

Dream Catchers and Native American Religion

By Rebecca May

- *What are dream catchers?*
- *Where do dream catchers come from?*
- *Should Christians use dream catchers?*



According to the Smithsonian Institute, dream catchers “consisted of wooden hoops about 3 1/2 inches in diameter filled with an imitation of a spider’s web made of fine yarn, usually dyed red.” In the center of the web there is a smaller hoop which no thread crosses, it is kept open. On either side of the hoop or at the bottom of the hoop there are leather cords which dangle with feathers attached to the ends of the cords. [*Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology*, Bulletin 86 at www.geocities.com]

Dream catchers originate with and are used by Native American Indians. Today they are also promoted as a spiritual tool within the New Age Movement and are popular in mainstream society as a craft and an in-home decoration.

The Legend of the Dream Catcher

According to Native American Indian tradition, a Lakota Indian had a vision back when the world was young. In this vision, Iktomi, the Great Teacher of Wisdom, appeared to him in the form of a spider. While weaving a web with the Indian’s willow hoop, Iktomi explained the cycles of life— “in each time of life there are many forces; some good and some bad, ... these forces can help or can interfere with the harmony of Nature.” When Iktomi finished the web, he handed it to the Indian and said, “The web is a perfect circle with a hole in the center. Use the web to help your people reach their goals, making good use of their ideas, dreams, and visions. If you believe in the Great Spirit, the web will catch your good ideas and the bad ones will go through the hole” [*Dream Catcher* at www.navajoworld.com].

Today, dream catchers are used by Indians and others to filter dreams. They are usually hung in windows or above beds (especially above baby’s cribs) to sift all dreams. During the night the good dreams pass through the center hole and slip down the feathers into the person’s sleep. The bad dreams are caught in the web and are burned away by the morning sunlight.

They are also thought to bring healing, good luck, and harmony throughout life. Because of their popularity today, there are many new versions of dream catchers with new significance. For example, the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota is producing “Path of the Spirit” spiral dream catchers— “The upward spiral is symbolic of our life’s journey. This dream catcher serves as a reminder to be patient, tolerant, and respectful of the places we and others are in on our journey” [*Dream Catchers* at EarthCirclesMinnesota.com].

Native American Religion

Because dream catchers are considered a Native American spiritual gift, it is important to examine their spiritual beliefs and practices. While American Indian religion is historically unorganized and varied in practice from tribe to tribe, they share the common goal of participation in or a relationship with nature and spirit. Indians were complexly ceremonial as they sought healing, help from the spirit world, and individual success in things like hunting, warfare, and child rearing.

Their religion appears polytheistic (the belief in many gods) because of their particular devotion and reverence for animals and nature. Ultimately, however, they are pantheists (the belief that God is everything and everything is God). Their religious leaders are known as medicine men or women, shamans, diviners, herbalists, conjurers, healers, crystal gazers, or dreamers.

They teach a belief in what they call the Great Spirit— “the Spirit over, under, and throughout all the physical world, its guiding principle, present in individual phenomena yet not confined to it, not strictly singular nor plural, neither truly personal nor impersonal.” [*Native American Doctrine* at www.stormwind.com]

Right and wrong are determined based on the affect an action has on the tribe or nature. “Wrong actions are those that disrupt balance and harmony, jeopardizing the wellbeing of a people and the cosmos as a whole” [*Native American Ethics* at www.stormwind.com].

There is an organized Native American Church which claims a membership of 250,000. The Native American Church, founded in 1918, is also known as Peyote Church. The worship services appear to be a combination of Native American religious rites, Christian traditions (praying and singing), the New Age Movement (use of crystals), and the Peyote Ritual. Native American shamans require eating the peyote plant as part of their membership ritual. The plant has a highly hallucinogenic affect on its users, and there have been reports of loss of consciousness. According to the shamans, peyote aids in the meditation, contemplation part of Native American worship.

Dream Catchers and Christianity

With respect to dreams, God did use dreams to communicate to His people in the past. However, God doesn't do that anymore. *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son* (Hebrews 1:1-2). The Bible gives no indication that we can or should expect God to influence our dreams today.

God also warns against trying to interpret your dreams. According to Deuteronomy 13:3, *you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

The Bible also reveals the possibility of demons affecting our dreams (Job 4:12 -16). “There is also the possibility of a demonic cause of bad dreams, but generally, such only occurs if one has been dabbling in the occult—ouija boards, seances, etc. Terrible things can be experienced as part of demonic influence and harassment. In such cases, the only way to stop this is to turn to Christ, confess this as sinful, reject it, and turn from it to a positive pursuit of knowing and walking with the Savior” [*Are Our Dreams Significant?* at www.bible.org].

Finally, and most important, dream catchers are a spiritual symbol of a pantheistic, pagan religion. Christians shouldn't dabble in things associated with pagan religions. Solomon warned Israel about being influenced by ungodly religions. He said, *Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments...* Why did Solomon urge Israel to be wholly committed to God? *So that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God* (1 Kings 8:60-61, emphasis mine). If Christians start participating in things which belong to or represent false religions, then they are endorsing other gods and are not wholly devoted to the Lord.

Symbols and objects, such as dream catchers, can interfere with your relationship with God. Gideon made an ephod, which actually represented something good in Israel , and yet *it became a snare to Gideon and his household* (Judges 8:27). With respect to images which come from other religions, God is clear, *you shall not covet them ... nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. And you shall not bring an abomination into your house ... you shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it* (Deuteronomy 7:26).

Questions and Answers

Q: *What are dream catchers?*

A: Dream catchers are hoops with webbing in the middle. They are meant to filter dreams so that the good dreams stay and the bad dreams are caught in the web.

Q: *Where do dream catchers come from?*

A: Dream catchers are a Native American spiritual charm used historically by Indians to protect them during sleep.

Q: *Should Christians use dream catchers?*

A: Christians should not use dream catchers because their use endorses a pagan, pantheistic religion. Christians who use dream catchers prove that their heart is not wholly devoted to the God of the Bible.