

Editorial



By Autumn Snow ,Associate Editor

Our Native American Traditional Ceremonies

As I have walked the White path of Peace throughout my life and strived to learn from my parents and the elders our traditional ways and customs I often wondered are we doing as the old ones did long ago? I have read many books, watched and attended many gatherings and spoke with many elders and people of many different tribes during ceremonies and cultural events. I was and still am as a sponge reaching out and wishing to know all I can to pass the knowledge and truth on to my relatives and all who ask and wish to know. It is an interesting journey because as we all know there are slightly different ways of doing the same ceremony depending on the tribe such as Cherokee, Navajo etc. As I focused mainly on the Cherokee which is my blood I continued to reach out. Some I have spoken with over my lifetime say a slight

difference in the ceremony is acceptable as long as the intent and the body of the ceremony is traditional and others say it must always be done in exactly the same way as our elders and the old ones of long times past. I myself feel that it should be done as it was long ago. We strive to honor the Creator, Earth Mother and The Ancestors in all we do. This is our heart, our desire to honor, remember and pass the knowledge on to keep our heritage alive. I have bought many books regarding our heritage and recently bought *The Cherokee People* by Thomas Mails. *The Story of the Cherokees from Earliest Origins to Contemporary Times*. It speaks of tradition, our culture, and Ceremonies. He also wrote *Mystic Warriors of the Plains*. The book was recommended to me by a native brother White Eagle who I know to be a person of knowledge and seeks to do all things in the true ways of our people. As I began to read I focused, for an example, *The First new Moon of spring*. It was very detailed from the Uku his seven prime counselors, appointing certain honorable women for the Friendship Dance. The Uku and his Prime counselors would meet to determine with a divining crystal when the first new moon would be. Members were then sent out to all the towns of the nations to announce the day the festival would begin. The hunters were sent out and provided the meat, Deer, Turkeys, and other wildlife. The preparation in the Heptagon, the Altar and the Sacred fire all prepared in great care and traditional detail. It spoke of the Seven large tables being set up by the river with seven white deer skins, one on each table with the seven diving crystals, one placed in each deer skin.

The procession in the beginning of the ceremony the Seven counselors carrying seven containers in the procession to the river. In the seven containers were medicine roots, the Uku who came last carried a container with the Seven Flags the sticks of the flags were 6 inches long. These flags were placed along the river during the ceremony at a precise time. In the ceremony the chief's assistant would plunge into the river and submerge seven times facing the East. This order was also for the infants to be immersed seven times as well by their mothers. Then the people went into the river in the same way. After other rites were observed they were to return home and change into dry garments. The balance of the day was for fasting until after sunset. The women continuing the Friendship Dance. At sunset everyone returned to and stood the around the heptagon. The ceremony for the Sacred Fire begun. The next morning The New Moon Festival had ended. The Uku called the seven counselors together to set the date for the Sacred Night Dance and announce that on the seventh day after the dance the new fire would be made by seven chosen men. Long ago the ceremonies in many cases were longer and more detailed than we do today, that I have observed over my many years. It is possible that these old ceremonies in their entirety are still being performed by many native peoples. I was fascinated at the great detail in the book *The Cherokee People* from the main ceremony to the festival to the way the meat was prepared and presented. Everyone brought something for the feast as a community. To truly understand the long and great detail of many days

and perhaps weeks of preparation for this one Moon ceremony you would need to read this book it is very enlightening. Because of its length and great detail it cannot all be described in this article. This then brought to my mind how different the old ceremonies and traditional ways are performed today.

In my observation perhaps it was deemed over time by the various Chiefs and Elders that it need not take days or weeks to prepare for each moon ceremony, time and era changes many things, but still taking care to leave the most sacred of the ceremonies intact. I am sure many who read this editorial many know the answer to the reasons for the changes. In any case I have received many Blessings when attending the various Ceremonies over the years. I have found them to be beautiful and very meaningful to me as an individual. I do know and feel that it is important for all of us to continue to seek to learn, it is a lifetime work in progress and participate with a great heart and enthusiasm with the tribe and other of our people to not only learn but give our support and attention into helping and keeping our heritage alive for all of our generations. Attending tribal meetings and gatherings is not only an important and vital part of being a member but will keep us strong as a people and as a family. It bonds us as a community and everyone prospers from the knowing. It renews us, invigorates the mind, body and spirit. You cannot learn if you do not come. Come walk with me on a journey in the knowing. *Dodadagohv'i*

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