

# What is the Sacred Clown anyway?

## Fools, Jesters, Clowns, Oh My!

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By Janine Bolon

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### Introduction

Have you ever been struck by lightning? This odd question was the first of many I was asked by two medicine men of the Lakota and Shoshone Nations. that brought me into the world of the Native American *heyoka* or Sacred Clown. Over the course of three years, these two men, Thunderhorse and Mike, would walk me through every initiation, ceremony, and tradition they could remember to make sure I was prepared for the spiritual purpose laid out at my feet. The very first challenge to me would not be hiking for miles in forbidden forest, juggling bowling pins at a fair, or pulling my pants down in front of a stuffy collegiate audience, it would be reminding people of the purpose and duty of the Fool!

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## Introducing Bugs Bunny!

Bugs Bunny cartoons in the 70s were my first exposure to the wide variety of clowning and joy a Fool could bring. Do you remember those old cartoons where Bugs Bunny goes to Camelot and is the Court Jester? (Thank you, Looney Tunes for the picture here!) Each time he bounces into the frame he's laughing and literally making a fool of himself in front of the court. It is a hilarious cartoon and I remember loving the adventure, thrill and joy of Bugs' daring deeds, dragon skills and eventual victory with a singing sword. Bugs beautifully demonstrates how the fool can become the hero in his own story. *Warning small rant: I've noticed that Cartoon Network and other media now break up the story that I used to see full length as a kid. It is difficult to go back and see it all, but there are enough remnants of the work to understand the nature, purpose and focus of a fool.*



For medieval queens and kings the **Court Jester** or **Fool** served two purposes, **distraction** and **perspective**. The Fool was the only member of court allowed to sit when the king or queen stood, to stand with his back to royalty and could tease and poke fun of royalty without fear of reprisal. Why? Because of the Fool's primary purpose; to give the King perspective. The Fool was outside the rules and regulations of Royal Society so as to be the most benefit to the King's perspective. The Jester would distract the king from heavy duties and to bring a bit of fun to an overworked king. Or the king would ask the Jester to distract the Court so that the king could get a bit of time away from the parade of people.

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Now, how does that fit in with Native American Clowns? They're purpose is identical with small, necessary differences due to tribal needs and culture.

### **Heyoka's are identified as contrarians, jesters, satirists, and tricksters.**

The purpose of the Clown is to balance the emotions and thoughts of the culture they are immersed in. This causes many clowns to be labelled as contrarians because they do the exact opposite of what other people of the tribe are doing around them. If others are all standing during a ceremony, they will sit. If everyone is sitting and relaxing around a fire, the clowns are up dancing, singing or playing jokes to get the tribe laughing or distract the chief so they can steal the food right off the spit. This is the simplistic, most seen side of a clown.

### **Clowns Ask the "Why?" Questions.**

Each clown that I have worked with has shown me their particular version of "why?" Clowns have a deep purpose to bring to light the concepts, understandings, traditions and mindsets that form the tribal group consciousness. The "Why?" question is the glue of the tribe. In every community the clown will use the tools of bad behavior, shameful speech, oral obscenities and aberrant conduct to demonstrate and remind the tribe of the tribal "Why?" It is deep medicine.

I have lumped the numerous clowns I have worked with into **4 major categories**. This was a necessity for me because depending upon the tribe, country or culture, the clowns were operating under various guidelines and were initiated into their spiritual heritage through different means. This format of labelling allowed me to move quickly into new tribal paradigms to assist wherever I was needed.

### **Warrior Clowns**



Early on in my training I was told incredible stories of clowns in battle. Because of the number of tribes I have had the privilege to work with, the stories of different timelines and battles have brought a bit of proof to my mind that these events are not just apocryphal. Several

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stories were told of tribes in the Midwest and Ohio River Valleys that had Warrior Clowns. These clowns would ride into battle on their horses backwards (thank you, [www.heyokamirror.com](http://www.heyokamirror.com) for the image) or they would startle the enemy by shooting at them with child-sized bows and arrows. While the enemy chased in pursuit, the Warrior Clowns would lead them into ambushes.

It was amazing to hear these battle stories of Native Americans after listening to war stories of my father who served in Korea and Vietnam. I was seeing many similar patterns to these stories and how humans protect their loved ones from invaders.

Clowns of the Warrior nature were frequently called to serve in military maneuvers requiring surprise, tricks and stealth. I have been honored to meet them and learn from them while my dad was in the Navy.

### **Tribal Clowns**

This group of clowns is the largest population at work today. These clowns work within a tribe to do the spiritual and emotional healing required of tribal members. I have seen tribal clowns work as shamans, medicine men, and as a police force for Sundance Ceremonies or when Making-A-Stand. If healing is needed and the normal tribal shamans or medicine men/woman can't seem to get the necessary results requested, clowns are asked into the situation and given full reign to do what is required to bring about the result with the patient's consent.

To give you some examples of the variety of Tribal Clowns, one tribe told me their clowns "call out" offenders within the tribe. They do not judge or decide how the misbehaving member will be handled, but their skills are used like what we see good police officers do. They corral the extreme behaviors for the good of the entire tribe.

Each tribe decides what "extreme" means. If you wish to really understand the mindset of a tribe in regards to their



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clowns, start researching them on the internet and look at the variety there is between the Nations.

### **Lost Clowns**

These are the clowns I frequently attract and stumble into, literally, we have WAY TOO much fun! I use the term “Lost” here tongue-in-cheek because a clown always knows where they are! For example: I was asleep in the back seat of a minivan that was taking 4 clowns to a ceremony near the Flathead Reservation. We were 11 hours into a 15 hour drive when I awoke and asked, “where are we?” The driver responded in pure clown fashion, “Right here, of course,!” LOL! The joke is always on!



These clowns have been called out of their tribes to do international work. It is this group that seems to always find me. (This image belongs to Granddaughter Crow) I’ve sprinkled their stories throughout my blog, lectures, and books. This group is why there is so much information about clowns over the past 10 years. They are calling out to people to “lighten the #%@\$ up!” What’cha worried about?”

These clowns are poking, prodding and annoying people to get them out of their routines, complacency and stale lives to celebrate life, laugh at death and remind them to have some fun before they leave planet earth. Why? Because *not a one of us is going to get out alive!* LOL!

### **Crazy Clowns or “Heyoka”**

This select group is truly crazy according to many of my therapist friends. But unlike the unfortunate people who have schizophrenia, these clowns manage to find their way “back” from the insanity to themselves and then integrate back into society. It isn’t easy, but they manage.

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I have used the term “Heyoka” here very selectively. Only clowns that have been physically struck by lightning do I label as “Heyoka.” These clowns have had to **physically** been touched by the Thunder Beings. The process of becoming Heyoka is very similar to what The Buddha embodied as enlightenment. What Paramahansa Yogananda manifested as a guru and what Joseph Campbell describes as his awakening. It was Campbell’s understanding of tribal clowns and his writings that helped me clarify for my family, friends and co-workers and now you, what it means to be a clown.

Heyoka is a Lakota word. If you ask me more than that, I’m not educated enough in the Lakota Tribal Way to know anything deeper. Why? Because I was given the word in a vision. I had no idea what Heyoka meant. I had never dealt with Native Americans before.

I had to have a clown describe for me the initiation, the process, what the ceremony and visions meant and when it was revealed to me that I was heyoka, I remember the state of shock and the immediate, “uh-uh, you got the WRONG guy!” I literally was backing away wanting no part of the life. My self-identification was a lot of things, but all my brain could say was, “NOT THAT!”

The best way to describe this group of clowns is to meditate every day for 25+ years with the single minded focus to *know* God and demand that He have a two-way conversation with you. When God does finally get down off His fluffy white cloud long enough to speak to you, He tells you your spiritual dispensation. This causes you to scream, cry, rant, deny, and whimper. That’s when you’ll know what it means to be a Heyoka. Sorry, that’s the best definition I’ve got.... Oh, wait! That’s what happened to me! Maybe this next paragraph will be a help.

Heyoka is being called to a new life after your identity has been burned to the ground. You don’t know what’s hit you. You don’t hear the BOOM! All you see for metaphorical miles is



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total destruction, black ash, red skies, and white light. Oh, and don't forget the Ozone. You smell a lot of Ozone!

### **Why should you care?**

If you love your life, if you're happy thinking you're a little human on planet earth with nothing more to worry about than this life, this year, this day and this moment. Then you got what you came for. Here is an informative nugget for you to put into your knowledge base. Congratulations! You have everything you need and you're living your life the way you should. Blessings and Peace be with you Always!

However, if you feel that you are starving emotionally or spiritually for a deeper, mysterious *something* that you can't explain. A clown can get you started on your way.

Clowns appear in your life when you hit crossroads. Hence, why there is so much lore about tricksters and how they turn you down blind alleys or make a "fool" out of you during major decision points in your life. Why?

Because a clown is trying to teach you something. A clown appears when you need to think differently. When you need to change your thoughts. Your perspective. Your understanding of a situation.

This annoys people. This is difficulty for some people. Why? And **People like the way they think!**

If you need a different perspective on a situation. Call a clown. They'll not only give you a fresh perspective, but entertainment, distraction and a whole new way of life. All clowns are powerful people. Crazy. Uncontrollable. Powerful. They want to help you become powerful in your way, too.

*Janine Bolon is a scientist first, a teacher second and a fool always! If you care to learn from her on topics such as meditation, expanding your spiritual gifts and how to live the life you dream about. [Check out her courses here.](#)*