

2014 *In Her Skin* Helping Women Move Forward

WHA Women & HIV/AIDS Initiative



About Smoke Ceremonies

Smoke ceremonies have been conducted throughout history of human kind, including the Australian and American Aboriginal community, European herbal healers (later condemned as witches), Celtic medicine people, the Christian church, and ancient Egypt. These ceremonies are still practiced today by native traditions around the globe.

Smoke ceremonies date back millennia and connect all traditional cultures, from the Native Americans to the Druids, from the Zulus to the Maoris, from Aboriginals to the Mayans, from the Chinese to the Balinese, which have age-old forms of cleansing and blessing rituals. Smudge is widely used in Oriental religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Taoism) and in the ceremonies of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches. Therefore smudging can be seen as a Universal truth that runs through and connects all cultures, religions, time frames and places.

It is impossible to say exactly when smoke ceremonies began. In some cases, smudging is linked to the use of incense. Like a smudge stick, is a natural object that is burned for a specific purpose. The history of incense itself goes back thousands of years to Egypt in 1530 B.C.E. Israel, in the fifth century B.C.E., devoted separate altars for the offering of incense.

Herbal smoke mixtures or incense are burned around the world, from China and Southeast Asia, to India, to Europe and the rest of the Western World.

There are many different ceremonies and rituals that include smudging. Each culture has its own way of bringing about physical, spiritual, and emotional balance, of cleansing negative energy and differing cultures and people have their own methods and herbal mixtures for smudging performed for varied specific purposes. Native Americans, for example, tended to favor sage that was lit from the central or cooking fire.

“Smoke has been used for ceremonial practices to purify, heal and protect, or to honor a deity, or invoke a particular energy for a person or sacred place”

In all ancient traditions the use of smoke has been used for ceremonial practices to purify, heal and protect, or to honor a deity, or invoke a particular energy for a person or sacred place. Depending on the tradition different herbs, plants or resin are utilised for specific purposes. Some other herbs and spices that are often used include cilantro, cedar, lavender, and mugwort, none of which are native to the Americas.

'Smudging' is the common name given to the indigenous American tradition known as the Sacred Smoke Bowl Blessing. This is a powerful spiritual cleansing technique which calls upon the spirits of various sacred plants to drive away negative energy and to restore balance to an individual, a group, a space, or all three.

Traditionally women performed the smudging ceremony in both Celtic and Native American cultures.

In addition to having spiritual benefits, there is a great deal of scientific evidence proving smudge sticks' effects as a pesticide, a meat preserver, and in increasing the flow of oxygen to the brain, making it a modern melding of the spiritual and the scientific.

There is no limit on what places or objects may be the object of smudging, and people often perform smudging on themselves. In addition, various movements have various meanings. One particular method involves blowing on the embers after the smudge stick has been lit, adding the energy of breath to the fire. Moving the stick over the left side of the body represents the female aspect of life, while the right side represents the male aspect. Moving the stick clockwise represents the circle of life. Moving the stick counter-clockwise represents undoing or unwinding, especially in reference to tension.

People who have themselves, their space or items smudged have reported instant effects ranging from increased happiness, increased feeling of peace, greater success and their homes become more peaceful after smudging.

Whenever you add fire to smudge it transforms itself from its physical state (the herb) to its energetic state (smoke). Now the smoke (energy) is able to interact with your negative emotions/thoughts (energy), which no longer support your highest joy, and transform them.

References:

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