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It is based in West Wales, and has been published four times a year since 1993.

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We hope you enjoy reading the article. Nicholas Breeze Wood (editor)



do you feel you are drawn to work with

# THE SACRED PIPE

Nicholas Breeze Wood explores the reality of being a pipe carrier.

The pipe is a sacred tradition that needs to be approached with great respect. It is a very sensitive subject to many native people, who do not all think it should be available to non natives. Many native people were badly mistreated and killed for being pipe carriers in the 20th century as the pipe, as well as many other sacred traditions were selected to be systematically destroyed by the US government. Because of this, there is some (justifiable) resentment by Natives against 'New Agers' who are seen to be 'stealing' the traditions.

In publishing this article on the pipe, I want to stress the importance of great respect, not only to the Powers, but also to Native American people.

A pipe, traditionally is not bought. It is made by someone or given as a gift. You do not just go out and buy a pipe and call yourself a pipe carrier. Being a pipe carrier is a thing you grow into slowly and often seek to run away from.



If a pipe comes to you, it needs to be made into the pipe you work with. Do some craftwork to decorate the stem, and put a little of you into the bowl, for instance, rub some of your sweat into it

to do a pipe for them you are obligated to do so. Those asking for or attending a pipe ceremony are also obligated to give a gift in return - even if it only a little tobacco or a bar of chocolate.

to act as a polish.

A pipe never belongs to you - it belongs to Spirit and so you need to remember that and offer it to Spirit asking that you can walk with the pipe and do good things with it for all your relations.

A pipe really needs to be blessed and awakened before it is first used. This is a whole ceremony in itself that often involves another pipe carrier blowing the smoke from their pipe onto your pipe. There are other ways that this blessing can take place, and I would not rule out working with a pipe by yourself before it is blessed, but for it to be a pipe used as a sacred pipe in a circle that others smoke, it really ought to be properly blessed.

A pipe ceremony must never be charged for, and part of the responsibility of working with the pipe is that if someone asks you

# Prayer Ceremony

Offering smoke is a very good way of making prayers, if you do not personally have a sacred pipe. There is no reason why you cannot use a ceremony adapted from the pipe ceremony given here, but instead of a sacred pipe, you can use a small bowl to burn herbs in. There will not, of course, be the sacred marriage of male and female as you have in a pipe bowl and stem, but performing a ceremony such as this is an excellent way to begin to get used to calling powers ("who love you") to you as you make prayers.

Begin by finding a suitable bowl. It needs to be able to resist heat, and needs to be big enough for you to hold comfortably, remembering that parts of it may get too hot to touch as the herbs burn. Suitable containers include large sea shells, as well as stone, metal or ceramic containers. Now you can begin to perform the ceremony as if the bowl was a pipe. Take a small quantity of burning herbs and offer them to the powers as outlined in the directions for the pipe ceremony given on this page. As each amount of burning herbs are prayed with they can be put into the bowl.

Now the herbs can be lit and the smoke fanned with a large feather as you offer the smoke to the Creator, Grandmother Earth, the Powers of the Four Winds and any other powers, ("who love you"), you have asked to help

Once your prayers are said, remember to thank the powers whose help you asked and announce the end of the ceremony by stating that it is completed and you have done it for all your relations.

The ash and some more fresh herbs can be given to the land to say thank you.

The herbs smoked in a pipe are never (with the possible exception of pure tobacco) mind altering. Many pipe carriers do not use tobacco, there are many traditional herbs that can be used instead.

There is a great deal of beautiful ceremonial symbolism in a pipe ceremony. Not only is there a sacred marriage between the female (bowl) and the male (stem), but as we have seen in the last article the four elements are included as are four kingdoms.

When a pipe is filled, the Powers of the Four Winds are called upon, as is Spirit above and Earth below as well as other powers such as the Creator of all, the ancestors and specific spirit powers the pipe carrier is working with.

There are many traditional forms that the pipe ceremony can take, and the way the pipe is reverentially filled varies across tribal and personal traditions. Below is laid out one simple pipe ceremony which has its origins with the writer Evelyn Eaton who learnt it from traditional native teachers with whom she lived.

Begin by unwrapping the pipe and placing it on a cloth on the floor (the pipe never touches the floor except for when it is on a specially built earth altar). Smudge the bowl, stem, smoking mix and any other items you are using in the ceremony - including yourself.

Hold the bowl in your left hand and the stem in your right and lift them above your head, asking permission of the powers to join and smoke the pipe. If you get a sense that you should not join the pipe thank the powers and put the pipe away. If you get a sense that it is alright for you to join and

smoke the pipe the stem can be gently pushed into the bowl in celebration of all of the people and the ceremony has begun.

Now bring the pipe down to a lower level and take a pinch of the smoking mix. Hold it above your head and thank the Creator for your life and this day and then ask the Creator to bless this ceremony and help with the prayers.

Now take the same pinch of smoking mix and lower it to the ground. Here you thank Grandmother Earth for everything you have, as everything you have comes from her, including your own body. Ask Grandmother Earth to help you with your prayers.

Now turn towards the South and thank the South Powers, asking them to help with the prayers. Turn now to the West, North and East in turn and thank them and ask their respective powers to help you with the prayers you will make.

Now gently push the pinch of smoking mix into the bowl and take another pinch into your fingers.

With the second pinch repeat all you did with the first pinch, but before you put the pinch into the bowl, pause a moment and sense what other spirit helpers wish to be invited. These may be the ancestors or spirits of the land where you are doing the ceremony or perhaps a specific animal or plant spirit. It is important to remember to only ask for help with the ceremony from those spirit powers who love you, as not all spirits do so. Once you have asked this extra power to help with the ceremony, push the pinch into the bowl.

Now repeat this whole process with two more pinches of smoking mix, ending each one with asking



another spirit power who loves you to help with the ceremony.

Once you have done this the pipe is charged or loaded and can be lit. Traditionally matches or lighters are not used to light the pipe, rather a glowing coal from a fire is used (more often than not in Plains culture a fire of dried sacred buffalo dung), but nowadays matches are often used. To avoid struggling to hold the pipe and light it, I have a small candle alight on the cloth before me on which all the sacred items used in the ceremony are kept. I simply light matches from the candle.

Hold the pipe stem to your mouth and light the mix in the bowl. You are not lighting it for you to smoke, as the Creator has the first smoke of the pipe and once it is lit you turn the pipe so that the stem is pointing towards the sky. Here you sit for a moment making prayers to the Creator that the ceremony will be blessed. Once this moment has passed, the pipe is turned round so that the stem is by your mouth ready for you to smoke.

The turning and holding of the pipe is done in a specific way. The bowl always remains in the left hand and the stem always remains in the right had, and the stem is always rotated sun wise (clockwise) and never moonwise (anti clockwise).

The pipe may well have gone out by this time, so if it has, relight it and once lit, blow a little smoke up towards the sky, then more down towards the ground, then to each of the Powers of the Directions, starting at the South and moving sunwise to the East.

Now the time for you to make your prayers is here,

and you do so. Generally it is good to pray out loud so that prayers do not rattle around your head. When you have made your prayers, sit still with the pipe for a little while to listen to the answer.

If you are smoking with others, the pipe is then passed sunwise to the person on your left. They make their prayers and smoke the pipe if they wish (not all in a pipe ceremony smoke the pipe, but each will hold it and say their prayers with it).

Once the pipe comes back to you you need to smoke all the mix that is in the bowl. Once this is done the pipe can be separated and the ceremony will be over. Hold the pipe above your head and thank the Creator, Grandmother Earth, each of the Powers of the Four Winds and each of the three special powers you called upon to help you. Once you have done this, you need to acknowledge that you have done the ceremony for all beings in the universe by saying the phrase "for all my relations", and separate the bowl and the stem. The pipe ceremony is now over.

Clean the stem and bowl and remove the ashes, keeping them safe. Put the pipe away. The ashes and a little fresh smoking mix are then taken outside and placed on the earth as a thank you for allowing the ceremony to have taken place. Now you eat, even if it only a token biscuit and a cup of tea.

PHOTOS:  
Page 19 : Sacred pipe and stem together with a pipe bag and quill worked pipe tamper. The Y shaped stick represents the sun dance tree and the opposites of life (yin- yang) acts as a pipe rest to support the stem when the pipe is placed on an earth altar.

## Smoking Herbs and the Pipe

We normally associate tobacco with the pipe, and if you wish to use tobacco that is fine, but if you do, choose a high quality pure tobacco such as a 'twist' of dried leaves. These tobacco twists are simply a bundle of leaves rolled into a sausage, twisted into a U shape and left to dry or cured in smoke (often from hickory wood). They are pure tobacco and some are even grown organically and sometimes ceremonially. If this is impossible for you to get, find a good quality regular pipe tobacco. Avoid cigarette tobacco sold for rollups.

Kinni kinnick is a word that is applied to lots of Native American smoking mixes. Often these are made up from herbs listed on this page. Sometimes it has tobacco added to it and sometimes it is sold without tobacco. Red willow bark is also often called Kinni kinnick, this is the bark from the plant we know in Britain as red dogwood, which the American's call red willow.

The Lakota word for this herb is Canasa. Normally it is also found in most Kinni kinnick mixes as are Bearberry leaves. Red Willow bark can be smoked by itself, and traditionally it is a very sacred plant to the Lakota and other nations, harvested in sacred ways at certain times of the year.

Deers tongue leaf (*Trilisa odoratissima*) is another herb used in some smoking mixtures, as it tastes like tobacco.

