

Journey to the Light, Ceremony



Three decades ago, I ventured into a spiritual quest and traveled into the backcountry of Northwestern British Columbia. I joined a small group to engage in ceremonial practices to deepen my spiritual self. This journey was the last of three I had signed up for. A body, mind, and spirit endeavor. This Journey to the Light quest was different; traveling to a remote, isolated tribal land with a seven-day focus period was special because I didn't

know what to expect. I learned from my two previous week-long teachings that being with like-minded people amplified the experience, bringing forth a deeper connection to the teaching. When I say spirit, I am referring to a guiding higher intelligence that is always present but is also indifferent to our attitudes. Spirit is conscious intent, and when one or more gather for it, this united awareness acts like an amplifier.

I've had several fundamental consciousness experiences in my life. This one was compelling and meaningful to me as I still revisit this experience often, even decades later, and learn from it—*Death as Your Advisor, Journey to the Light*. The actual guided ceremony's intent was a journey to see the light and experience the moment before dying.

We slept in small tents that we brought with us. We were deep in the bush of the Pacific Northwest. The camp was close to a stream, and wildlife was abundant. The tribal camp chief told us not to wander out of the camp. See those marks on the trees? The bears would not come into the camp, but outside the camp, you are on your own.

I left my tent and walked to the big main tent on the forest trail. It was a beautiful summer day. The Pacific Northwest Forest kept the summer temperatures temperate this far north, and the insects were few and barely noticeable, which was surprising. There would be fewer physical distractions, allowing the body to turn inward for *the Spiritual Journey Home* ceremony. Each person in the group will be guided into a trance state, and each person's experience of going home will differ.

Before this ceremony began that evening, I was told to prepare for a ceremonial, spiritual sweat. I was to eat very little, drink water, and gather with the others at one in the afternoon in the center of camp. The ceremony is a religious and spiritual purification of the body, mind, and soul. It is performed under the supervision of a sweat lodge shaman and is intended for prayer and healing.

A tribal man walked out of the deep woods and instructed us to follow him. There was to be no talking until our return. When we walk, we are to feel the earth beneath us, the air around us, and the water in the stream.

We hiked for quite a while on a young trail, with very little ground exposed. We came to an opening by a large stream. Before us was a low-profile dome-shaped hut made from bent branches with animal hides, moss, and bark for covering. A large fire was burning outside the hut, heating rocks. Another young tribal male apprentice was caring for the fire.

The apprentice greeted us, asked us to wash our faces in the stream, and then gathered us in front of the hut to wait for grandfather. I washed my face in the cold, clear water stream. My face was cold and wet, but I could feel it drying as I looked up at the sky and felt the warm sunlight filtered by the overhanging tree canopy. When everyone was ready, the apprentice started explaining the ceremony to us. The fire was now in the grandfathers, the hot rocks that would be brought into the sweat lodge. He told us to follow him into the lodge in a single file, and we would make a circle around the stone pit. We were to sit cross-legged if we could. No talking, no asking grandfather any questions. When we return to camp, you can ask me any questions you might have.

We were led into the sweat lodge. It was dark except for light streaming in from the open hide flap door and some light leaking between the cracks in the hut's covering. We all sat down at the same time. In the center of our circle was a stone pit and an old shaman—grandfather. He began to chant and sing at a low hum. The other two assistants brought in red, glowing, fire-hot grandfather rocks. They were cautious. They moved one stone at a time in large Elk antler forks. They gently placed each glowing hot grandfather in the pit with respect. When they were done, they carried buckets of water inside the hut and put them close to the shaman grandfather.

The ceremony started, and the shaman started singing prayers. At the end of each prayer, he took a large ladle and sprinkled water from the bucket over the hot rocks. The grandfathers hissed in a furious steaming response. The shaman would then explain his prayers to us in English. The shaman continued in prayer after prayer. More hot grandfather rocks were brought in. We were told how to breathe. If we felt our health was in danger, raise our hands high and wait to be led out.

The hissing of the rocks, the steaming hot wave of heat. I almost reached the point of raising my hand, but then I let go of my resistance and let the transformation overtake me. When I let go, everything came alive through the chanting, the prayers, and the beating drum. I was now a spiritual human experiencing this moment and remembering ancient ceremonies emanating through my consciousness's ancient DNA. I could feel things coming alive. My mind was centered around spirits. Everything has a spirit. I was now touching the edge of the spirit world. Ghostly dark shapes were moving around inside the hut. First, I would hear and feel the flapping of wings, followed by a large, dark, void-like form. When the dark shape went by, there was no sensation as they went through me. It was outlined by the absence of air, light, and vibration. It was not from this world. I felt it was neither evil nor good. It was the spirit of some sort.

The ceremony ended not with fireworks but like waking up. It was time to leave. No one said a word. We were led back to camp. We asked no questions, so I went straight to my tent and fell asleep. I don't remember what I dreamed, and I still might be in my dream dreaming.

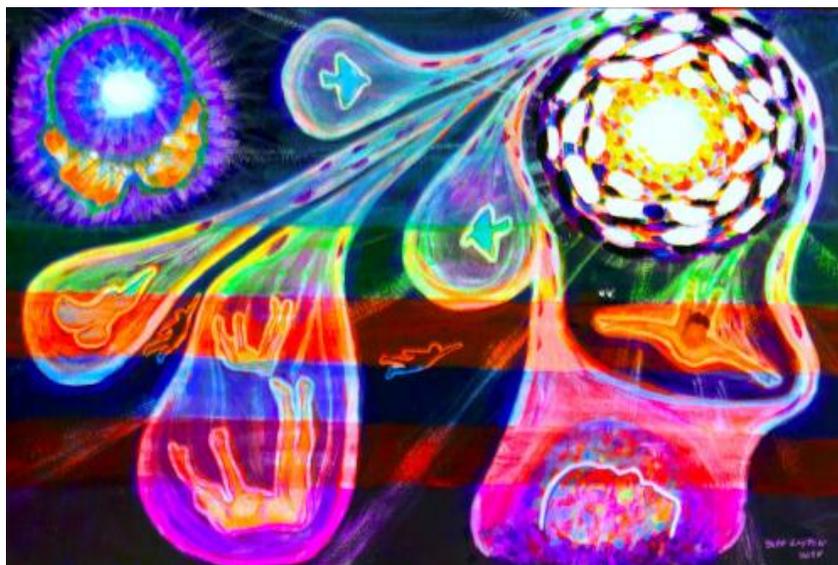
Later that evening, I was led to the big tent. After witnessing others go through the ceremony. I was surprised by their reactions and wondered what mine might be. My time came and the beating of drums and the shaman's chanting inclinations and attention on me led me inward. The rhythm, the breath, the guiding presence of spirit. A power came into me; I was being pulled upward. My legs and arms lifted skyward. It felt like a giant magnet was pulling my non-metallic flesh body toward it. Everything in me wanted to lift off the ground. I started a wailing scream and began shaking. Everything in me wanted to become weightless. My despair stemmed from the feeling that something was holding me back. I screamed, "Let me go, I want to go." My legs and arms were still flailing upward in the air. There was no fatigue; it was just their desire to detach from my earthly body anchor, which was holding them back. The energy kept rising in my body. My voice wailed, a continuous, vibrating 'aw' sound that continued without breath. I then blacked out.

The world stopped. I no longer had a connection with people, places, or things. I had no physical body. I was detached from where I came from. I was in a black void of inner space. I was dormant, waiting without expectation in a timeless moment. I could wait a second or a million years. There was no difference.

A light appeared above me. It was small at first but powerful. I could feel its attraction, and I wanted to get closer. As I got closer, it grew and shifted to the right. I want to say that it was flowing and moving like the sun, but I don't know if it was. It was powerful beyond belief. Earlier in my life, around 1987, I painted an entire series for an art show entitled White Heat. This was my white heat. This was my visual metaphor manifesting as the God light. I also saw a white ghostly human form to my upper left. I knew it, but didn't. Then I believed it to be my soul watching and witnessing. This was a trinity.



White Heat Eternity Awaits, Mono Print on wood.



Journey to the Light and Beyond, 2024

I could feel the light's overwhelming love. Or maybe it was my overwhelming love for the light. Every cell, atom, electron, and quark in my being wanted to go into the light. I had become the moth attracted to the light bulb. I knew that I would be totally absorbed if I went into the light. There would be no coming back out. Again, every part of my being wanted that. I longed for that moment. I begged for the moment. I was getting closer. I was almost close enough to kiss the garment of God when everything went blank, like a power cord was cut as the Shaman was tapping my forehead to bring me back.

I awoke and came back. The room felt empty and eerily quiet, with low, whispered voices. It felt like a bomb had gone off, and I was recovering from the shock. I had no pain. I was soaked with sweat and felt exhausted. Later, when I regained some energy and faculties, I remained silent. I didn't have anything to say. I easily could have taken a vow of silence for the rest of my life.

It was the seventh day. The ceremony ended. I awoke early the next morning, packed my car, and drove 700 miles home. I didn't feel any fatigue, thirst, or hunger. I didn't talk, or even daydream. I didn't feel much of anything for three days.

Jeff Layton, 02-08-2026 | <https://jefflaytonpaintings.com/>