

The Sun Dance Ceremony

By Chiefs Talks With Trees & Man Found Standing

The Sun Dance Ceremony is somewhat like the Ghost Dance Ceremony but with different aspects. Many Native American cultures will perform this Ceremony uniquely but generally there are common features like the dancing, songs, drums, the Sacred Fire, prayers, pipe, fasting, herbs, and with some the ceremonial piercing of the skin. The purpose of the Sun Dance Ceremony is to participate in offering oneself as a sacrifice to lead a good life of service. (Many hold this to be a likeness to honor the sacrifice of Jesus.)

Usually the Ceremony takes place outside in the summer and last four days. Even though there are normally just a small group of actual Sun Dancers, the Ceremony is for all attendees who show their support in many ways including prayer and fasting. Often there are Sweat Lodge Ceremonies that take place before and during to further support the Sun Dance Ceremony.

The Ceremony consists with a large pole or tree that is placed into the ground and adorned with offerings to the Great Spirit. These include colored cloth, feathers or other animal parts, herbs, and so forth. Often nothing is to be worn on the head and nothing that is “manufactured”.

The Medicine Elders sit in the center facing the pole while the Sun Dancers march abreast around the circle until every dancer has joined the circle. At this point they all stop and face the center. As everyone gathers around the pole, the Principle Chief Medicine Man (or designee), will address those in attendance, offering prayers, giving instructions about how the dance is to be performed, words to the chants, and so forth.

Each dancer stands directly behind another with their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. After walking around the circle a pre-determined amount of times, chanting, "Father, I come," the Sun Dancers remain in the circle and stop. At this time they cry out to their ancestors, often by name, with shouting, crying, pleadings, and so forth. The Dancers then will take dirt from Mother Earth and pour it upon their heads and wash their hands with it.

Finally, the Sun Dancers raise their eyes to Father Sky with their hands clasped high above their heads, and stand perfectly still, invoking the power of the Great Spirit to allow them to receive guidance from their Spirit World ancestors. This part of the Ceremony lasts until everyone feels complete, usually about fifteen minutes, and then everyone sits down.

The Principle Chief Medicine Man (or designee) offers words of encouragement and assurance of the Creator (and often their testimony of the coming Messiah). When that is complete, the dancers enlarge the circle by facing toward the center and begin dancing, singing Sacred Songs, pray, and so forth as directed by the Spirit. Often each sunrise is greeted with sacred songs and the Principal Medicine Chief (or assigned) will pray in behalf of the Church, the world, and all creation. Fasting the entire time by the Sun Dancers is a common occurrence and many in attendance show their support by doing the same.

At the commencement of the Ceremony, songs can be sung. An example of a traditional Sun Dance song is as follows:

*Wakan Tanka be merciful to me. We want to live!
That is why we are doing this.
They say that a herd of buffalo is coming;
Now they are here.
The power of the buffalo is coming unto us;
It is now here!*
- Sioux Ceremonial Song

Each Sun Dance Ceremony should be followed as directed by the Creator. Often when the Ceremony is in conclusion, the Sun Dancers take hold of each other's hands. They begin to run around the center pole as fast as possible, while chanting the following words:

*O Wakan Tanka, be merciful to me!
I am doing this that my people may live!
Our Grandfather, Wakan Tanka,
Has given me a path which is sacred!*
- Sioux Ceremonial Song

This is repeated over and over again until the dancers either pass out or fall down from exhaustion. After which the audience will often come forth to pray, assist with healing, ask for healing, and so forth. The audience will seat themselves around the circle and one at a time the experiences of the Sun Dancers are then shared. Once the Sun Dancers have concluded their sharing, others are often invited to share their spiritual experiences of the Ceremony.

*To gain a Certificate of Training for this Ceremony, a Medicine Person should feel called by the Spirit to lead the Ceremony. They should also already be certified in the Ghost Dance, dance in a minimum of four Sun Dance Ceremonies, and lead out in at least one Sun Dance Ceremony as directed by the Certified Medicine Person in charge. Upon the successful Completion of the above, the Certified Medicine Person will write a letter of recommendation to the main office of the Church stating the trainee has accomplished the assigned tasks and they feel confident the trainee is qualified to be certified in this training.