

One String of Beads

A newsletter for the spiritually aware

New Year 2016

Volume I: Issue I

Happy New Year!

A Note from the Editor



Ah, the new beginnings that each new year bring ... there is something magical about those times that feel

The Burning Bowl

One interesting custom many people practice on New Year's Eve is the Burning Bowl. From Native American, Pagan, Reiki, and many Christian traditions, this ceremony promotes introspection, and supports the idea that people can leave behind those things that no longer serve them while embracing the New Year as an opportunity to begin fresh. Native

Americans look to the North, that direction within the Medicine Wheel that



fresh and new, filled with promise and possibilities!

While I rarely make resolutions, each New Year's observance offers me a time for introspection and formulation of future plans.

The book should be available for purchase, in print or eReader versions, at the end of January 2016. For the most up to date information, check our Facebook page or visit our website at www.OneStringOfBeads.com.

Happy New Year!

encourages people to look within, to release the old self and make space for new beginnings.

The ritual involves writing things one wants to release – such as old habits, sadness, worry – as well as wishes for the new year on slips of paper, which are then thought of as prayers. The bits of paper are placed into a fire – often a bowl. When they are ignited, the prayers turn to smoke and are believed to carry the prayers to God/ Creator, thus releasing old patterns and clearing the way for spiritual growth.

Rumi wrote, "There is a place where words are born of silence, A place where the whispers of the heart arise." Whatever your New Year customs involve, may love and peace be a part of them, and may you have every joy in the coming year!

Breaking News!

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The book is on its way to the publisher, and should be released in around the end of January - stay tuned for updates!

Look for *One String of Beads* in your local bookstore, and in on-line outlets such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

The eNewsletter will be published about every three months, and will contain more stories, interviews, and pictures related to *One String of Beads*.

Those who sign up for our eNewsletter will also receive additional material and access to more content on our website, as well as future updates, information, and valuable coupons. Head to www.onestringofbeads.com for more information and to sign up.

The Long Dance

September 2015
Sweet Beautiful Waters Peace Chamber
Tucson, AZ

By Elizabeth ("Chance") Diebold



Originally coined by 19th century anthropologists, the term "vision quest" is often used to describe a ceremony undertaken to find spiritual guidance and purpose. It is said that practicing a vision quest can provide a deep understanding of one's life purpose, and thus is often used as a rite of passage in many native cultures throughout the Americas. These ceremonies are both personal, as the vision quest usually involves individual solitary time, and collective, as they are guided and witnessed within a community.

Over the years, the vision quest has become a general term, and includes the customs and traditions of many cultures. These rites offer a powerful way for people to celebrate important life traditions, to acknowledge, mourn, release, and welcome all that life encompasses, both in sorrow and in celebration. It can bring people together, or offer a cathartic way for individuals to recharge and reconnect with their own spirituality.

The specifics and length of a vision quest vary among groups and cultures, and generally involve culturally ritualized events. Most take place over the course of a week, and include cleansing and purification (usually a sweat lodge), fasting, being alone in the wilderness, and re-integration. It takes real effort, but it seems that most

humans inherently understand the importance of this kind of work, and many are willing to spend the time and energy necessary to participate.

The Long Dance is done over a weekend, the actual ceremony beginning at dusk on Saturday and ending as the sun rises on Sunday morning. Much like the vision quest, the Long Dance ceremony is a deeply personal community ceremony, in which people participate for a myriad of reasons. It offers a unique opportunity to address challenges, and to use a renewed connection to Spirit and sacred initiations to implement change, find clarity insight, and revelation, and further personal growth.

Both the vision quest and Long Dance begin with mindful preparation, in which the participant is readied to physically, mentally, and spiritually benefit from the event. For the Long Dance, this means thoughtfully setting personal, community, and global intentions, then weaving these intentions into a banner that will represent them at the gathering.

Pouches of tobacco must be



Prayer Ties

secured as gifts for Long Dance facilitators. Tobacco is one of the four sacred plants, given to humans by the Spirits of the Four Directions. The others are sage, sweetgrass, and cedar. Tobacco represents the East and the mind, and is said to connect the worlds through its deep roots and high-drifting smoke. It is often offered as a gift to event leaders, teachers, or others to whom homage is paid. When used in ceremony, tobacco is said to invoke a relationship with the energies of the universe, and ultimately with the Creator, bonds that cannot be broken.

Tobacco is also tied into small bundles along a single string, known collectively as prayer ties. Brightly colored squares of cloth are wrapped around a pinch of tobacco as a prayer of hope or intention is placed inside, hence the name. Traditionally, the fabric scraps are in the colors of the four directions, thus honoring each one in turn. Yellow for the east, representing the daily rebirth that comes with the rising sun. Red represents the south, for the physical aspects of life. Black is for the west, representing maturity, while white stands for the north, for the ancestors and for Spirit. A staunch believer in fluidity in my traditions, to my own sixty prayer ties I added blue to represent healing energy and life-giving water, purple for Creator and the ancient ones, and green to represent Mother Earth and all creations.

The Long Dance is said to begin with a commitment to attend, usually several months ahead of time, during which the preparation occurs. Sixty prayer ties are tied. The introductory banner is made, to be hung behind each dancer's resting spot around the ceremonial circle as well as to each dancer's intentions for the ceremony. I labored over my banner for more than a week, sewing and gluing and painting a 2'x4' rendition of a large tree (representing my life) filled with leaves and topped with flowers, with many little eyes peeking out from under its boughs (representing all of those who have watched over me throughout the years). As I worked, I thought about my intention ... what did I want to get out of the Long Dance experience? Long ago, I let go of expectations for any event. Expectations, I have found, limit me, and when they guide my experience, cause me to miss those serendipitous encounters that inevitably arise along the way. Intention, on the other hand, is something I see as my part to play, my participation. In the Long Dance, my intention was to participate fully and to wring everything out of the experience as was possible.



The drive from

Albuquerque to Tucson is a long one, but a beautiful entry into this unique spiritual ritual. With some years living in AZ, I was well acquainted with the Sonoran desert, but had forgotten how much I loved its vast beauty. What a fitting spot for the Long Dance.

Saturday morning, the group of sixteen dancers, one Dance Chief, two Chief trainees, and a firekeeper enjoyed some time to visit and prepare resting space in the Long Dance arena and sleeping quarters nearby. Next, we began making preparations for the first event of the day: The sweat lodge, which is often used prior to many Native American-inspired sacred ceremonies, such as the vision quest and Long Dance, as a means of cleansing and purification. This lodge is a permanent *wickiup*, with blankets spread over a wood frame, floor swept clean and swathed in soft quilts, and a sacred fire burning just outside of the east-facing door. Nearly everything is significant, and facing east represents the new spiritual beginning that is the basis of the sweat lodge ceremony. Each person is first bathed in the smoke of dried sage, a smudging meant to purify the spirit. Participants enter the sweat lodge on hands and



Sweet Beautiful Waters Peace Chamber

knees, bowing in respect to the Great Spirit. Red-hot stones from the sacred fire, which represent the undying light of the world, are placed in the central pit, then the door is pulled closed. This is a time of great fear for some, for whom the darkness and enclosure can be claustrophobic. For me, it feels like a safe cocoon, a place to mature and grow without outside interference. I find these first quiet moments calming and soothing, like a baby in swaddle. Any vision quest offers an opportunity to reconnect to nature, a connection that is widely recognized as having many health benefits. Research has shown that people with a deep connection to the natural world suffer less stress and enjoy a greater sense of competence and self-esteem. In our fast-paced world, it can be easy to lose this connection, and for me, the sweat lodge was a perfect time to reconnect and rebalance.

A prayer begins the sweat lodge ceremony, calling forth ancestors and the Divine. The hot rocks were sprinkled with herbs, first sage, then sweetgrass and lavender, and dippers full of water were dribbled on them, causing wafts of steam rise into the air. The sweat lodge is a time for participants to turn within, to heal mind and body, to seek answers from the Divine, to ready themselves for what comes next with an open heart, mind, and spirit.

After the sweat lodge ceremony, the group gathered in the Sweet Beautiful Waters Peace Chamber (much like a traditional Hogan) to cool off and enjoy water and watermelon. Great fun was had in splashing one another with the garden hose, easing the heat of both the sweat lodge and Tucson's late summer sun.

Typical of any vision quest is time alone, fasting, in a natural place. This represents solitude, emptiness, vulnerability, and self-trust. With the same objectives in mind, the Long Dance is celebrated by a group, under an open arbor assembled and decorated specifically for this purpose. Dancers eschew food and drink throughout the night, and do not speak, thus providing the solitary

aspect of a vision quest. While done as a group, each dancer is on their own journey, separate from the others, easily achieving that sense of solitude. This is a time of deep introspection, of letting go and taking in, of being stripped clean and filled with power and Divine connection.

After our respite in the Peace Chamber, it was off to adorn the Long Dance arena with colorful ribbons, feathers, and prayer ties, placing bell and rattle instruments around the central tree and preparing individual space for rest periods as needed throughout the night. After a light supper, we retired to our tents for some pre-dance napping.

Awakened by a slow, gentle drumming, dancers began to arise and congregate around the Long Dance arena. Dark had fallen as we slept, and it was time for the Long Dance to



begin. Sage smudging was carried out once again as instructions were given by dance leaders. The arena was wrapped in twine, onto which the banners and prayer ties were hung. Each dancer entered the arena in silence, a silence that would be maintained throughout the night and well into the morning.

Hardly a long distance, dancers traverse perhaps fifty feet around a circle during the Long Dance. What is long is the time traveled, beginning just after sunset and concluding as the sun arises in the western sky. We each carried a stone from home, representing our own power and energy, placing it carefully around the sacred fire as we entered the circle. A piece of wood, also from home, was placed in the fire, representing each dancer's energies and intent, which

the fire then sets free to soar and manifest.

The first event was a dance honoring those who had served in the US military, and two veterans danced around the circle three times (I was one of these). Then the dance began for everyone. In retrospect, the Long Dance feels a bit surreal. We danced/walked in a circle under the open wooden structure, its ribs tied with all manner of feathers strung on festive ribbons and twine that sparkled in the firelight. A sacred 'teen aged' tree stood sentry as we danced, festooned with colorful bits of cloth, all shapes and sizes of rattle and bell instruments at its feet. Dancers – all but one women – had dressed in traditional skirts, trading instruments as they went along... once a bell, then a rattle, then maybe a clacker. Sweet, melodic guitar music came to life from time to time, provided by our brother dancer. Darkness deepened. Tarantulas appeared. The bushes rustled, indicating the presence of javelina (wild boar) nearby. Coyotes sang to one another, groups of them surrounding the compound throughout the night. Owls hooted. Night birds sang. Stars shot against the inky sky.

We left the dance as the sun's first rays flowed up and over the mountain, tired and weary, yet alive like never before, my last memory of the day of falling into a sleeping bag on the floor of my tiny tent. When I awoke and joined the others, we all seemed different. As we ate breakfast together and shared the night's events, we had grown from acquaintances to family, joined by the memory of the Long Dance. We cleaned our celebration away, leaving only the whispers of our Long Dance, our energy, and our love.

The return is a very important part of any vision quest, and for the Long Dance was done after some much-needed sleep. The return is a time to gather together with other dancers, to share experiences and personal stories, and to ease back into the real world. It is also a time to reflect on the dance, to glean the practical aspects of the experience in

order to live the life and changes one has found in the ceremony. This was true for me, and as I ate and chatted with the other dancers, I realized that this was an experience my spirit had been yearning for; the reconnection with both myself and the earth, in order to remember who I am amid a chaotic and complicated world.



The School of Lost Borders is one organization that teaches many rites of passage, including vision quests. Founder Steven Foster once said, "My soul is striving to remember who I am, to make who I am compatible with who I was born to be, to bring who I am into synch with who I will be." For me, the Long Dance was a time of introspection and a deep spiritual awakening. I definitely danced in an altered state of consciousness this night, my heart opening to experience and become one with everything from each individual star in the sky to the grains of sand beneath my feet. I felt a great love and connectedness with every aspect of the earth, the universe, and every living thing. With only starlight and a tiny sliver of moon to light the path, I saw the tarantulas that scampered by, yet remained unafraid. I heard coyotes both sing and whisper, packs answering from miles away. I saw shooting stars and heard the owls' hoots. I felt myself at the very essence, knowing with absolute truth who I had grown to be. I felt unimaginable gratitude and connection to all things. The Long Dance was a coming together for me, a reaffirmation of what is important in my life, who I am, and that I am loved.

It had been a long night, and I still felt the effects, felt as if I continued to be wrapped in that misty cocoon of the dance. Still, I had planned to drive partway to Albuquerque, so as to lessen the next day's journey. When I drove by the interstate and had no idea which way would take me home (I was in Tucson, the choices were east or west ... not a difficult question...), I realized that it would be foolish to insist on continuing. I returned to the hotel I had stayed at my first night in Tucson, ate a banana, and went to bed at 3:30 pm. I awoke at 5:00 the next morning, refreshed and ready to go home. Headed east, a bit worried about having the sun in my eyes all day, the first drops of rain began to fall as I left Tucson. The gentle rain cast a soft mantle over the countryside, and followed me all the way home.

Don Miguel Ruiz' *The Four Agreements* has offered inspiration to me for years, and is a book I require my patients to read when they first see me. On the way back to Albuquerque, I read *The Voice of Knowledge* by the same author, which further inspired and uplifted me. As I ease back into my life, the remnants of the Long Dance persist, keeping me grounded, safe, loved, and aware.



One String of Beads offers nearly two dozen unique stories of faith and hope, is available at Amazon.com or through our website at www.OneStringOfBeads.com.

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