**The Smudging Ceremony**

**Sacred Herbs to Cleanse the Spirits**

**Overview:** This ritual is not a scripted ceremony in that you would read it but a simple explanation of a Native American Indian ritual that has been used over the years in Native Sons and Daughters Programs in various forms. This ritual is typically performed by Chiefs of Elders but really can be performed by anyone as long as it is entered into respectfully, with honor and good intentions.

Native American Indian elders believe that all ceremonies, tribal or private, must be entered into with a good heart so that we can walk, pray and sing in a sacred manner, and be helped by the spirits to enter the sacred realm. Native peoples use herbs to accomplish this. One common ceremony or ritual is to burn certain herbs, take the smoke in one’s hands and rub it or brush it over the body. This is commonly called smudging. In North America, the three plants most commonly used in smudging are Sage, Cedar and Sweetgrass.

**Sage:** Is burned in smudging ceremonies to drive out the bad spirits, feelings or influences, and also to keep bad spirits from entering the area where a ceremony takes place. It is considered a healing plant.

**Cedar:** Is burned while praying aloud or silently. It is thought that the prayers rise on the cedar smoke and are carried to the Great Spirit. It drives out the negative energies and also brings in good influences. The spirit of cedar is considered to be very ancient and wise. Used commonly in the Pacific Northwest.

**Sweetgrass:** A most sacred plant for Plains Indians with a perfume-like odor. Usually braided together in bunches as a person’s hair is braided. It is thought to be good to burn the sweetgrass after the sage or cedar had driven out the bad influences. Sweetgrass brings in the good influences. As with cedar, burning sweetgrass while praying is thought to send the prayers up to the Great Spirit in the smoke.

The herbs are found at Native American pow-wows, pioneer festivals and elsewhere. These herbs, especially the sage and sweetgrass, are commonly found already woven in sticks or braided and dried so they are ready to use. Burning the dried herbs is commonly done in a small stone bowl or clay pot. Use of a sea-shell or a turtle shell is another way. If the vessel needs to be portable, such as to carry to smudge a large group or gathering, the shells (or small pots) can be attached to a handle of some sort, decorated and used for this special purpose only.

To do a smudging, gather the smoke in your hands, rub your hands in the smoke and then use your hands to bring the smoke over yourself. One person or persons can smudge another or a group of people by using hands or more often a feather (or feathers in a fan) to lightly brush the smoke over the other persons.



Feather Fan

Native American tradition