

NA-TIVE AMERICAN

The following Anasazi-Pueblo Indian myth of Spider Woman, one of many versions, tends to deemphasize the male element strongly present in other Spider Woman stories, such as the Hopis' myth of Gogyeng Sowuhi (Spider Grandmother). It is a version that may suggest the kind of Goddess personality and myth that would have developed in Early Neolithic societies before the Great Mother underwent the struggles with males recorded in the myths of later literate cultures. The process of emergence described here is reflected in the architecture of the underground chambers where Pueblo clans, particularly the men, meet for social and religious activities. These spaces, called kivas, are reminiscent of the ancient maternal caves. A kiva is entered from above by a ladder emerging from what appears to be a hole in the ground. The kiva is representative of the original place from which humans emerged; to enter a kiva is to return to the Great Mother. It is there that men do the weaving learned originally from Spider Woman, a practice that symbolizes Spider Woman's cosmic weaving of creation. And within the kiva itself, on the floor, is a smaller hole, or *sipapu*, itself representative of the place of emergence and a link between the upper world and the sacred place of Spider Woman.

Spider Woman

At a remote time, when there was no world and nothing else alive, Spider Woman thought out into space.

She breathed, and sang, and thought, and spun a world into being out of the purple glow at the beginning. She spun a thread that stretched across the universe from east to west, and another from north to south.

Spider Woman then set about creating the sun from turquoise, red rock, white shell, and yellow rock, carrying it to the highest point of the world and placing it in the sky.

Seeing that half the time remained dark, Spider Woman fashioned the moon from the same materials and placed it in the sky. After observing the sun and moon for a time, she noted that, in the course of the moon's travels, it left many nights without light. She put the crystalline eyes of the stars into the night sky so that even on moonless nights there would not be utter darkness.

From a great east-west arcing, many-hued rainbow, she inspected her work and found it lifeless. So Spider Woman spun into being the birds and animals. These pleased her greatly, but she was not finished. She formed a woman and placed her on the earth, then a man. For each, she spun a bit of her own being, a web of wisdom and thought, so that women and men would be able to chant and sing and draw on Spider Woman's very wisdom.

These first parents gave rise to the people, who dwelled in a cave-like world within the earth.

It was not long before the people forgot they each possessed a web of wisdom, connected by a strand to Spider Woman's own web. They lost sight of the meaning of life and fought among themselves, disappointing Spider Woman. She came and told them to prepare themselves to go to another world and, when they were ready, led them to the second world, where they were happy at first.

Soon again, however, the people in this second world became proud and bitter and fought among themselves, and once again Spider Woman had to tell them they would move to a third world, where they were instructed to live in har-

mony. "Try to understand the meaning of things," Spider Woman cautioned them as they made their journey.

In the third world, the people made villages, and Spider Woman gave them corn to plant, explaining that it was the milk of her breasts. She taught the women to make pots from the earth's clay for storing food and water in the dry land. She taught them to weave cloth and blankets to keep them warm in the chill air. She also gave them fire to warm the fields so the corn would grow, and in the ashes of the fire, they found they could make their pots harden so they were less easily broken.

Life was good in the third world, but some of the people became sorcerers and made the young people disrespectful of the elders. Husbands became adulterers and gamblers, rather than attending their wives and fields. Women too gambled, leaving their children uncared for and unwashed. People forgot the meaning of things, and even began to fancy that they had made themselves.

So one more time, Spider Woman came and told the wisest among them that they would have to move to a fourth world, somewhere above. The people sent a scies of birds up into the sky to see if another world lay above them, and eventually one returned, describing a place of sand and mesas, of corn, squash, and melons that lay beyond the sky, reached through a hole called the *sipapu*. But there seemed no way to reach it.

Spider Woman came to their plaza and offered to help. She instructed the chipmunk to plant a sunflower seed, and the people sang, and the sunflower grew up almost to the *sipapu*, but finally bent over under the weight of its great flower. The chipmunk planted a spruce seed, and the people sang, but the tree failed to reach high enough. So Spider Woman spoke again to the chipmunk, who planted the seed of a reed. The reed grew taller and taller as Spider Woman exhorted the people to sing, and finally it reached the upper world.

Spider Woman told the people to leave their pots and tools behind. They would make new ones when they reached the fourth world. And the wise people agreed that only those who

were willing to leave evil ways behind were permitted to make the journey up through the reed.

The journey took four days, but the people finally emerged from the *sipapu*, the vulva of the earth, into the fourth world they now inhabit. They set about making tools for planting, weaving, and making pots, and Spider Woman gave them their language, along with special stones for grinding corn, eagle feathers so that they might travel safely across the land, and prayer sticks by which they might remember the meaning of things, the web of destiny that Spider Woman had long ago spun. For it was here, in the fourth world, where people could truly live well as long as they drew on the wisdom of Spider Woman, the wisdom she had made available to them at the beginning.

But as it turned out, some people had brought evil with them up the reed, through the *sipapu*, to range above in the fourth world as it had done in the earlier worlds. And it was here also that the Spirit of Death dwelled.

In the fourth world, then, the people finally became fully human.

