



The Book of
CEREMONY



*Shamanic Wisdom for
Invoking the Sacred in Everyday Life*

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sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

CONTENTS

Introduction . . . 1

PART ONE The Power of Ceremony

- 1 What Ceremony Is . . . 17
- 2 Envisioning Your Ceremony . . . 27
- 3 Preparing for Your Ceremony . . . 41
- 4 Performing Your Ceremony . . . 55
- 5 Additional Guidelines for Your Ceremonial Work . . . 71

PART TWO Sacred Transitions

- 6 Turning Points and Rites of Passage . . . 83
- 7 Honorable Closure . . . 101

PART THREE Ceremonies to Create Energetic Balance

- 8 Releasing Blocking Energies . . . 117
- 9 Working in the Unseen Realms . . . 131

CONTENTS

PART FOUR *Life as a Ceremony*

- 10 *Blessing and Healing Ceremonies for People . . .* 141
- 11 *Blessing and Healing Ceremonies for Places . . .* 149
- 12 *Transforming Your Dreams into Reality . . .* 165
- 13 *Joining Together to Bless Our Global Community . . .* 185

Acknowledgments . . . 189

Resources . . . 191

About the Author . . . 195

INTRODUCTION

I love performing ceremonies. I like to perform ceremonies on my own, and I am also passionate about joining with like-minded souls to perform ceremonies for all of life and the Earth.

When I lived in San Francisco in 1980, I was introduced to the practice of shamanic journeying. I loved this practice, which taught me how to receive my own spiritual guidance by traveling outside of time and space to meet with helping and compassionate spirits.

In shamanic teachings, every spiritual and sacred act we perform is a ceremony. When we recognize the sacredness of each moment, miracles happen. In the early 1980s, as I explored the many facets of shamanism, I was drawn to creating shamanic ceremonies to heal my past and to manifest what my soul desired. I knew performing ceremonies was a classic part of shamanic practice.

In the practice of shamanism, the practitioner gazes beyond only what we can see, hear, feel, taste, and smell in our tangible world. Shamans look into the unseen realms, which are filled with great beauty and spiritual healing energies that can empower our lives in ordinary reality.

Using the ancient power of ceremony, shamans move beyond ordinary thinking. And working beyond the tangible world, shamans see disharmonious energetic patterns that need to be rebalanced to improve people's health and the health of the planet. By receiving guidance from the helping spirits, shamans learn to restore harmonious energies through the mysterious healing power of ceremony. Every shamanic journey a shaman takes, every healing method a shaman works with, is considered a ceremony.

Shamanism is a practice of direct revelation. This means shamans receive guidance from their own inner wisdom, communicating with

multiple helping and compassionate spirits, and through their deep connection with everything that exists in nature.

In our modern world, we have become so focused on accumulating material wealth and objects, believing this will make us feel whole and joyous. But when you bridge spiritual practices and ceremony into your life, you end up thriving in a more complete way. You live your life with a gleam in your eye as you start to perceive, digest, and absorb more beauty and potential in the world around you, and to understand how you can be an active participant in bringing the sacred into your life.

So many people feel that life is empty and that the outer world holds no meaning. And when we only focus on the tangible realm, that is true. For true joy, wealth, and healing awaits as we learn how to interact with the power of the invisible worlds. Bringing ceremonial practices into our life helps us create a new reality, one filled with richness and purpose as we weave in vibrant energetic threads from the invisible realms. These practices help us find meaning in life and assist us in acknowledging our creative potential.

I performed my first formal shamanic ceremony in 1982—and shortly after that, I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. For my ceremony, I first closed the curtains in my living room to darken it, leaving my ordinary thoughts behind and stepping into the mysterious role of the shaman who “sees” in the dark. I still remember the smell of the match when I lit my red candle to begin.

I had a beautiful blanket that was woven with rainbow-colored threads. It felt like a perfect place to create my altar. (Later, while performing healing work, I would ask my clients to lie on this blanket, which I called “my magic carpet into the unseen realms.”) I placed an abalone shell filled with the cleansing herbs sage and juniper on my altar. In some traditions, the abalone shell represents the element of water, the cleansing herbs are used as the earth, the match as fire, and the smoke as air. Working with the elements is a way of honoring them for giving us life. Then I placed an offering of red roses on my altar as a gift to the helping spirits who would listen and help me to manifest my prayer.

When I lit the incense, the smoke was filled with a lovely fragrance that felt cleansing on all levels. The glow of the red candle filled the room. The candle's light and the sacred objects on my altar shifted the energy in my living room from an ordinary living space into a sacred spiritual environment.

I remember drumming and standing by the altar I had made with its lovely offerings to the compassionate spirits and to the directions—all the spiritual forces I wanted to honor. I alternated using my rattles and drum to call in the helping spirits as witnesses as I spoke my intention out loud. I asked the spirits to call into my life a spiritual teacher who could take me deeper into my shamanic path.

I could feel all the hairs standing up on my arms, and my heart felt full. I knew as I sang my song that honored all the helping spirits that something big was about to happen. I allowed my spiritual song to emerge, assisting in shifting my ordinary state of consciousness into a shamanic state of consciousness, where I was now ready to engage in sacred ceremonial work.

As I performed each step of the ceremony, my mental chatter about my life dissolved. I stopped worrying about everyday matters like cooking, daily tasks, or news I found disturbing. The more I left my human concerns behind, the more I engaged in the true magic of ceremony.

I wrote my intention on a piece of paper, and once I was ready, I put it into the abalone shell with the burning healing herbs. I lit the paper on fire. This is a symbolic act associated with all fire ceremonies, where you place your intention in the fire, and the smoke carries your desire to the power of the universe that joins with you as a spiritual partner to create your dream or to bring through healing energies.

I thought I was calling in a human teacher. Little did I know that I was actually calling into my life a spiritual teacher from the unseen realms. We don't always know how our intentions might manifest. Over time, I learned that the Spirit of Santa Fe was to become my greatest teacher and would show me how to tap into my creative potential and take my shamanic healing work and teachings into the world.

Over my long history of performing powerful and successful ceremonies, I learned about the elements needed to create such sacred events.

During the 1980s, I began by leading ceremonies in workshops for healing ourselves or for calling in spiritual support for our personal goals.

In 1990, my ceremonial work with groups took a leap when I started teaching five-day workshops on shamanic healing instead of short weekend trainings. During these longer trainings, I led ceremonies for large groups. The ceremonies flowed so smoothly, and these large groups gravitated so strongly to ceremonial work. I could easily see why ceremonies have been performed for thousands of years. Tens of thousands of students have participated in ceremonies I've created. Over the years, participants have given me feedback on not just the power of the ceremony itself, but they have also told me that to bond with community in such an intimate way had created healing beyond the ceremonial work. The community aspect of performing ceremonies gives people an experience they never imagined, bringing comfort, love, and support. Over time, I learned how to bring more power into a ceremony. For example, when performing ceremonies outside, I learned that if I greeted and welcomed the helping ancestors of the land, severe weather and other issues that would have prevented our ceremonial work from taking place would be resolved.

I learned how to help people focus their attention and not drift away during sacred work, because in our culture, most people have short attention spans. I needed to create short ceremonies, or people would lose concentration and would not remember the steps of the ceremony and the intention that went with each phase.

I discovered that ceremony has great power to heal and create positive transformations, but there is also a right timing when desired outcomes will manifest. I had to learn about trust and surrender in performing ceremonies, and I have had to teach my students the same.

There is a lot you can learn from watching and participating in ceremonies. While you can read books and take classes on performing ceremonies, and there are shamanic ways of working that are definitely teachable, be aware that too much focus on acquiring knowledge can keep you in your head instead of helping you move into a life-changing, spiritual state of consciousness and can keep you from seeing through

your own eyes. Relying on authority figures disempowers you and diminishes your trust in your own spiritual guidance.

When we attempt to define ancient teachings that focus on energetic work, we disassemble the magic of ceremony. The key, instead, is to unlock your intuitive knowing that invites the power, vibration, and frequency of words and phrases, transforming the results of your ceremony.

As I will continue to share throughout *The Book of Ceremony*, the true positive results come from your desired intention that is heartfelt and authentic, how you honor yourself and the helping spirits, your ability to focus and concentrate as well as create and hold sacred space, and trust in your own intuitive knowing. The success of your ceremonies will evolve over time as you learn how to open your heart to the power of the universe, craft clear intentions, and let go of the outcome.

With ceremonial work, we create sacred space and incubate conscious intentions. We allow the twists and turns, the focus, the willingness to open our hearts and minds. And when ready, we invite other community members into our circle. Afterward, the effects may still be building, so we need to avoid wanting to see immediate results—although immediate results can happen.

The practice of shamanism is not frivolous, nor is it a hobby. For tens of thousands of years, this has been a serious and dignified practice based on helping the community survive. There is a celebratory and often joyous aspect to the work, but there is a difference between being celebratory and being shallow. The practice of shamanism is anything but shallow. If ceremonies for healing, blessing, and divining food sources did not produce good results, people in the community died.

Today, shamanic ceremonies are being used to improve our health and quality of life. But we do need to practice ceremony in a disciplined way. We are witnessing so much devastation in the world, and performing shamanic ceremonies is once again needed for our survival. If we do not take the work seriously, we will lose the power of ceremony that kept our ancestors alive for thousands of years.

Many people still travel to indigenous cultures to learn ceremonies that have been passed down through the generations, and it is quite wonderful to witness these ceremonies, but my interest has been to

design ceremonies to meet the current issues we all face living in a modern world. I am devoted to bridging ancient shamanic practices with our modern culture, making them applicable to the issues we face today.

In the last few years, my work has evolved to leading powerful virtual ceremonies in which groups of people from around the world gather in the unseen realms to perform ceremonies of healing and blessings for the group and for the planet.

HOW TO WORK WITH THIS BOOK

In *The Book of Ceremony*, I share with you what I have learned over the years, and I hope to inspire you with the many ways you can lead healing and blessing ceremonies. This work is meant to serve your personal healing and growth, and to also be shared with loved ones, friends, coworkers, and eventually with the community you live in.

As my work with ceremony evolved, I was invited to work with diverse communities that had different spiritual and religious beliefs. I found that people will dive in and participate fully in performing a ceremony if the work is explained in an accessible way. We need to use vocabulary that opens people up to the power of love and support without burdening anyone or pushing them away with shamanic principles or terminology that prevent them from engaging fully.

The Book of Ceremony is written for practitioners of shamanism as well as those who have no experience with the practice. With ceremonial work, the key is being willing to open your heart and pray for yourself and others. The helping spirits, the power of the universe, God, the goddess, or whatever numinous spiritual forces you believe in are waiting to help create healing, transformation, and positive change in all our lives and for the Earth. The ceremonies shared can also empower any social activism work you are engaged in.

I also include ceremonies for more experienced shamanic practitioners. As you read the book and work with material on your own, you will know which ceremonies you wish to engage in (or adapt to fit your needs) and which ceremonies hold no interest for you.

Although the ceremonies in the book are not advanced, one could argue about what an “advanced” ceremony is. The truth is that we are facing multiple challenges on the planet. By performing simple ceremonies, we can dissolve collective negative energies such as hate and fear. We do this by engaging our own divine energy and partnering with the divine in the nonordinary realms.

At a time when people are looking for more advanced ceremonies to perform, we need to step back and perform ceremonies that help us to discover who we are as humans and to treat all of life with respect and honor. Destabilizing changes propel us into a higher state of consciousness, which can be attained more gracefully through ceremonial work.

The Book of Ceremony was written to guide you in adapting the ancient art of using ceremony for healing and creating your soul’s desires. Please note that the helping spirits will work as partners *with* you—they will not do your personal work *for* you. Spiritual work must be integrated into each person’s daily life. It is not enough to perform a beautiful ceremony to create peace. You must commit to your own work to create a landscape of peace within yourself and express peace in your daily actions and choices.

For example, throughout the book I will speak about “expressing,” “sending,” “transmuting,” and “transforming.” (I use the words “transmute” and “transform” interchangeably.) We were born to have the full experience of being human. It is critical for our health and well-being to express our feelings, from the joyful states we feel to our feelings of fear, anger, and hate.

At the same time, we don’t want to send negative energies into the world to feed more disharmonious states. In the practice of shamanism, we teach the importance of honoring our feelings and expressing them in a healthy way to ourselves and others. Then the next step is to transmute or transform the energy behind our emotions into energies of love and light that feed us and the planet with healthy, harmonious, loving, and peaceful energies. The energies we feed are the ones that grow.

Think of expressing your feelings as discharging some of the challenging energy you are holding in your body. Hold the intention of asking your inner divine to transform the energy you are feeling to a

nourishing vibration of love and light radiating throughout the entire web of life. I do this by repeating a prayer: “May all the energy behind my negative emotions be transformed to love and light.”

In the chapters that follow, I share how to perform ceremonies to release an emotional block or hurt into the elements of earth, air, water, or fire. Please remember to repeat a prayer like the one shared here so that all is transformed into loving and light-filled energies nurturing life.

I will continue to encourage you to leave your ordinary and burdening thoughts behind, so you are not anchored to this ordinary realm while performing your ceremonies. Please understand that I am not asking you to deny your feelings. I share a lot of tools on how to transform your energy in my book *Walking in Light: The Everyday Empowerment of a Shamanic Life*.

I am passionate about creating a strong, spiritual global community. Throughout the book, I invite you into the global community that is joining together to be in service to all of life and the Earth.

I tend to use gardening terms as a metaphor for our inner and outer life. We must plant the seeds in our inner and outer life that we want to see grow, cultivate our dreams, and harvest the plants from the result of our ceremonial work. With our intentions for our ceremonies, we plant spiritual seeds in our inner landscape—the garden that lives within us. And what we feed, grows.

When we perform ceremonies, we are immersed in nature’s cycles of exploring the shadow and the light, death and rebirth. This is necessary for us to attune to our nature and how we grow, evolve, transform, and heal.

Many today are working with ceremony to acknowledge the spirit of the land they live on and the trees, plants, animals, and other life-forms that live in their locale. Groups of people are gathering to perform ceremonies welcoming new seasons and honoring the change in the phases of the moon. This helps us reconnect with nature, bringing a deeper relationship with the land we live on, and a return to emotional and physical health and balance.

Ceremonies are being performed to support a move and bless a new house or apartment. In this way, we establish a harmonious

relationship with the home we live in, creating a feeling of comfort and safety. People connect with the power of the universe to help find a new job, creating more meaningful work—not just a job that supports pure financial survival. Ceremonies are used to bless changes and transitions in life.

People are turning to ceremonies to ask for a positive outcome when moving through life changes, to honor the environment, and to ask for help during extreme climate changes.

More people are willing to introduce loved ones, friends, and coworkers to ceremonies to be performed together to create stronger and healthier relationships.

Through opening our hearts to all the possibilities that life has to offer and being willing to stretch our imaginations, we find that there are a wealth of ceremonies we can use to unburden ourselves from our past hurts, traumas, and self-sabotaging beliefs, moving us into a place where we feel a deeper relationship with life and why we are here.

We will still face challenges in our work, and these experiences help us grow toward our authentic natures. Being part of the status quo is not why we are here. We are here to manifest our passions and to grow. We need to stretch beyond the limiting beliefs that society places on us.

Today, many alternative healing traditions teach about neuroplasticity. This scientific knowledge shows how flexible the brain is and how we can create new neuropathways through positive thinking to help us recover from emotional and physical illnesses.

Shamans were the first people to teach about neuroplasticity. But they did not teach about positive thinking. Instead, they taught that the words, thoughts, and daydreams we focus on throughout the day can either bless or curse us and others.

One way to work with neuroplasticity is to maintain a state of gratitude and positive thoughts, feelings, and memories. We give attention to what is working in our lives instead of what does not work. We are encouraged to use our imagination to help the brain manifest a state of physical and emotional well-being. Working with gratitude and holding a positive vision are key principles in living shamanism as a way of life.

When we perform ceremonies, we transform the negative thoughts and states of consciousness burdening us. We can then use ceremony to ground and manifest the thoughts and dreams we do want to create in our life. Ceremony impacts us deeply on a subconscious level, creating positive change.

In the world of shamanism, everything that exists on the planet is connected to a web of life as one living organism. You can think of this web like your body. You are made up of multiple organs and cells, each of which affects your health, and each of which is impacted by your words, thoughts, and energy. In the same way, the web of life is a weaving of living creatures who all contribute to, are impacted by, and are energetically reshaped by our intentions, thoughts, words, daydreams, and states of consciousness. You can create positive outcomes for all in the web of life by bringing the sacred into your everyday life with ceremony. If you perform one powerful and successful ceremony for yourself, the principle of oneness ensures that all of life heals and evolves from the work you did. For all of life is connected—and in shamanism, where unity consciousness pervades the work, all minds are connected.

Despite the appearance of separation and conflict, we face the deeper truth that we are part of an interconnected web of life. This connects us to the matrix of life itself. Although we all have a unique energetic signature, we are part of one living, breathing organism.

You will learn specific details about designing ceremonies in *The Book of Ceremony*. I offer examples of many types of ceremonies that I, my students, or my peers have designed, participated in, witnessed, or heard about. I have changed some of the details to respect the privacy of the people involved. Let these examples stimulate your imagination to design ceremonies that speak to your needs and the needs of your community. By developing your own unique ceremonies, you bring a freshness and aliveness into your ceremonial work, fueling the power of the results of your work.

In the practice of shamanism, every word, thought, and daydream is an energetic vibration that can be sculpted into form. In the universe, there is mostly formlessness. In shamanism, we can work with