem that needed to be solved. Every answer, they felt, was waiting for them somewhere in the spirit realm. Because medicine people were able to travel in the spirit world and bring back reliable advice, they were also the doctors of the tribe. If someone became ill or injured, they would ask the spirit world for guidance on how to make this person well.

One day, alone in his lodge, Drinks Water fell into a deep sleep and had a vision of the future. In this dream he saw the Wasichu weaving a spider's web around the Lakota. Drinks Water said, "When this happens, you shall live in square gray houses, on a barren land, and beside those square houses you shall starve."



Many years later, on the Reservation, Sitting Bull and the Lakota often recalled their great ancestor—Drinks Water—and the prophecy of his words.