

An Ancient Tradition

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The word had been spread among the people. Many of us could feel the energy stirring within ourselves, and when we happen to meet on the paths or in our common buildings, that energy could be felt to leap as a spirit from one person to another, commingling, uniting now into something greater and more beautiful than any part alone. With each conversation, each caress of eye contact, the feeling was shared; it's time that we met in ceremony.

As a community we are collectively aware of our chosen lifestyle as reflecting the lifestyle of our ancestors. It is a village feeling, our own tribal ethos building here as we share our evening meal in our dining hall, as we share the joy and responsibility in caring for the children of the community, and even as we take leave of one from another, dispersing to our private concerns. We are a people of the earth, a people of the moon and of the stars who know that by our wish we can see the power in our desire and intention create the world of our choice.

As twilight fell, the many stars and our smaller number of people came out together, and our slow and careful streaming through the fields and down the path to the river was mirrored in the streaming of the stars along the Milky Way, across the sky and down to the horizon. The fireflies in the river field were as beacons, flashing light in the darkness, leading to the wooded hillside where the ceremonial fire was visible, flickering its light between the shadows of tree and of human silhouette.

Our soft tone of voice and careful movements around the fire reflected our respect and reverence for the tradition we were living. As spiritual beings we are more than our physical forms, we are part of the whole of the universe. We are tree and flower, bird and fish. We are the flowing of river, and blowing of wind. We are the crackle of fire and the silence of darkness; and in this knowing, our actions and lifestyle begin to affirm our feeling of connectedness to the natural world.

This ceremony is both a celebration of our place as the crown of creation, and a ritual observance of our comparative insignificance in the universe. At the same time, we recognize our community and our smaller gathering around the fire as being symbolic of the circle of life and of all of the cycles in the universe. We are the world; we are the universe.

Quietly, with clothing lain aside, our circle slowly files into the sweat lodge, each blessing our relations to all the families of life and of non-living forms. Within we converse in hushed voices until the stones from the fire are brought in through a special opening in the lodge. The red glowing stones, piled together in the center, faintly illuminate the faces of the people, each now sampling, then savoring the sweet aroma of sage sprinkled upon the stones, the incense serving as a cleansing agent, dispelling all negative and ill-seeking spirits. When the water is sprinkled upon the stones our spirits rise in the same manner as the steam, over and around us, building upon itself. Around the circle each

person shares in ceremonial sincerity that which is most important to them in their life: our thoughts, beliefs, feelings, emotions.

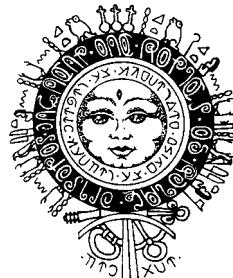
More water, more heat and steam, greater passion and emotion, rising, swirling, expanding! Some of us crouch closer to the ground to escape the worst of the almost unbearable heat. Now, in the darkness one of us calls for spirit yells, beginning low and rising, louder and with greater force, each person gives voice to the purifying process of the steam heat upon our physical bodies, and of the spiritual cleansing within our minds and hearts. Wildly expressing the depth of our feeling and being we are as close as a people can be to the ancestral tribal heritage that this ceremony evokes. As the stones cool, so also does our energy. We emerge, again blessing all of our relations, some of us to lie upon the bare ground, feeling its coolness, others diving into the river, then together we reenter the sweat lodge.

Four sessions we experience in the sweat. Sharing first our prayers for ourselves, each other, our families, our fellow community members, and for all of the peoples of the Earth. During the second session we share our prayers for all of the other animals with whom we share this planet. In the third session we pray for the plants which channel energy from the sun, and the gases of the air and the minerals from the earth, many species of which we use to support our existence. Finally, in the fourth sweat we share our blessings for the rocks and water that comprise our planet itself, and for all the celestial bodies of the universe. Suffering and sharing together in this ceremonial ritual we are one with our ancestors, with each other, and with the world around us.

Now with the rising sun shining through the trees, we walk in line along the path through the valley mist, up through the fields and to the awakening community; some to postpone sleep to engage in the morning activities of this culture we are creating. Combining elements of our modern world with aspects of the ancient traditions, we are living the life of our collective choice.

Afterword:

This sweatlodge ceremony took place the night of August 16, 1987, the eve of the Harmonic Convergence, by a small group of us at Twin Oaks Community. Our observance of this date was in recognition of its prophetic significance to the Mayan and Aztec calendar systems, which measure different cycles of time, both ending on that date. The Mayan Quetzalcoatl prophesied that a time of peace would follow, and either by coincidence or by fate, the Cold War ended soon after.



According to the Aztec calendar and its Sixth Sun Cycle, the Sun of Spiritual Consciousness, we are now in the midst of a 25 year transition period or "return movement," to end in the year 2012 AD. Various people suggest that the significant events of this date may be yet another expectation of the second advent of Jesus Christ, the dawning of a solar age, the establishment of a cosmic consciousness via a "mental re-polarization" among humanity, and the entrance of humanity into the galactic civilization. What ever happens, it will be another good time to meet in ceremony.