

Chanupa

The Chanupa (or Sacred Pipe) is a Way to pray directly with the Creator. It was brought to the Lakota People at a crossroads in their lives. The People were told by the one who brought it, often called the White Buffalo Calf Woman, that there were hard times coming, and that those who would cling to the Chanupa would survive these times.

After its arrival, the Chanupa was incorporated into all the existing ceremonies: Sweat Lodge, Vision Quest, and Sun Dance. Later, as other Sacred Rites were revealed through dreams and vision, the Chanupa also became an integral part of these ceremonies.

It is hard to describe the total impact that the coming of the first Chanupa had on the Lakota People. It was as powerful of presence as the Ark of the Covenant in Moses' time; anyone with murderous thoughts or lies in their hearts would die in its presence. Through the years, the Chanupa has provided the People with great truths and great solace. And, even though there is a decline in the number of Lakota who put their confidence in the Chanupa, it is still held dear in the resolute hearts of many.

The Inipi Ceremony (Sweat Lodge)

The Inipi or Sweat Lodge Ceremony (as it is currently called) is one of the most ancient ceremonies given to the Lakota People. The old name for the lodge is Tunka Teepee. Tunka is a Lakota word meaning stone and teepee means lodge. So, the Inipi ceremony takes place in the Lodge of the Stone Nation. The construction of a lodge is very simple. It is made of a variety of tree saplings bent to form a framework that is covered with blankets and tarps. A shallow pit is dug in the middle of the lodge to receive rocks that are heated in a fire pit on the outside.

After the participants have entered the lodge, and the rocks and water brought into the lodge in a ceremonial manner; the leader of the Sweat begins the ceremony with a prayer and pours water on the hot rocks. Participants then begin to sing prayer songs and calling songs to show the Creator that they are there to pray and that they want the Tunkashila (spiritual grandfathers) to join them in the lodge.

After three door openings, the Sacred Pipe is smoked to carry the prayers of the participants to the Creator. And, during the fourth and final round, songs are sung to release the Tunkashila to take the prayers to the Creator for answers. The participants then leave the lodge, knowing that prayers have been heard and that they will soon have answers.

Although there are many occasions for the Inipi to be performed, it is not scheduled on specific days of the week. It is performed more as the need arises. For instance, if someone is having trouble in some aspect of his or her life, he or she can ask for a Sweat Lodge ceremony to pray to the Creator for help. This means that the keeper of a Sweat Lodge is basically "on call" any at time to "sweat" someone in need. Also, the Inipi is an integral part of the preparation and purification for the Hundlecheya Ceremony and the Sun Dance.

The Hunblecheya (or Vision Quest)

Traditionally, the Lakota People would go out apart from their camp to some remote place to seek a vision of how to live a good life. And, today this sacred way of understanding one's life is still available to all people in the form of the Hunblecheya (Vision Quest). The Hunblecheya (Vision Quest) ceremony includes fasting and staying awake for a specific duration of time, from one to four days. During the entire time, the participant holds the Sacred Pipe and prays to his Creator. The participant is put out from a Sweat Lodge ceremony and returns to pray in the SweatLodge after his or her time spent alone. During the final Sweat Lodge ceremony, the participant may share his or her experiences and have them interpreted.

The Hunblecheya Ceremony is performed when an individual requests the opportunity to seek a vision for his or her life or when an individual wants to offer gratitude for help that he or she has already received. Sometimes, individuals will Hunblecheya in order to prepare to dance in a Sun Dance. This ceremony usually occurs during the spring and summer months

Wi Wanyang Wacipi (or Sun Dance)

The Sun Dance is one of the most powerful of the Lakota Sacred Rituals. Unlike the Sweat Lodge ceremony, which may involve up to 15 individuals, the Sun Dance often requires the concerted effort of as many as 100 or more people. Preparation begins weeks and even months in advance. The Sun Dance grounds must be cleared and the arbor built. All the Sun Dance dresses and skirts must be sewn. The food to feed the people must be accumulated. Finally, there are four days of preparatory Sweat Lodge or purification ceremonies, culminating in the ritual of "hunting and capturing" the Sun Dance tree, which will stand in the center of the arbor, during the dance. On the fifth day, the Sun Dance begins with the solemn entry of the Dancers into the sacred circle and proceeds with four days of praying and dancing in the Sun. At the end of the final day, the Dancers leave the arbor and there is a big meal to feed the people called Wopila (Thanksgiving). Throughout the entire Sun Dance, the Dancers and their supporters pray that the People might live in abundance and good health during the coming year.