

Pipe Ceremony

When we begin to smoke the Pipe, the Pipe holder asks the Spirits to come and join in the smoking of the Pipe. Just like us, the Spirits enjoy smoking tobacco. When they inhale the fumes and our smoke, which holds our prayers, they carry these messages to the Great Spirit. The Pipe holder inhales our messages of prayer and calls for help and blows them towards the Four Directions to ask them to join our ceremony.

The two main parts of the pipe that hold special symbolic value as do the materials used in their construction, Pipe-stone (bowl) and the wooden portion of the Pipe (stem). The joining of the two is considered a metaphorical marriage of Mother Earth and the creatures that inhabit the Earth. This is the main ideology behind the two materials joining and becoming one. The Pipe cup is referred to as female because of the symbolism between Mother Earth and the Pipe-stone itself. In reflection, the male portion is symbolized as the wood used in the stem. The wood symbolizes the connection between all the living things that inhabit the Earth. The wooden portion joins the stone portion similar to a male joining with the female.

The Pipes themselves are adorned with elaborately shaped bowls resembling the Pipe holders Totem and Spirit guides. They are painted with colors depicting special meanings and feathers, adding an animal presence. Beads are mainly used for decoration but the colors have symbolic value.

The tobacco used in the Pipe is brought by the people who requested the ceremony. It is their gift for the Spirits to come and guide the Medicine Man throughout the ceremony. Even the placement of the offering (commonly called the tobacco) has significance. Exactly four pinches of tobacco are used and must fill up the bowl at the end of the fourth pinch. These pinches of the tobacco are held out to the Four Directions to call forth the Spirits to accept the offering and hear their plea for guidance.

Only men smoke the Pipe during the ceremony because women are not allowed to smoke from the same Pipe. Instead, women are touched upon the brow, and this is how they send their messages to the creator. Women in the Ojibway culture are considered to be more powerful than men. Women on their time are considered at their most powerful and cannot even be touched upon the brow. They are not even allowed to participate in the ceremony and must remove themselves from the ceremonial grounds or stand on the outside of the ceremony (most ceremonies are formed into a circle).

Women do not inhale or smoke from the Pipe because they are so powerful that anyone smoking after them will get sick or a sickness will fall upon them. This is why there are Medicine Women. They have their own Pipes and rituals that men cannot perform. Men may not smoke or even touch a woman's pipe. In fact, women are so powerful that they form a balance in every single ceremony performed.