

## **Smudging**

A First Nations Elder strikes a match, lights something in a bowl or a shell, fans it with a feather until it smokes, and then proceeds to waft the smoke around the area or room, or towards individuals who are gathered, often in a circle. As people are approached with the smoking bowl, they use their hands to pull the smoke over themselves.

This is a scene you may have seen in a movie, on the television news or, in person, at a meeting or ceremony. But were you aware of the significance of what you were watching or perhaps even participating in?

The purpose of the smudging ceremony is to cleanse, to remove any negative energy that may be present in a place, an object or a person. And that is why many First Nations activities start with a smudge. Smudging is often followed by prayer.

A smudge is made by lighting dried plant medicines (sage, sweetgrass, cedar or tobacco) in a shell or bowl until they smolder. If sweetgrass is the medicine, it is often braided and one end of the braid is lit. The medicines can be used in combination or separately.

It is said that metal holds on to negative energy, therefore it is best to remove glasses and jewellery before smudging to ensure thorough cleansing. The glasses and jewellery should be smudged before they are put back on.

To smudge, place your hands in the smoke and rub them together as if you are washing them. Then pull the smoke over your head, eyes, ears, mouth and heart.

Smudge your head to get rid of negative thoughts, to open your mind to positive thoughts.

Smudge your eyes so that you see things in a positive way.

Smudge your mouth so that you speak in a good way, a truthful, honest and kind way.

Smudge your heart to cleanse it of any resentment and to open it to compassion and caring for others.

Smudging clears away the busyness and stresses of daily living, leaving one calm, balanced and feeling positive, prepared for a spiritual gathering and prayer.

This information is based on oral teachings from various elders and *The Four Sacred Medicines* by Anishnawbe Health Toronto and *Anishinabe 101* by The Circle of Turtle Lodge.

