

Six Crows Temple Sweat Lodge Ceremony Q & A

Reminder of Things to Bring

Sweat lodge apparel and two towels

Drums and rattles etc.

Tobacco for the Sweat Lodge facilitator

If you like, small gifts for the facilitator and fire tender

Items to place on the altar for blessing

A dish to share at feast following the sweat

A rock or two to add to the reserves

An open mind and a helpful heart

Directions to Six Crows Temple: From Muskegon, take US 31 North and go East on M120 for 9 miles (2 miles past the blinking light in Twin Lake). Turn north (left) onto Ewing Road and follow it for 1.2 miles. (Note that Ewing becomes Hart Road at the first bend.) Six Crows is at 3646 Hart Road, Twin Lake.

Email info@sixcrows.org; Phone 231.828.5030

How much does it cost? There is never a charge to participate in sacred ceremonies or programs at Six Crows Temple. We are a not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to sharing sacred space in community, and promoting Oneness among all our "relations". Donations to help cover costs are gratefully accepted, but not requested or expected.

What is expected of me? In my teachings, the preparation of the fire and lodge are part of the Sacred Sweat Lodge Ceremony. Those who are sharing in ceremony partake in the building of the Sacred Fire and the preparation of the Sweat Lodge. Demeanor is solemn as we do our work, for we are preparing ourselves for mystical experience. When preparation is complete, we move deeper into personal preparation as we sing and drum and connect with the Sacred Fire and the state of our own being. Finally, we move into silence in reverence and anticipation for the mystical experience that is imminent. In this light, we ask that you make every effort to arrive in advance of the announced program so there is time for greetings and settling in before we begin to build the ceremony.

Do I have to take classes before I can take part? No. Unless specified for a program requiring certain skill levels, no advance teachings are ever required for the sharing of ceremonies or rituals held at Six Crows Temple. Questions are invited and explanations provided, and we learn as we go.

How do I dress in the presence of the Sacred Fire? In the ways of my teachings, the women wear long dresses or skirts, and perhaps also shawls, and the men wear long pants. This is done as a show of reverence and humility before the Great Spirit, and to recognize sacred space, and to switch the mindset as we enter into sacred space. This is comparable to a Hindu person removing their shoes before entering a temple, or a woman wearing a mantilla (veil) during Catholic mass, or even a man removing his hat for the National Anthem.

How do I dress to enter the lodge? At Six Crows, we do occasionally sweat naked when it's our core group, who do not have issue with nudity. In this case, it is done with modesty. We disrobe privately and enter the lodge wrapped in a towel, women settling in first, and leaving first after the ceremony. When there are newcomers, or if anyone is not comfortable with nudity, we wear light clothing, the men shorts or trunks, the ladies something like a light cotton dress, nothing clinging or form fitting. Always bring something to wear in case it is needed. It is also helpful to bring two towels, one to wear into the lodge and one to wipe off with afterward.

What is the Tobacco for? People in cultures and religious traditions all over the world have used herbs in sacred ceremony since long before recorded history. In fact, you will find quite a bit of intricate direction on the use of herbs in relation to the Arc of the Covenant in the Old Testament. Frankincense was burned by Babylonians and other ancient civilizations for its healing properties and to communicate with the gods. The Catholic Church still uses sweet-smelling frankincense to bless items and congregants, as an offering to God, and to symbolize prayers rising to heaven. There are four primary herbs used by most Sweat Lodge facilitators: tobacco, whose smoke when burned, takes our prayers

directly to Great Spirit; sage, to cleanse body, mind, heart, and spirit; sweet grass, for the pleasure of Great Spirit and to attract favorable spirits; and cedar for protection against unfavorable spirits. When you attend Sweat Lodge Ceremony, you are in effect asking the facilitator to pray for you and to hold space for you, and to guide you through the “rebirthing” process, which is the purpose of a Sweat Lodge Ceremony. It is therefore traditional to bring an offering of tobacco to the facilitator as a formal request for these services. It is also acceptable to bring any other herb, or any other token of appreciation for both the facilitator and the fire tender as a way of honoring the energies they are expending on your behalf.

What do you mean by fasting? Fasting for Sweat Lodge Ceremony is no food whatsoever for 24 hours prior to entering the lodge (that’s why we feast after the sweat). If you cannot fast for 24 hours, do what you can, and if you can't fast at all, that's ok, and it certainly doesn't mean you won't get connected. In any case, you are encouraged to drink plenty of water. A sweat lodge ceremony will draw out more toxins than days of peeing. Your purpose in attending a Sweat Lodge Ceremony is to cleanse spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. Because the first toxins to leave are the last to arrive, we have to do more to go deeper. Fasting lets the sweating process reach deeper to expel old toxins, including copper, lead, zinc, mercury, excessive salts, urea, and lactic acid responsible for stiff muscles and fatigue. Also, if your digestive system is not busy, there is less for your body to focus on and distract your mind with, as you strive to connect beyond the physical plane. And finally, any adept will tell you that the best ways to promote trance state and thereby vision (besides drugs) are fasting, exhaustion, and ritual.

What position is expected in the lodge? The only time position is relevant during a Sweat Lodge Ceremony is when the grandfathers and grandmothers (the rock people) are arriving. As each one is brought in, we position ourselves on our knees if we are able as a sign of honor for our ancestors (for the rocks are our “mother's” oldest children), which are sacrificing their lives for our physical wellbeing and spiritual growth. At all other times we sit, stretch out, or lie down according to preference and comfort.

Can I leave if I can't take it? Yes. Some traditions require that participants wait for the door to open at the end of the round (there are four rounds), and often do not allow reentry. At Six Crows, we ask you to try to wait for the door but we stress that if you feel like you cannot wait, that you ask for the door and it will be opened immediately. If you wish to return, you may do so at the next door. At Six Crows, we do not conduct warrior sweats, which are too hot for most people to endure, and may not be safe. There is no shame in not staying for all four rounds. Great Spirit knows that we are all exactly where we're supposed to be. I once received one of the most meaningful teachings of my life when I got out of a lodge early and thereby had the opportunity to sit with a wise fire tender, quietly holding vigil for those still inside. If you do go out early, just remember the reverence. Your energies are still a part of the whole.

What is the Altar and what is its use? A small altar mound sits directly in front of the lodge and between the fire and the lodge. This mound is formed from the contents of the pit that was dug out in the center of the lodge to accommodate the rock people. It sits in direct line between the fire and the lodge, considered a power area. Bring items that may “help” you in the lodge, or items you wish blessed to place on the altar during the sweat. The altar is also where you place your gifts to the facilitator and fire tender, and is used by the facilitator for his or her “tools”.

What are Prayer Ties? There might be something or someone needing a lot of attention, help, or healing. Put a pinch of tobacco into a small red cotton square and tie it up with a strip of the cotton while “praying” in your way and “putting” your prayers into the prayer tie. Then bring it to the Sacred Fire, a powerful place to put a serious prayer.

What happens inside? There are many ways and no wrong way. It is the intent that makes the ceremony sacred. Most Sweat Lodge Ceremonies are four rounds, meaning the door is opened and more grandfathers and grandmothers brought in and added to the pit four times. Water is poured over the hot rocks to create steam during each round. Each round usually has a theme, often following along the teachings of the directions and elements. There is often singing and rattling and perhaps drumming, sometimes storytelling, meditation, prayer, and silence. Every Sweat Lodge facilitator develops his or her own style, and will generally guide participants through each round.

Yours in service,
Red Spider Weaving