

# Sacred Pipe || A World Journey

The world journey of a Sacred Pipe || World Journey of the Four Directions Unity Bundle || Turtle Heart, teacher, ceremonial student and artist, educated by elders of many tribes; this is the lifelong work of a keeper of a Sacred Tribal Bundle. The Home of this Sacred Pipe is on Pantelleria, a small island in the Mediterranean Sea. The work is done through invitations from communities around the world. A ceremony for the ancient future.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 12, 2008

## Who Pays for the Sacred?



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## Who Pays for the Sacred? ||

### Part 1: Don't Pay To Pray

Reasonable people understand there is a relationship between money and the infrastructure of sacred space.

There is a vocal and unrelenting, judgmental minority that pesters society on this subject. This divisive issue distracts and affects the dialogue about tribal ceremonial matters like no other issue. It has led to accusations and a mythology that American Indian ceremonies are "free".

I have done hundreds of ceremonies for "free", meaning I paid with my own money whatever the costs came out to be. In doing so I have spent a modest fortune over these years. At other times, I require that participants make donations or pay fixed fees to cover the various expenses involved. These expenses include housing the sacred objects (rent), travel, food, telephones, computers and gasoline, to name a few.

While you can function with great freedom, you cannot function in a worthwhile manner for free. This has always been true. There should be no question that you are going to pay. If no one asks you for money, it is up to you to seek out the host and demand to know how you can help. Every other argument on this subject is fear, a lie.

Who pays for Dalai Lama to travel in the world and give teachings to all cultures? And how much is he paid? The answers are simple; it costs millions of dollars to get Dalai

## ABOUT ME



### Turtle Heart

Ojibwe author, poet, painter, sculptor and computer artist. Educated by tribal elders of many tribes. Former Vietnam veteran with the US Army, 1st Infantry Division. Presently resides in Italy.

[View my complete profile](#)

## THE WORLD JOURNEY?

We are taking a group of sacred pipes, a sacred meditation fire, and other American Indian ceremonies in a circle around the world. We are working with people in other countries who may be interested in hosting for 3 or 4 days the ceremony of the Sacred Fire, which is the base or central ceremony around which this project is moving.

**To make a donation, or consider hosting a ceremony in your country, please visit our official web site at [www.aicap.org](http://www.aicap.org).**

You can always [contact me directly here](#).

**Hymhenteqhous Mizhekhay**

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Lama around. He personally makes nothing. I, and a handful of others like me, are in this exact situation.

Reservation communities have never had much experience in understanding or talking about money. From the beginning until the present day, money is not well understood by reservation members. Most reservation members do not grow up in the same capitalist system as modern people. It is a different there. Tribal people do not really understand money. Even today, with some tribes having profitable casino operations, they require outside consultants to actually understand how to make a paying system work on the reservation.

When tribal speakers talk about “do not pay to pray”, or say things like “there is no money in the right to ceremonies”, they are speaking tragically incorrect English. What they are trying to say is how much American Indians really dislike the theft of tribal teachings by modern people. This is always the problem. Money is not the problem....

Do the people who say strange like these believe that the ceremonial leader must pay for his airline ticket, car rental, feed everyone and then go home, paying for everything himself?

So, in this argument about “money” put forth from loud-talking American Indians, they are not speaking correctly. This is too bad. It has created a lot of confusion. Learning to express clearly what you really mean is a very important part in communicating with others. Clarity in communication is in fact the foundation of the sacred teachings in question.

More tribal authorities need to take responsibility for standards. Every great tool of spiritual faith in the history of the world is sustained by an infrastructure, payments by those whose best interests it serves.

I travel throughout Europe and have made a number of sweat lodge ceremonies here. I have asked that the expenses for wood, food, travel and other required spending are covered. The fees I have charged reflect what these costs are. In this way I am able to make this effort to share in a responsible way. Usually I collect just at or under what the journey and supplies cost. It is that simple. Only models like this can enable the possibility to share these American Indian practices with a waiting world.

Another model might involve endowments. Some tribes have the power to do this, but so far have not. There are no endowments for the sacred bundles and ceremonial keepers of tribal American Indian society. With proper endowments sweat lodge camps could be set up and open at no cost, like the church. They could be dispatched to troubled places around the world to offer assistance, for example. But there are no endowments for this work from anyone, including American Indian tribes, including those tribes who have spent millions of lobbying dollars on gambling interests and political activities while their sacred objects and languages vanish in front of them...or perhaps I should say behind them.

Historically, tribes never developed a habit for cash. To this day, reservation tribal members rarely have a good understanding or a good feeling about money. This is symptomatic of poverty. Guilt and confusion over what money is and where it should arrive is a source of great confusion in American Indian life, and in the expectations and mythology of tribal ceremonies. This great confusion has become a mythology which is spoken of as a do not pay to pray policy. It is only confusion. Understanding how to use money to protect and move the ceremonial original instructions around is a challenge for even the best American Indian community. There is a lot of healing that needs to be addressed on this issue.

I have always believed that it was a good idea to enlist the help of modern people and their money to support the infrastructure of the tribal sacred. With some sense of money management the tribes can move their dialogue out into the great waiting world. By insisting everything is free, they stay home while the mountain of bullshit which surrounds them grows higher and higher. Having the money to send runners, bundle holders, sweat lodge leaders, out into and around the world where they are needed can only happen with a supported infrastructure. This is not paying to pray, it is praying and building and growing, when it is done right.

#### Odyin

Jessakid Wabeno  
Aneek-i-nan  
aka Turtle Heart  
Keeper of a  
Sacred Pipe ||  
Four Directions  
Unity Bundle  
the Ahnishinabeg  
Aneeg (exPatriot)

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Tribal ceremonies contain more sacred real world information than "prayers". We Ojibway Wabeeno people do not believe mouthing your desires and hopes to the creator (praying) are very real. The ceremonies and the sacred bundles are something much more important than prayers. A sacred space is like a mystery life machine. You can enter it and go on a great journey. If you know how.

Society in general expects religious and spiritual groups to build an infrastructure, a financial system that takes care of the work and the objects. That is why there are so many tax and political reliefs for such groups. Only in American Indian tribal society, in loud voices dominated entirely by the impoverished Lakota Nation, do the people talk about "don't pay to pray". They talk about it loud and they talk about it often. What they are trying to say is they don't want people to steal their ceremonies and make money from the theft. I agree with that. When the wrong people do the wrong thing and make money, it is ugly. It happens everywhere, not just to American Indians. We all have to work our way through the same pit of snakes to find a true path for our lives. Stealing and selling is not the same argument as the act of providing support and expenses to the great sacred work. Confusion between these two ideas has come out as a loud and vulgar argument called "don't pay to pray".

I have made many ceremonies with tribal people. I always paid for this. I considered it my obligation and part of my education. I was happy to pay. I paid as often as I could. I would just leave as much money behind as I possibly could when I stayed with and shared ceremony with my tribal relations. I used to bring cash. And just left it behind when I left. I made no noise about it. I am a good example. It is one reason why my tribal elders love me.

Tribal leaders and keepers of ceremonies need to brace up and embrace a more balanced and thoughtful view of these matters. Under the current entrenched attitudes, the ceremonial teachers, sacred bundles and ceremonies are vanishing. This attitude contributes to the continual shrinking of opportunities and qualified people to carry on the tribal sacred.

I imagine a great university filled with teachers of the sacred teaching day and night. The great school of the sacred American Indian teachings has yet to be built. The current attitude may sound noble, but it is not correct. When tribes scream and yell about the money they are missing the point entirely. They are trying to object to the theft and acting out of tribal sacred, but using this language it comes out as something else..

Arvol LookingHorse, a keeper of an important sacred bundle of the Lakota went on record in 2010 to answer some of the hysteria directed his way by tribal members who are angry that he "raises" money or "accepts" fees for his work. His answer is similar to mine, as you may read above. It is great that at least one other keeper of a tribal bundle has spoken with some clarity about the need for tribal keepers of bundles to raise funds to meet their escalating expenses: "This whole conflict is happening because of money that these individuals think should go to them personally and to others they convinced of their hardship that is due, any money raised is for what efforts Wolakota was created for and the people involved in those efforts. There are other state and non-profit organizations that help the concerns they have and have helped them. They can also spend their energy on their concerns and creating their own program, instead their energy to attack people."--Arvol Looking Horse, statement June 2007.

## **Part 2 || Who Pays for the Sacred?**

One American Indian teacher told me that a person must try in this life to be honest and respect time, sex and money. Behaving responsibly, she said, in these areas is important in leading a balanced life.

The Four Directions Unity Bundle and the World Journey is an official enterprise or project created by well-qualified and realistic American Indian people. To make this project work it has been necessary to secure housing, materials, transportation, communication and a sustaining force so we can continue to work now and well into the future.

Most of the funding to date has been from my own sales of sculpture and paintings. This has been true for many years. During my long studies and relationships with my tribal teachers I continuously gave them gifts, paid their bills, brought food to their homes and gave them gifts of cash when I could. I never stayed with any of the old Indians without doing what I could to take care of them and ensure that I was giving back and showing support and respect for their time and friendship. They never had to ever ask for my help, or ask for money or food. I always came with these things. No one had to ask me. I wish more people followed my example.

Many modern people hound and pester and get up in tribal lives and leave nothing except the occasional empty McDonalds hamburger bag or an empty pack of cigarettes. Yes, it is worse than that. I am trying to be nice. Every good tribal American Indian knows that if you visit the house of the sacred you have to give back, help out. Good tribal relations do not have to be told this fact.

This sacred silence about what is really obvious has been translated into a belief that tribal people, if they are real, must work for free, without any kind of payment or assistance. I really wonder what kind of person would visit the home of sacred American Indian teachings and not leave something behind, not try to help in some way.

In my travels I am often put in the position to rely upon the people who are hosting and who have invited the ceremonies into their community. When we are invited in the proper way to bring the Great Bundle to a community of people, we must rely upon their resources and their fairness to travel there and come home, as well as to do good and productive work for them.

Good work needs what it needs. Sometimes it needs money. Sometimes it needs an airplane or a long automobile drive. Good tribal relations really struggle with this issue and try to find a point of balance. To get something real done in the world tribal people, like all people, need financial resources. These come so slowly to tribal sacred teachings. Most of the tribal members who do this work do it on his or her own, because it needs to be done...money or no money.

I have never known a single American Indian who grew rich from doing ceremonial work. Some American Indians have grown rich by exploiting this system and by telling lies to everybody. These people are rarely in possession of Sacred Bundles, though they may talk about them. If there is money available, there are always people who will lie and cheat to get it, even if it is only one dollar. This is a big struggle for those brave and beautiful tribal people who really hear the waiting world, the need modern people have to hear from the sacred of the American Indian. This is yet more in a long history of bad information which is so damaging to tribal culture and tribal people of North America.

In Buddhist society, the monks are there for the people and there is usually little talk about money or what things cost. The monks are taken care of by the monastery. The monastery is built by the faith and donations of the people whom it serves. In many cases, in tribal society, this system of balance has failed. There is a lot of cynical and unreal talk about how ceremonies are free and no money should be involved.

Historically, tribal communities were so immersed in the normal ceremonial lives day to day that it is hard to point to a direct system of payments. However, there has been and never will be a free ceremony. Somebody pays, even if no one asks you or your friends for money. In every society on this earth the work of specialized ceremonial, religious and cultural work must be paid. They must be fed, housed. Supplies wear out and have to be replaced. The persons who receive the work of the sacred are responsible for its survival and its good health. A good ceremonial leader needs clean clothes and new shoes for example. On the other hand tribal people do not like to see spiritual and ceremonial leaders behaving in an indulgent way.

Modern society for some reason feels the normal attitude in these matters is to press Native Americans to do strong ceremonial work for free. Not only is this an insult to common sense, it has disoriented tribal society so they feel guilty and outraged over the issue of money completely. The damage has been severe.

The services of ceremonial rituals and their people have never been free in any society at any time anywhere. The method of payment and maintaining form may be subtle and hard to detect but it exists in every case.

The thinking that would allow people to believe an American Indian can travel to their homes and make long ceremonial teachings for free is an insult to the very idea of what is honest. It is an idea that has come from the shadows and lives like a bee, stinging the spirits of every poor tribal person. It has created a bony and ugly pointing finger of accusation to those American Indians who have tried to get out in the world and get some work done.

The Catholic Church is most likely the largest single private land and property owner in the world, in the history of the world. The people of Catholic society gave this great wealth to the church. Because of this system you can go and talk to a local parish priest for "free". The priest receives a healthy salary, a home and most of their expenses, including health care.

### **The Sacred School |**

The families and other relations who sought out special ceremonies made traditionally and historically serious payments. The same was true for those who wished to advance their knowledge by studying to achieve higher ranks in the sacred societies. In Ahnishinabe Society, many favors, payments, gifts and services to the community were required in order to advance in the great Mide-Wian Society.

Sacred Pipe prays with and for all people. There is no way to put a price on such things. There is no payment for prayers because only you can pray, only you can reach and understand this place in your own soul. An education can help you. In our work we do not charge people money to pray. We do need to pay for the firewood, the food, very often the transportation and other expenses of life in this modern world. It is in balance that the students help pay these expenses. That is all we have ever approached as far as fees go. Anyone who needs this experience can come without payment, but they must work or make some other trade. This is what is in balance. Everyone works together to make these moments possible.

Here in Italy you cannot go out and cut firewood. You have to buy it. The people in the cities have no food growing in their small yards. We have to buy the food and prepare it. I cannot ride my horse to a city across the sea. I must buy an airline or a boat or a train ticket. The sacred objects live in one house on Pantelleria. This house costs us \$9,000.00 dollars a year. Electricity, telephone, gasoline, and all the other expenses must be paid in cash. These same facts are true on tribal reservations as well. Someone must pay the expenses, every time. All too often there are no resources to keep a good gathering of people making ceremonies going for very long. These days it is more like a guerilla operation than a polished organization of ceremonial professionals.

This house where the Sacred Four Directions Unity Bundle lives is safe and protected and strong. It is a good place for several people to come together and study the sacred ways of the mystery life. Sacred Pipe is happy to have this house, needs this house. We are happy to pay. If we travel in Italy a long distance to one ceremony it usually costs about \$1,500 to go and come back for three or four days.

There is a lot of phony talk from self-appointed new age people about how all the American Indian ceremonies are free. Every tribal person has heard this talk for years. This kind of talk is nonsense. It implies something that is nonsense. It is manufactured hysteria masking the troubled spirit of angry people who are not very well informed about the real world. Perhaps these people were disappointed in their lives and believe pointing a finger at other people is a good way to get attention and love from American Indians who otherwise would ignore them?

American Indians need to be more responsible about these money issues. They need to take more control, build more infrastructures for the sacred and otherwise learn how money can be used in a sacred way to preserve, protect and share the sacred in a responsible way. This is what is real.

Here at the home of the Sacred Morning Fire of the Four Directions Unity Bundle we have a sacred fire that any person on this earth can visit and use for prayers and sacred silence without any cost. We also conduct many ceremonies for people here for which there is no payment asked. In other situations, we offer special programs that involve travel and real world expenses, so we charge a modest fee for these moments.

Wherever we travel, we are available to talk and work with people and no money is involved in this work. It is also my policy to make no charge of any kind for any tribal people, anywhere. I am quite satisfied to absorb all the costs myself for work with tribal people, and have done so for more than 30 years.

Talk by new age barking dogs about the "shame" of tribal people trying to manage the practical money and other issues required to do actual work out in the real world is one of the strange new problems which pound on the hearts of any tribal person who dares to think such work is important.

It seems like any tribal person who tries to get out into the world has to run through a long line of snakes and barking dogs. It can be intimidating. Well-informed people understand the value in supporting the expenses of worthwhile work in this world. The old Ahnishinabe Elders know all about this kind of problem. These snakes and barking dogs are prominent realities around any sacred place, around any sacred work in this troubled world. Every person knows that it is dangerous to try new things, try to change old bad things. That is why many people don't even try. This work we are doing is clear in our minds, clear in the continuing consultations we have with tribal elders and clear that money is not the point or purpose of our work. I believe this is true for many other American Indian people trying to work with modern society.

In this work we try to help people in the best way we can. There are many people who visit and share ceremonies that never offer a penny and are never asked for one. We believe the World Journey of the Four Directions Unity Bundle is a group of teachings, a school in the movement of the Sacred. Nothing we have done or will ever do involves charging people money to pray, like the Christian Churches do every Sunday. In the Christian King James Holy Bible there are numerous references to "tithing", which is giving ten per cent of your income to the Church. This is one way the churches build their great power and influence in society. Who says American Indians must stand at the door in rags, homeless and begging people to let them pray with humanity for free?

For many decades tribal people were forbidden to even practice their spiritual and sacred ceremonies. They were forbidden to pray in their language or even speak their languages in many places. Today those repressive practices are no longer "legal". American Indian people have the right and privilege to create their own sacred schools and make their own plans for how these works are to be managed. There is a difference in being in a situation to "pray" with someone, and offering some days of teachings and formal experience in tribal ceremonial life. Schools and sacred teaching are specialized services, learning opportunities and an effort to build something lasting, organized and regular. The world may seem like a complicated place....but it IS possible to build something and get other people to help you build something. I hope every day that more American Indian people and communities will take responsibility for understanding what is real about these serious issues....and that others back off on the phony "the sacred is free" codeword's about something they fail completely to understand.

It may be true that there are people who think the sacred is free..... People who really think it is ok that you have to give nothing, give up nothing; contribute nothing in order to stand with the sacred. I don't want to know such people.

Posted by [Turtle Heart](#) at 22:25 

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