Sweat Lodge Ceremony

This ceremony is that the Ojibway people undertook to heal themselves. It was prompted by the influence of European culture with its corrupting effect on Ojibway culture. In pre-contact times there was no purpose for having a Sweat Lodge. With the introduction of alcohol and the inhumane treatment of Ojibway people the need to re-purify themselves became evident as they were becoming increasingly poisoned by European culture. The ingesting of large quantities of alcoholic mixtures (traders would use water and other things such as beer to dilute the whiskey to save on money; pre-contact there was not even the invention of alcohol by the Native Americans) brought about abusive behavior that was never seen before by native culture. Wife and child abuse was rampant, brought on by drunkenness. They desperately needed to find their way back to traditional ways of living, and the Sweat Lodge was the answer. Not only could they draw out the poison of alcohol but also the behavior that went along with drunkenness, through intense heat and steam. Physically they sweated out the toxins inside the Sweat Lodge. With the help of Medicine Men and Women they also repaired the damage done to their spirits. It was a place of refuge and healing but also a place to get answers and guidance by asking spiritual entities, totem helpers, the Creator and Mother Earth.

The Grandfathers are awakened in the stones by heating them in a sacred fire until red-hot. Then they are swept clean by means of a cedar bough broom. One at a time they are placed into the Sweat Lodge in a shallow pit. This pit is referred as the bellybutton of Mother Earth. When enough Grandfathers are inside the pit, which is told to the Sweat Lodge keeper by a spirit, then the entrance is closed and sealed up. The ceremony begins in the lodge. Aglow with the luminance Grandfathers the Water Drum sounds and calls forth the spirit guides and the Four Directions. At this point water is poured and keeps pouring until he is told by the spirits to stop. Then he begins his prayers, songs and chants.

During the purification of one's spirit inside a Sweat Lodge, all sense of race, color and religion is disregarded. After all, in the Mother's womb we are all the same and have the ability to sit with the Creator himself. As the steam rises so do our senses and we begin to see things that are messages from another world (presenting itself to you). It is the job of the Sweat Lodge keeper to decipher these messages and deliver them to the person whom it is meant for.

Healing also begins here for all sorts of ailments such as physical, emotional, directional and diseases. One at a time all the people inside get an opportunity to speak, pray and ask for forgiveness from the Creator and the people they hurt. As they go around the circle, they must announce their name, so the Creator can recognize them. At this time, they must also tell where they are from and who their Clan is, important information to relay.

The Sweat Lodge is made up of poles of willow lashed together with raw hide and covered by skins of bear or moose, depending on the lodge keeper and his spirit guides.

Nowadays the skins are replaced with simple heavy gauge canvass sheets. The entrance must always point directly to the East. This has very significant spiritual value, for the Father Sun lives in that direction and has immense power. There is no set size for a sweat Lodge it all depends on the lodge keeper and what he sees as fit. They are usually at least 10 feet across and 3 to 4 feet high in the middle. The pit in the middle must be in the very center and no bigger than 2 feet wide and no deeper than 2 feet deep.

When you are called upon to go into the Sweat Lodge you will have some tobacco to offer the fire. At this time, you would say a prayer for someone or ask a question. You then would crawl into the lodge and take your place after stating who you are. Bringing personal sacred items is allowed but some rules apply. Items such as: Eagle feathers, whistles and medicine pouches are allowed and welcomed. You cannot bring anything that is not natural into the Sweat Lodge, such as: watches, ear rings, gold, silver (copper is okay), eye glasses, false teeth and any female on her time.