

HOPI

BELIEFS, TRADITIONS, AND RITUALS

Emergence, the Kachinas, the Kiva Ceremonies, Hopi Prophecy, and the Fourth
World

The Hopi have lived in the same villages on the same mesas
for longer than any other people in North America.

Old Oraibi has been continuously inhabited since approximately 1100 CE.

The Kachinas are not mythological. They live with the Hopi
from winter solstice to summer solstice, every year.

The kiva is the entrance to the underworld that every human soul
climbed through to reach this Fourth World.

The Hopi do not ask for rain. They call it.

The difference is the certainty of relationship.

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A Note on Sacred Knowledge and Disclosure

The Hopi maintain a clear and explicit distinction between sacred knowledge that can be shared publicly and knowledge that is sacred and ceremonially restricted. This document honors that distinction. The specific prayers spoken in kiva ceremonies, the specific songs of individual Kachina ceremonies, the specific content of initiatory teachings, and the specific details of the most restricted ceremonies are not included here — not because this information is unavailable, but because its inclusion would violate the specific request of the Hopi people regarding the boundaries of their sacred knowledge. What is included is what the Hopi themselves have shared publicly — the cosmological framework, the ceremonial calendar and its purposes, the philosophical principles, and the step-by-step structure of ceremonies where that structure has been shared by Hopi cultural representatives in public contexts.

Introduction

The Hopi people of the Arizona desert — the 'Hopi' name meaning 'peaceful people' or 'people who follow the peaceful path' (the full traditional name is Hopituh Shi-nu-mu, 'the people who are peaceful') — live in one of the most remarkable continuous human settlements on earth. Old Oraibi, on Third Mesa in the Hopi homeland of northeastern Arizona, has been continuously inhabited since approximately 1100 CE, making it the oldest continuously inhabited settlement in North America. The Hopi have maintained their ceremonial cycle, their agricultural practices, their language, and their cosmological framework in this specific landscape for more than a thousand years — through Spanish colonization, through the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, through the suppression of Native American religious practice by the US government in the 19th and 20th centuries, and through the sustained pressure of American modernity.

The Hopi sacred system is one of the most complete and most internally coherent indigenous sacred frameworks in the Western Hemisphere — a total worldview in which cosmology, agriculture, ceremony, social organization, and daily life are integrated into a single consistent understanding of the human being's responsibility to the land, the sky, and the sacred beings who mediate between them.

Hopi Cosmology

The Four Worlds

The Hopi understanding of existence is organized around the concept of the Four Worlds — four successive planes of existence through which humanity has traveled, each ending when the people forgot the Creator's instructions and fell into spiritual imbalance, and each giving way to a new world entered through emergence. The present world is the Fourth World — Tuwaqachi, the 'complete world' or the 'world of materials.'

THE FOUR WORLDS — COMPLETE DESCRIPTION

THE FIRST WORLD — TOKPELA (ENDLESS SPACE): The first world was a time of simplicity and innocence. The people and animals all spoke the same language and lived in harmony with the Creator's instructions. The disruption came through spiritual deviation — the people began to misuse the gifts they had been given and forgot their relationship with the Creator. The first world was destroyed by fire. **THE SECOND WORLD — TOKPA (DARK MIDNIGHT):** The second world was more materially developed — the people built structures and accumulated possessions. But again, spiritual deviation followed material development. The people began to value possessions over relationship. The second world was destroyed by ice and cold. **THE THIRD WORLD — KUSKURZA:** The third world saw the most advanced material civilization — cities, trade, widespread technology. But spiritual corruption was also at its most advanced. War began. The Creator saw that the people had forgotten their original instructions so completely that the world needed to end. The third world was destroyed by flood. The faithful people were saved in hollow reeds, floating above the flood waters. **THE FOURTH WORLD — TUWAQACHI (THE COMPLETE WORLD):** The present world — entered through emergence. The people climbed through the sipapu (the emergence hole) from the third world below. The sipapu is physically located, in Hopi cosmology, at the bottom of the Little Colorado River canyon. Every kiva has a sipapu — a small hole in the floor — representing this emergence point and maintaining the connection between the present world and the worlds below. **HOPI PROPHECY:** The Hopi tradition holds that the Fourth World is not permanent — that the signs of its coming end are already visible, and that the choice remains whether the transition will be catastrophic or can be made with greater grace through the restoration of right relationship with the Creator's instructions. The specific signs named in Hopi prophecy include roads in the sky (air travel), a gourd of ashes dropped from the sky (the atomic bomb), and a 'spinning wheel in the sky' (satellite technology).

Spider Grandmother (Kokyangwuti) Sacred Guide and Co-Creator

Spider Grandmother (Kokyangwuti — Spider Old Woman) is one of the most important sacred beings in Hopi cosmology — the divine helper who assisted the Creator in making the world, who guided the people through the transitions between worlds, and who continues to be available as a sacred guide to those who seek her with sincerity and humility. She is not the Creator but the Creator's most important helper — the practical, compassionate, and specific intelligence who makes the Creator's abstract plans into concrete reality.

SPIDER GRANDMOTHER'S SACRED ROLES

CO-CREATOR: In the Hopi creation narrative, Spider Grandmother helped Sotuknang (the Creator's nephew and primary agent of creation) fashion the first human beings from earth and saliva. She breathed the breath of life into them — not unlike Kane's breath into the clay figure in Hawaiian tradition, or the divine breath in Genesis. **THE GUIDE BETWEEN WORLDS:** At each world's ending, Spider Grandmother appeared to the faithful — those who had maintained the original instructions — and guided them to safety. She instructed the people to take seeds of every plant, told them how to hollow the reeds that would carry them through the flood, and guided them to the emergence point between worlds. **THE TEACHER:** Spider Grandmother taught the first people the specific skills needed for life in the new world — how to weave (the spider's art), how to plant, how to conduct the specific ceremonies that would maintain the relationship with the Creator. Her teaching is practical, not theoretical. **CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE:** Spider Grandmother is still addressed in Hopi ceremony and still understood as accessible to those who approach with appropriate humility. Her specific instruction — 'keep the door at the top of your head open' (the fontanelle as the sacred point through which divine communication enters) — is one of the most specific and most practically applicable teachings in any indigenous tradition.

The Kachinas (Katsinas) The Spirit Intermediaries

The Kachinas (Katsina in the Hopi language — the 'i' plural form is Katsinum; the Spanish-influenced spelling 'Kachina' is the more commonly used form in English) are the most distinctive and most theologically sophisticated element of the Hopi sacred system. They are not gods, not ancestors (though ancestors can become Kachinas), not animals, and not entirely human — they are a specific category of sacred beings who serve as intermediaries between the Hopi people and the Creator, who embody and carry specific sacred forces (rain, healing, abundance, protection, discipline), and who are understood to be literally present with the Hopi people for half of every year.

WHAT KACHINAS ARE AND ARE NOT

WHAT THEY ARE: Kachinas are spirit beings — not physical beings in the ordinary sense — who have specific forms, specific functions, specific songs, specific calls, and specific personalities. There are over 400 named Kachinas in the Hopi tradition, each with specific ceremonial roles, specific physical appearance (mask, costume, body paint), and specific relationship to specific aspects of the natural world. **THE HALF-YEAR RESIDENCE:** From approximately the winter solstice to the summer solstice, the Kachinas are understood to physically reside with the Hopi in their villages on the mesas. During this period, the masked dancers who embody the Kachinas in ceremony are not performing — they are literally providing a physical body for the Kachina spirit to inhabit. The mask is the Kachina's face. The dancer has, through specific preparation including fasting, prayer, and ritual purification, made themselves a proper vessel. **WHAT THEY ARE NOT:** The masked dancers are not 'playing' the Kachinas in any theatrical sense. The Kachinas are genuinely present in the ceremony. A Hopi child receiving their first Kachina doll from a 'Kachina dancer' is receiving it from the Kachina — the dancer's human identity is irrelevant and to reveal it would be a profound violation of the sacred reality the ceremony maintains. **THE CLOUDS:** After the summer solstice ceremony (the Niman — Home Dance), the Kachinas return to the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff, Arizona, where they live during the second half of the year. They do not disappear — they become the clouds that bring rain to the Hopi mesas. When rain clouds form over the San Francisco Peaks and move toward the mesas, the Hopi see the Kachinas returning in their cloud form to nourish the crops they helped plant.

Soyal

The Winter Solstice Ceremony — Step-by-Step

Soyal (also spelled Soyalangwul — the ceremony to establish life anew at the beginning of winter) is the opening ceremony of the Kachina season — held at the winter solstice (approximately December 21) to welcome the return of the Kachinas, to turn back the sun from its southward journey and begin the days' lengthening, and to set the spiritual intentions for the coming year. It is one of the most sacred and most restricted of all Hopi ceremonies.

SOYAL — STEP-BY-STEP (PUBLIC ELEMENTS)

PREPARATION (DAYS BEFORE THE CEREMONY): Clan leaders enter the kiva days before the ceremony begins. During this preparation period, no conflict, no harsh words, and no disturbing activity is permitted near the kiva. The entire village enters a period of heightened spiritual attentiveness. Prayer sticks (pahos) are made — feathered prayer offerings that carry specific intentions to the Kachinas and to the Creator. Each paho is made with specific materials for a specific purpose; the making of pahos is itself a form of prayer. THE CEREMONY: STEP 1 — THE RETURN OF THE SUN KACHINA: A specific Kachina — the Soyal Kachina — appears for the first time since the previous year's Niman ceremony. His appearance signals that the Kachinas have returned and that the sacred season is open. STEP 2 — THE KIVA CEREMONY (RESTRICTED): The specific ceremonies conducted within the kiva during Soyal are among the most sacred and most restricted in the Hopi tradition. What is publicly known: prayers for the coming year are made, the sun's turning is ceremonially enacted, and specific sacred objects are renewed for the new year. STEP 3 — THE DISTRIBUTION OF PAHOS: Prayer sticks made during the ceremony are distributed to specific sacred sites — placed at springs, at the edges of fields, at specific landscape features — carrying the community's prayers for rain, health, and abundance into the physical landscape. STEP 4 — THE STAR WATCHING: Traditional astronomical observation at Soyal confirmed the exact moment of solstice — Hopi astronomical knowledge, maintained through specific ceremonial specialization, tracked the sun's position against specific horizon markers to determine the precise ceremonial calendar. STEP 5 — THE COMMUNITY RENEWAL: The ceremony closes with specific renewal practices for the entire village — the confirmation that the new sacred year has properly begun and that the Kachinas are present and engaged for the coming season.

Powamu

The Bean Dance Ceremony — Step-by-Step

Powamu (the Bean Dance or Bean Planting ceremony) is held in February — one of the most important ceremonies of the Kachina season and the ceremony at which children receive their first Kachina initiations, making it simultaneously an agricultural ceremony, an initiatory ceremony, and one of the most emotionally significant events in Hopi childhood.

POWAMU — STRUCTURE AND SACRED SIGNIFICANCE

THE BEAN GROWING: Weeks before the public ceremony, the kiva men plant beans in the warmth of the underground kiva — growing them in the depths of winter through the kiva's natural warmth, producing bean sprouts that demonstrate the power of the ceremonial intention to bring growth even when the ground above is cold. These bean sprouts are distributed to every household as a sign of the coming spring and the community's maintained relationship with agricultural abundance.

THE INITIATION (FOR CHILDREN AGES 6-10): Powamu is the ceremony at which Hopi children receive their first formal initiation into the Kachina tradition. Prior to initiation, children are told that the Kachinas are supernatural beings from elsewhere. During initiation, the reality of the Kachina tradition is revealed in its adult form — not that the Kachinas do not exist, but that the Kachinas work through human practitioners in ceremony, and that the adult's role is to become the vehicle for the Kachina's presence.

THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSION: Hopi accounts of Powamu initiation consistently describe the initial shock of the revelation — the Kachinas removing their masks before the children — followed by a profound reorientation in which the children come to understand that the sacred reality they experienced as children was real, and that it is now their responsibility to maintain that reality for the next generation. This is one of the most sophisticated initiatory structures in any indigenous tradition.

POWAMU CEREMONY — PUBLIC STEP-BY-STEP

STEP 1 — THE KIVA PREPARATIONS (16 DAYS): The Powamu ceremony begins 16 days before the public ceremony, with the planting of beans in the kiva and specific ceremonial preparations conducted by the Powamu clan. STEP 2 — THE NIGHT OF THE BEAN HARVEST: The night before the public ceremony, the bean sprouts grown in the kiva are harvested and prepared for distribution. The kiva men work through the night. STEP 3 — THE MORNING ANNOUNCEMENT: At the rise of the day, specific Kachinas appear in the village — their arrival formally opening the public phase of the ceremony. STEP 4 — THE DISTRIBUTION OF BEAN SPROUTS: Every household receives bean sprouts — the physical evidence of growth achieved through ceremonial intention and kiva warmth during winter. STEP 5 — THE KACHINA DANCES: Various Kachina groups perform through the day — in the kiva and in the plaza. Each Kachina group has specific songs, specific dance forms, and specific gifts they bring to the community. STEP 6 — THE DISTRIBUTION OF GIFTS: Male Kachinas bring Kachina dolls (tihu) for girls and bows-and-arrows for boys — sacred teaching objects that carry the specific energy and teachings of each Kachina. This is not a gift in the commercial sense; it is the Kachina itself giving a piece of its sacred identity to the child. STEP 7 — NIGHT DANCES: The ceremony continues through the night with specific dance sequences conducted in the kiva — the most sacred portion of the public ceremony.

Niman

The Home Dance — Step-by-Step

Niman (the Home Dance or Going Home ceremony) is the final ceremony of the Kachina season — held in July (after the summer solstice) to bid farewell to the Kachinas as they return to the San Francisco Peaks for the second half of the year. It is simultaneously one of the most joyful and most poignant ceremonies in the Hopi calendar — a farewell that is also a trust that the Kachinas will return in cloud form to water the crops, and a trust that the following winter solstice will bring them back in physical ceremonial form.

NIMAN — COMPLETE STEP-BY-STEP

PREPARATION: The Niman ceremony is specifically the domain of the Hemis Kachina — one of the most dignified and most beloved of all Kachinas, representing the maturity of the summer season and the harvest abundance. The Hemis Kachina's appearance in Niman is one of the most visually magnificent moments in all of Hopi ceremonial life — the elaborate headdress (tableta), the precise body painting, and the specific gifts carried mark this as a ceremony of extraordinary care and intention. **STEP 1 — THE RISE OF THE DAY OPENING:** At the opening of the day on the day of Niman, prayer offerings (pahos) are placed at the kiva entrance and specific prayers are made welcoming the final day of the Kachinas' residence. **STEP 2 — THE PROCESSION FROM THE KIVA:** The Hemis Kachinas emerge from the kiva in formal procession — their entrance into the plaza is one of the most dramatic moments of the ceremonial year. **STEP 3 — THE ALL-DAY DANCE:** The Niman dance continues through the entire day — the Kachinas singing and dancing in the plaza, their songs directed simultaneously to the Creator (expressing gratitude for the season), to the clouds (inviting the Kachinas' return in rain form), and to the assembled community. **STEP 4 — THE DISTRIBUTION OF GIFTS:** The Niman distribution is the most abundant of the year — every child receives multiple tihu, corn, and other gifts. The Kachinas give everything they carry before they leave. **STEP 5 — THE ELDER WOMAN'S CORN:** An elder woman of the Corn Clan formally presents ears of corn to the Kachinas — the reciprocal gift that acknowledges what the Kachinas' presence and rain have made possible. **STEP 6 — THE FAREWELL SONGS:** In the late afternoon, the Kachinas perform their farewell songs — the most emotionally charged moment of the ceremony. Children who have grown up receiving the Kachinas' gifts may weep at this farewell. **STEP 7 — THE RETURN TO THE KIVA:** The Kachinas formally enter the kiva for the last time in the season, descending below. This descent enacts their return to the spirit world — the specific portal between worlds maintained by the kiva throughout the year. **STEP 8 — THE DISTRIBUTION OF PAHOS:** Community members distribute prayer sticks to the fields, to water sources, and to the sacred landscape — sending prayers with the Kachinas as they depart and establishing the specific relationship between this community's prayers and the clouds that will carry the response.

The Kiva

The Sacred Underground Chamber

The kiva is the most sacred architectural space in the Hopi tradition — a semi-underground chamber entered by a ladder through a hole in the roof, used for ceremonial preparation, ceremonial performance, and the specific maintenance of the sacred relationships that sustain the community. Every Hopi village has multiple kivas, each associated with specific clans and specific ceremonies.

THE KIVA AS SACRED COSMOLOGY MADE PHYSICAL

THE SIPAPU: The most sacred feature of the kiva — a small hole in the floor of the kiva that represents the sipapu, the emergence point through which the people climbed from the previous world into this one. Every kiva has a sipapu; maintaining it maintains the living connection between the present world and the worlds below. The sipapu is the most concrete available physical expression of the Hopi cosmological framework — it is not a symbol of the emergence; it is the emergence point itself, maintained as a living sacred threshold. **THE LADDER:** The kiva is entered by descending a ladder through the roof opening. This descent replicates the original emergence — the people who climbed up through the sipapu from the world below now descend into the kiva through the roof opening to conduct ceremony in the space that represents the below-world. In and out of the kiva is in and out of the relationship between worlds. **THE FIRE:** The kiva fire maintains warmth during winter ceremonies and bean-growing. The fire also represents the original fire of creation and the specific warmth of the Creator's attention. Maintaining the kiva fire is a sacred responsibility. **THE ALTAR:** Each kiva has a specific altar arrangement associated with the clan and ceremony — sacred objects, painted boards, prayer sticks, and specific symbolic arrangements that maintain the specific sacred relationships the kiva is responsible for keeping.

KIVA CEREMONY — PROTOCOL AND PREPARATION

APPROACH: One does not approach a kiva during ceremony without specific invitation and authorization. The kiva's sanctity during ceremony is absolute. STEP 1 — PURIFICATION BEFORE ENTERING: Participants in kiva ceremony purify themselves before entry — fasting, specific washing, sexual abstinence for a specified period, and the internal preparation of right intention. Without purification, the ceremony cannot be conducted with integrity. STEP 2 — SMUDGING AT THE ENTRANCE: At the roof opening, participants are smudged with juniper or other sacred plant smoke — cleansing the body and the energy field before descending into the sacred space. STEP 3 — THE DESCENT: The descent of the ladder is itself a ceremonial act — the transition from the ordinary world above to the sacred space below. Many traditions require a specific pause or prayer at the ladder's top before descending. STEP 4 — ACKNOWLEDGING THE SIPAPU: Upon entering the kiva, the sipapu is acknowledged — directly, silently, or through specific prayer — recognizing the cosmological threshold it represents and the relationship it maintains. STEP 5 — THE SPECIFIC CEREMONY: The content of specific kiva ceremonies varies by clan, by ceremony, and by the specific restricted knowledge of each ceremonial society. The general structure includes prayer, sacred song, the use of specific sacred objects, and in many cases the preparation of ceremonial elements (costumes, pahos, altars) that will be used in the public-facing portions of the ceremony. STEP 6 — THE ASCENT: Leaving the kiva — climbing the ladder back into the ordinary world — is the reverse of the descent, with its own acknowledgment of the transition between sacred and ordinary space.

Hopi Prophecy

The Signs and the Sacred Choice

Hopi prophecy — maintained by specific prophetic clans and transmitted through specific oral traditions — describes a sequence of signs indicating the approach of the end of the Fourth World and the possible transition to a Fifth World. The Hopi elders who have shared aspects of this prophecy publicly have done so specifically because they believe the signs are being fulfilled and that the wider world needs the Hopi understanding of what is happening and what choice remains.

THE PROPHECY SIGNS

THE GOURD OF ASHES: A container of ashes that, when dropped from the sky, destroys entire cities — widely understood as the atomic bomb, first used in 1945. The Hopi elders who brought their prophecies to the United Nations in 1948 and subsequently cited this sign as having already been fulfilled. ROADS IN THE SKY: Paths through the sky along which people and goods travel — widely understood as aviation and air travel. THE SPINNING WHEEL IN THE SKY: A wheel that spins in the sky, visible to all — understood by many as satellite technology. THE PURIFICATION: The Hopi prophecy describes a time of Great Purification — either catastrophic, if humanity does not change its relationship with the Earth and with the Creator's instructions, or possible of a more gentle nature if enough human beings remember what they came here to do. THE PAHANA: The Lost White Brother — a figure in Hopi prophecy who would return to assist the Hopi in the time of transition. The Pahana's return is one of the most misused elements of Hopi prophecy — multiple non-Hopi individuals have claimed to be the Pahana, which the Hopi consistently reject. The Pahana's identity will be confirmed by specific sacred knowledge that only genuine Hopi elders can recognize. THE CHOICE: Hopi prophecy is not fatalistic. The elders consistently emphasize that the outcome of the transition depends on human choices — specifically, on whether human beings return to the original instructions before the threshold of no return is crossed. The Hopi ceremonies themselves are understood as part of the work of maintaining the balance that makes the gentle transition possible.

The Haligricity Lens

The Kachina Relationship and Sacred Reciprocity

Hopi sacred tradition offers Haligricity the most complete available indigenous model of sacred reciprocity as the organizing principle of the entire human-divine relationship — the understanding that the sacred beings (the Kachinas) give everything they have (rain, healing, abundance, teaching) and that the human community's corresponding obligation is to give everything they have (prayer, ceremony, right living, specific offerings) in a relationship of mutual sustenance that neither party can maintain alone.

The Kachina Relationship and the Haligric Sacred Practice

The Hopi relationship with the Kachinas — specific named sacred beings who reside with the community for half of every year, who respond to specific ceremony with specific gifts, who are welcomed by name and sent off by name at specific ceremonial moments — is the most complete available parallel in any tradition to what the Haligric Living Altar practice is building toward. The practitioner who maintains a Living Altar, who makes specific offerings to specific ancestors and sacred beings, who conducts specific ceremonies at specific times of year to maintain specific relationships, is doing what the Hopi do with the Kachinas: maintaining a living, specific, reciprocal relationship with the sacred world through consistent practice.

Spider Grandmother's instruction — 'keep the door at the top of your head open' — is the Hopi understanding of what the Haligric practitioner is working to maintain through every practice in the library: the specific quality of receptivity, of upward openness, of allowing the sacred world's communication to enter through the crown rather than stopping it at the level of the ordinary mind. The Kachinas come when the door is open and the ceremony is right. The Varesence works when the practitioner's full four dimensions are aligned and the Ha — the sacred breath — is genuinely moving through the intention. The technology is the same. The cultural container is different. Grand Rising.

"Itam hapi pi it enang unangwtapyani.

*We must remember the instructions we were given.
This is why we are still here."*

— Traditional Hopi teaching

Old Oraibi has been continuously inhabited since approximately 1100 CE. The kiva sipapu — the hole in the floor that maintains the living connection with the world below — has been tended in that village for approximately 900 years. The bean seeds carried from the Third World are still planted. The Kachinas still return at the winter solstice. The pahos are still made. The relationship is maintained. This is what a tradition that takes seriously the original instructions actually looks like across time. Grand Rising.

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