

CULTURE AND TRADITION

"A Way Of Life"---Sweat Lodge, Part II

The following article is the last part of a story about the cultural significance of the Sweat Lodge.

What one wears into the Sweat Lodge is entirely up to the individual. Towels, sheets, shorts, sundresses, or sweat dresses are comfortable. Some people wear things they can take off during the sweat because they are more comfortable in nothing. Those who take their sweat clothes off during ceremony are asked to cover themselves when the door is open to help others feel comfortable in the Sweat Lodge.

There are certain things one does not wear in the Sweat Lodge. Necklaces, rings, earrings and bracelets made of metal should not be worn, as they might get hot enough to burn, and the spirits do not like shiny things. Eyeglasses and contact lenses should be removed for safety reasons.

When we enter the Sweat Lodge, we follow the one who pours the water in a clockwise circle around the Sweat Lodge. We follow clockwise, because this is the way the sun travels. All women who are going to sweat will follow the one who pours the water, and all men will come in after the women. We make a circle at the door or go around the back of the Sweat Lodge, get down on all fours and crawl like the four-legged to our place, then sit up like the winged.

When the one who pours the water goes in, he/she will pray for a good ceremony and blessings for everyone there. Sometimes he/she will blow an eagle whistle to call the eagle to join us in this ceremony. When the one who pours the water begins to drum and sing, this is the signal to enter the Sweat Lodge.

When we go through the door of the Sweat Lodge, we say aloud, "ALL MY RELATIONS". This may be spoken in one's native tongue or in English. When we are seated, the tobacco ties will be hung over our heads in the ribs of the Sweat Lodge.

When the one who pours the water has offered first prayers, the Pipe is then given to the person sitting directly across from him/her and asked that person to greet the stones

do not. Water is also the breath of Grandfather/God as it turns to steam when we pour it on the stones. It makes us sweat out all our impurities, helping us to feel better.

Throughout the ceremony, it will get very hot in the Sweat Lodge. If you get too hot, you can turn around and put your face next to Mother Earth, and she will help cool you. If it gets so hot you cannot take anymore, just yell, "All my relations" and at ANYTIME the door will be opened.

Then the door is closed so no light is visible. It is so dark that there is no difference between man, woman, human, or spirit. We are all one entity at this time.

After the calling songs are sung, the one who pours the water asks if anyone has anymore songs to be sung, and is given an opportunity to sing them. Then everyone says in a clockwise direction, "All My Relations", and the stone tender opens the door.

Now everyone has a chance to cool off, get a breath of fresh air, and come back in. There may be a period of questions and answers. Some may get a little lightheaded, but it is important to remember to be respectful.

When everyone comes back in, it is time for the second round. This is the prayer round. Everyone will have an opportunity to pray at this time. You may pray aloud or in silence, remembering to pass it on to the next person by saying aloud, "All My Relations". More stones are brought in for the prayer round. A prayer song is sung and we proceed with the prayers. When everyone has finished praying, we yell, "All My Relations" and the stone tender will open the door.

The third round is called the "Suffer Round". In this round we willingly suffer for the hurts and wrongs we have done to others. We suffer for the people that are in sorrow or sick, and suffering themselves. To some this may seem a little frightening, but to suffer in this way helps one to deal with his/her feelings.

In this round, a dipper of water is passed around, one for each person. Each person uses the water in the manner they see fit. Some water dippers prefer you take a

drink and pass it on. Others will give you a full dipper. You can drink the water or pour it on hurt or sick places on your body. The water is holy and will heal and relieve the pain. You can pour the water over your head to cool off. You can pray with the water and offer it to people who are in need of special strengths and prayers.

After the water is shared, the door is closed. The one who pours the water prays for everyone to have the strength they need to suffer for the reason they choose. A song is sung that is usually meant for suffering. Water is poured on the stones during the entire song to make the Sweat Lodge really hot.

Next is the fourth round. We do not refer to it as the last round because we all hope to be able to return to the Sweat Lodge. The one who pours the water offers prayers for the people and all our relations, for safe journeys to our homes, and good learnings and health for all. Then a song is sung, and the rest of the time is used for meditation, prayers, or songs from anyone. When everyone is finished, the Going Back song is sung to send the spirits home and let them know the ceremony is over. We leave the Sweat Lodge in the same manner we came in, crawling on all fours in a clockwise direction.

While we are sweating, the stone tender is kept very busy. This person must keep the stones in the fire completely covered with wood so they will stay hot for the next rounds. In the fourth round, he/she brings in all the stones but one. One is left for the spirits to sweat with, and it also honors the spirits who come and join us. In this way, the stone tender is a very important part of the ceremony.

After the ceremony, everyone is allowed time to cool off and get dressed. Some will prepare a meal to share. The meal is an important part of the ceremony, as we share all our good feelings. The meal is usually a potluck and will turn out to be a pretty good feast. Even if there is only water to share, it is important that we share something. We are a sharing people and sharing food and water is very important to us.

When the meal is finished, we may have a "Talking Circle". Everyone sits in a circle, and candles are lit. Everyone quiets down and relaxes. One person usually leads the circle. He/she holds an eagle feather and chooses a topic to talk about. No one interrupts the person holding the eagle feather. When the person is finished, they pass it to their left. No one is obligated to talk.

The Pipe and Sweat Lodge are a way of life for many people. They are very precious tools which can be used to help a person get in touch with his/her inner-self and their Creator. The Sweat Lodge is a place of love, brotherhood, peace, and contentment. The Sweat Lodge and Pipe are ways of the Red Road that our Native American people are willing to share with all mankind.

as they come through the door by touching the end of the Pipe stem to each stone and saying, "Welcome, Brother".

In the first round, the one who pours the water asks the stone tender to carry in a certain amount of stones, one at a time. When the stone tender passes the stone through the door he/she will say, "All my relations" with each stone. The one who pours the water picks up each stone with the antlers and places it in the pit. There will be a stone to represent each direction, Grandfather, Mother Earth, the universe, and you. After each stone is placed, cedar is sprinkled on it making a smudge to purify the Sweat Lodge and free it of any negative vibrations.

The Pipe is smoked and a song is sung to honor the Pipe.

Water is very sacred, as it represents the "life blood" of Mother Earth. Through the blood of Mother Earth, we live, without it we

