

## TALES FROM A SHAMAN: PART 2

Authentic shamanism is very rare. Unless there is tangible spiritual activity, practitioners are just going through the motions in hopes of experiencing anything spiritual or genuine in nature. As seen when the spiritual realm physically crosses over to the earth realm. For example, orbs, ghosts, demonic infestation, demonic possessions, entities, and interactive ceremony and ritual. In ‘Tales from a Shaman,’ I will share such crossovers and paranormal/supernatural events. Any modern-day shaman can fake paranormal activity, or share a ritual, whether fake or authentic; but rarely do real paranormal events ever occur. I can tell the difference between authentic shamanism and snake oil, ‘plastic shaman.’ I was raised around authentic spiritual paranormal activity. The spirit beings made their presence known, as well as performing phenomena such as healings, teleportation, spirit-travel, physical manifestations in the Earth realm, and producing visions.

### THE SUNDANCE VISION

A sun dance is a very sacred and ancient Native American ritual and rite of passage. It involves prayer, fasting, worship, endurance, and sacrifice—which most often involves blood offerings; referred to as ‘*flesh offerings*.’ The participants are clothed in red cloth, and typically carry eagle whistles and eagle wings. They dance in a circle from sunrise to sunset, while drummers and singers chant sacred songs, the participants dance around a very tall tree, which is at the center of the ceremony grounds. The tree is reminiscent of the *Tree of Life* or *World Tree* in mythology. The tree is said to be linked to the cosmos; more precisely, the spirit road of life. The tree is outfitted with multiple ropes which represent our umbilical cord and our attachment to our mother’s womb.

At the end of the four-day ritual, these ropes are attached to a piece called a *harness*, which is used to connect to choke cherry *pegs*, which are pierced through the flesh of the upper chest of the participant. The *pegs* are very strong and are fashioned like small stakes, pointed on each end—the flesh of the chest is stretched until it is broken, which can be quick or very painful and difficult to break. This is part of honoring your mother and the pain of childbirth, which also connects you to the spirit road—very necessary for the departure of one’s journey after death. Of course, there is much more to this deeply respected and sacred ceremony, which requires much preparation and is held on an annual basis. This is not ‘sun’

worship, but a show of faith and sacrifice to the Creator. Lakota Chief, Sitting Bull, was known to take part in Sun Dance ceremonies.

It was my first time participating in a sun dance ceremony, and I was very excited; there was much to learn, and this was believed to bring great blessings. I was also required to attend this rite a minimum of four times in total. Most of the participants and their families and/or supporters initially set up camps outside the ceremony grounds, myself included and were to only sleep within the ‘sun dance compound’ once the ceremony began. There was such an eclectic diversity of people, from different tribes, backgrounds, non-Native Americans included, arriving from all over the U.S., Canada, and South America. It was incredible to see the surrounding encampment of teepees and tents, and the multitude of rising pillars of campfire smoke. The aroma filled me with memories of childhood, growing up around woodstoves, and spending evenings by the fire. I was surrounded by so many people but was still burdened with a deep loneliness; perhaps for *home* and days of my youth, reminiscing of loved ones who have passed on, such as my mother. I was the only camp without a fire.

A lot of preparation went in to setting up the sun dance grounds, especially the large fencing of the sun dancer’s compound, which resembled old trading fort walls. There was a large teepee assembled within, where we would all stay once the sun dance began—resting after a day of dancing, once the sun set. A sweat lodge was also set up, for the daily purification ceremony. It felt like you were in another world and time.

A lot of new friendships were made, and camaraderie was abound, as we all took part with the ceremony preparations including our own individual tasks—which involved making numerous tobacco offerings, called *tobacco ties*, and constructing our red cloth garments. Gathering firewood for the sun dance took longer than anticipated, as the Medicine Man only preferred one type of tree; frustrating yet amusing that I spent all day scouring the terrain for this specific tree, and I can’t even remember the name. The most crucial and revered task of preparation involved the quest to locate a straight, towering tree, worthy enough to become the monumental center sun dance pole. This took half the day, not including the heavy lifting back to the sun dance grounds. It was surreal to watch dozens of men carrying the massive tree through the forest, to bring back to the camp. Offerings such as food, tobacco, cloth, and ribbon, were

then placed inside the pit dug for the tree base. The group attached the main ropes to the tree and hoisted into the pit where it was secured. The participants, aka sun dancers, started attaching their previously prepared offerings such as tobacco ties to the tree.

This is when I learned about *flesh offerings*—interested participants would have small circular cuts of skin carved from their body with a scalpel, mainly the shoulders, which was then placed in a red cloth and attached to the center tree. I refrained from this practice, but I watched as several people lined up in front of the head Medicine Man to carry out this ritual practice. It was viewed as a very blessed, unique, and meaningful sacrifice, as only *you* could give parts of yourself—hence the flesh offering, eerily reminiscent of a blood offering.

The ceremony camp was located in a beautiful Montana forest, and very remote and private. I loved being outside surrounded by nature, far from the stress and responsibilities of life—especially far from any reminders. When I had free time, I would walk along forest trails, listening to the sound of the flowing creek nearby, the wind flowing through the trees, accompanied by the surrounding sounds of bird song. I enjoyed the solitude of sitting in my tent alone in the evening, sometimes laying halfway out to gaze up at the stars. I recall one Elder telling me that once the ritual begins, your spirit leaves, ascending towards the cosmos, and enters the spirit road via the sun dance tree; returning on the fourth day when the ceremony has concluded. This was very intriguing, and this information would be key in understanding the vision soon to come.

On the eve prior to the first day of the sun dance ceremony, all of us participants moved into the sun dance compound, secured our individual rest areas, and rolled out our sleeping bags; this would be our home for the next four days. You could discern the excitement, anxiety, and restlessness from amongst the several groups, young and old, including the odd solo participant in deep thought—perhaps praying for much needed blessings and strength. I was excited for the ceremony to begin—I desperately needed powerful prayers and blessings, and this was the way.

The morning was abuzz with excitement and preparation. We gathered for the morning sweatlodge, which was very crowded—the body heat alone would be sufficient for heat. Afterwards we formed a circle around the Sun Dance tree. The Medicine Man finished his ritual prayers, and the drums and chanting began. We all started dancing in a circle, eagle wing fans shaking, and our eagle whistles were blowing in harmony with the

drums. It was a magical scene of warriors dressed in red, dancing in unison. We danced until sunset, attended the evening sweatlodge, then rested to preserve our strength for the next three days of the sun dance.

By the third day of the sun dance, many of the participants were exhausted and moving very slowly. You could see the suffering on their faces and hunched postures. Yet not one person gave up. Surprisingly I was dancing very energetically, feeling rejuvenated by the day, as if the sun was powering me. I felt blessed. My energy level was noticed by one of the elders, who commented saying my prayers must be sincere and humble. It was a powerful blessing.

The fourth day was filled with anxiety and fear as this was the day we were to be connected to the tree and were to stretch our flesh from our chest until it tore; in what was referred to as *breaking*. The rope represented the umbilical cord, with the entire experience symbolizing the pain of childbirth—honoring your mother. I watched as each participant's chest was sliced with a scalpel to form two small slits on each side of the chest, allowing a choke cherry *peg* to be inserted through each slit. It was painful to watch, and even more painful to experience. Many of the participants were in tears, which did not help. It was almost my turn, my heart started to race. The Medicine Man pinched the flesh of my chest, proceeded to slice through each end with a scalpel, he then inserted the peg through the opening. It was surreal and excruciating, and I couldn't help but remember that this was to be repeated a minimum of four times in one's life. We all stood in a large circle, blood streaming down our chests, anticipating the next part of the ritual; the breaking.

I watched as each participant was called forward by the Medicine Man, whose helper attached the rope to the pegs in their chests using a harness. They walked slowly backwards stretching the skin as far as it would go, it was amazing to witness how far the flesh would stretch, perhaps around 8 inches. They touched the tree four times, each time stretching their skin as they walked backwards away from the tree. After the fourth repetition, they were given the signal to finally break the skin, tearing the pegs out of their chests. Some men struggled, the skin would not break, they were in pain, sobbing, as they leaned backwards tugging as hard as they could. It was said the skin would not break due to certain personal spiritual issues, and even insincerity or pride. The people who struggled were allowed to receive help in tearing their pegs, as their family members assisted them, pulling them backwards.

It was finally my turn, I prayed to the Creator, and proceeded in the ritual. I touched the tree four times and waited for my signal to break free. The Medicine Man gave me the signal. I started to lean back, stretching my skin. It was painful to experience, and surreal to see my flesh pulled unnaturally far out from my body. When I felt my flesh reach its maximum stretch, I pulled back a sudden jerk; I felt my skin snap violently, releasing the pegs into the air. I was relieved that it was quick and that I did not have to struggle—that was my biggest fear. The Medicine Man came forward with his scalpel, and proceeded to slice my chest wound, giving it a clean cut. He collected my torn flesh in a red cloth and offered it to the tree. My wounds were then treated with natural medicines. My body started to throb in even greater pain as my adrenaline rush subsided. There was great love and support from the participants and the families in attendance. We all endured this sacred ceremony together.

After the ceremony we were allowed to eat and drink water. Watermelon was served to rehydrate and break the fast—it was the best watermelon ever. I was relieved to go back to my camp and rest in my tent. I was exhausted and still in pain. I fell asleep early that evening.

## THE SUN DANCE VISION

I found myself hovering in the air above my tent. I looked below me and noticed I was tethered from a cord coming out of my navel. It led through the top of my tent and anchored inside. *It must be attached to my body. Is this an out of body experience?* It was still evening and there was a strange yellow glow in the sky. I felt a cool wind blowing all around me. I looked around my surroundings and noticed I was still at the campground and there were others tethered to their bodies! The other men were all hovering over their tents, fast asleep, except for one individual who looked visibly confused and in terror.

I then noticed that right in front of me, in a distance towards the east, was a gigantic sparkling tree, with a height reaching far above into the night sky. The tree was glowing with a bright yellow, its bark was outlined with multiple glowing lines, and wandering lights that flowed along the tree in opposite directions; they resembled stars. It was as if the lines of the tree were being used as highways by these orbs. It was as if I was viewing the sun dance tree for how it spiritually appears and what it represents—the World Tree. It was beautiful and sacred. I knew this was a vision, and it felt powerful. I was in awe of its sheer enormity.

Above the treetop was what looked like a *cosmic highway*. Millions of beings and stars were traveling along the highway surrounded by the heavens. *Was this the spirit road? Is my spirit on that road traveling to return to my body?* I remembered what the elder had said to me. I watched as the tree itself sparkled with traveling spirits bound for the cosmic highway stretching across the heavens.

From the corner of my eye, I spotted one of the hovering bodies across from me, suddenly get yanked down back inside their tent. One by one, each body proceeded to shoot downwards, disappearing into their tents. *Perhaps they were returning to their physical bodies?* The spectacle was becoming alarmingly closer. *It was eventually going to be my turn!* I braced myself. I felt myself suddenly get yanked downwards, my head snapped backwards, and I felt my *spirit* slam back inside of my body. My physical body shook with force as if it hit the ground. I woke immediately and sat upwards. *Wow! This could not be a vision. This was happening in real time. I just witnessed the return of the souls after the sun dance ceremony.* I could not stop thinking of what I had just witnessed, as well as experienced. It was sacred, magical, and very real.

#### THE RETURN: BACK TO REALITY

The ceremony experience was incredible and very meaningful. I felt a great accomplishment and humility. I felt my prayers were answered by the Creator. I never did return to this site, nor did I ever join this Medicine Man and his faithful followers again. I did not feel comfortable with their cult-like activity and creepy behaviors. I found myself questioning their motives and their strange devotion to their leader. In the end, I practically had to escape with the help of a friend. I got in his vehicle, watched the group turn right, we turned left, and I told my friend to step on the gas pedal until we were way out of sight. My experiences with this group itself is an adventure and a tale for the future.