

The Native American Sweat Lodge – Part 2 of 2 ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Yes, a stone axe is in some sense more primitive than a steel axe.

00:00:13 So I guess the assumption among the Europeans when they came to the Americas was, well,

00:00:22 their axes are more primitive than ours, therefore their consciousness must be more primitive

00:00:27 than ours.

00:00:29 And once you've participated in their ceremony, you don't know whether to laugh or cry at

00:00:35 that notion, because it is so deep and so subtle.

00:00:40 On the surface, it's a prayer ceremony.

00:00:44 It's also a physical cleansing.

00:00:47 It's also a shared group's sort of group therapy, because people talk and their defenses are

00:00:56 down.

00:00:58 It is a shamanic journey into the power realms, because of the altered states that you may

00:01:05 enter.

00:01:07 At a deeper level, it is purification of consciousness through having equanimity with strong sensations,

00:01:16 both physical and emotional sensations come up.

00:01:20 And within the context of the ceremony, the ceremony induces a mindful state, and therefore

00:01:29 consciousness is purified.

00:01:31 Purification equals sensation multiplied by equanimity fits in my model perfectly.

00:01:37 So that's at a very deep level.

00:01:40 And at the deepest level, it's an experience of the flow of nature in terms of the fundamental

00:01:50 forces of expansion and contraction.

00:01:53 They may use different words.

00:01:54 They use father sky, mother earth, or they talk about the bowl of the pipe versus the

00:02:04 stem of the pipe, the earth versus the tree.

00:02:09 But everything is built on an interplay of a flow of affirmation and negation.

00:02:18 I've even heard native people talk about yin and yang, actually use those

words in the

00:02:25 ceremonies because of their education, that they've learned of concepts from East Asia

00:02:32 and so forth and see how they map on.

00:02:35 In fact, the word inipi in the Lakota language, I said it means a tool for life, but the stem

00:02:42 ni in Lakota, Lakota, if you're not familiar with the term, is the Western Sioux.

00:02:50 Ni means life, but it also means breath, and it also means the sort of flowing energy of

00:03:01 spirit that would be vibrating, expanding, contracting, and so forth.

00:03:08 So the whole ceremony is built around merging with the fundamental flow of the expansive

00:03:17 sky and the contractive earth and the vibrating energy that's born in between them.

00:03:26 So it's the essence of mindfulness practice as I understand it.

00:03:33 And on top of that, it's fun.

00:03:38 It's colorful.

00:03:40 It's shared with a group.

00:03:42 Buddhist practice is sort of, well, I mean, there's the subtle sharing that happens on

00:03:47 a silent retreat, but it's sort of like silent, you're with yourself.

00:03:51 This is not a subtle sharing.

00:03:53 You're singing.

00:03:54 You're like really singing, okay?

00:03:57 And people are crying and people are saying things because their defenses are down, and

00:04:03 then everybody is affirming them.

00:04:05 They're saying, that's good.

00:04:06 Yeah, that brother, good.

00:04:09 It's like this shared support structure that you have.

00:04:15 It's very communal.

00:04:17 So it makes the perfect complement to the Buddhist practice.

00:04:21 The Buddhist practice gives you systematic techniques for doing things.

00:04:26 They don't have those systematic techniques because they don't need those systematic techniques.

00:04:31 They just do these ceremonies.

00:04:32 They don't have the concepts of purification equals plain plus equanimity, multiplied by

00:04:41 clarity, et cetera.

00:04:43 They just do the ceremonies, okay?

00:04:45 They don't need the terminology.

00:04:48 They don't have to have a philosophical system about the fundamental oneness of things.

00:04:55 They just say, all my relations, okay?

00:04:59 And that sums it all up, okay?

00:05:01 We're all related.

00:05:03 It's like, oh, so this is what they mean by primitive religion, okay?

00:05:06 In other words, this so-called primitive religion is really subtle, multi-layered, goes down

00:05:13 to the deepest, from the most surface to the deepest in a single integrated ceremony.

00:05:21 It's like so impressive as a spiritual vehicle.

00:05:26 So I knew this is for me.

00:05:29 It was 27 years ago, and it's been true.

00:05:32 I've been doing these ceremonies with native people wherever I can, wherever I run a retreat,

00:05:40 when there is someone that can do it in the traditional way, I make it available for our

00:05:48 retreatants.

00:05:49 My metaphor is that for me, the Buddhist practice will always be the cake, sort of the substance,

00:05:57 but I like a little frosting on my cake.

00:05:59 And the Native American ceremonies in general, specifically the sweat lodge, represents that

00:06:08 frosting on the cake for me.