

# **Ghost Dance (Circle Dance) Ceremony**

## **By Chief Talks With Trees**

The Paiute tradition that led to the origins of the Ghost Dance began in the 1870s in the Western Great Basin with the visions of a Medicine Man named Wodziwob (Gray Hair). These visions were concerning the renewal of Mother Earth and the reintroduction of the Spirits of their ancestors into the material world. This was to assist them in defeating the onslaught of white settlers and western expansion.

In 1889, another Paiute Medicine Man named Wovoka (also known as Jack Wilson) had a vision and claimed that he was taken into the Spirit World where he saw the indigenous peoples being taken up into the bosom of Father Sky and Mother Earth opening up and swallowed the white man. The vision continued with Mother Earth reverting back to her natural state and the Native Americans, along with their ancestors, were placed back upon the earth to live in eternal peace. He also claimed to have been shown that, by dancing the round-dance continuously, this dream would become a reality and those that participated could enjoy Mother Earth made new.

Wovoka's interpretation of his dream and the time frame that was assigned to it did come to pass, but nevertheless it gave hope to countless Native Americans that had been removed from their ancestral lands and onto various reservations. Different tribes selected aspects of the original Ghost Dance that fit with their own beliefs and would change from time to time.

Versions of the Ghost Dance incorporate the idea, that performing this dance will invoke the Spirits of our ancestors (some even specifically include Jesus) to heal the sick and give protection to our Earth Mother. The overall belief is Mother Earth will someday return to her primordial state of natural beauty and those who do not have a strong Earth-based Spirituality will be "swallowed up" by her. It is said that those who perform this dance, and live a good life, will be saved and allowed to return to the Earth-Mother to enjoy everlasting peace. (The story is reminiscent of many Christian beliefs where Christ returns to gather the good people and raise the righteous dead and then, together they are taken to "heaven" while the Earth is made new.)

When a Member or Medicine Person feels called by the Spirit to participate in a Ghost Dance Ceremony, they are advised to communicate their feelings to the Stone Carrier of their Chapter or appropriate leader. When enough support for the Ghost Dance Ceremony is achieved, the Ceremony will be held under the direction of the Principle Medicine Chief, or designee.

Traditionally, the Ghost Dance Ceremony is performed over the span of one to five days (four nights). The dancers should prepare themselves before the Ceremony with fasting and prayers. When the Ceremony begins, the Dancers will perform a series of round dances that push the physical limits of the participants and visions/trances.

\*To gain a Certificate of Training for this Ceremony, a Medicine Person should feel called by the Spirit to lead the Ceremony. They also have to attend a minimum of four Ghost Dance Ceremonies and lead out, under the direction of the Certified Medicine Person in charge, at least one Ghost Dance Ceremony. 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.