

CHAPTER 2

COMING-OF-AGE CEREMONIES

“Human beings will be happier, not when they cure cancer, or get to Mars, or eliminate racial prejudice, but when they find ways to inhabit primitive communities again. That’s my Utopia.”

¹ Kurt Vonnegut

The heart of tribal communities are their ceremonies. They still continue on most North American reservations today. Yet they are no longer fully embraced by the majority of the community who have come to believe that the world of civilization and money is the way to go.

This was revealed to me one summer day when I was walking through the Tsuu T’ina Reserve on the edge of Calgary. Bruce Starlight (a tribal medicine man) had called me that morning to say he wanted to have a Sweat² with a few other medicine people and asked if I could come and help to run the fire. I was happy to do so. I didn’t have a car, so that meant a fairly long bus ride to the edge of the reserve, then perhaps a forty minute walk through the reservation itself to his house. I was walking, enjoying the sun and getting my mind ready for the upcoming ceremony. After about ten minutes I came across three young Native men who were doing roadwork. They looked up to see me walking towards them, and they did not look pleased. I took off my ballcap so they could get a better look at me. I was getting ready to say hello, but they began the exchange.

“Hey,” one of them shouted, “You’re on a reserve. This is not walking trail, go to the mountains if you want to walk.” They all looked at me standoffishly to see if I would turn around.

“Oh, I’m just off to Bruce Starlight’s to have a Sweat, he asked me to come over,” I said, while casually replacing the ball cap on my head.

With that the three men, all at the same instant, turned their backs to me and got back to work. They were behaving in a manner of “please don’t tell Bruce you talked to us.” These young men would likely have no interest in going to a Sweat, seeing it as a type of old caveman superstition. But as my story reveals, most on the reservation knew medicine people could create amazing things, and they didn’t want to find out personally what that could be.

I kept walking past them, doing my best to ignore them as they were ignoring me. Of course Bruce does not hurt people, he uses his knowledge to help people. In 2002 he gave my mother a small bundle of herbs when she bought her first home. He told her to bury the bundle on the property by a tree and it would look after things for her. She lived in that rather old house for fifteen years without one major problem.

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/78161-human-beings-will-be-happier---not-when-they-cure>

² A Sweat Lodge is a Native ceremony that it compared to a modern sauna. Only the steam coming off the rocks is the same. Saunas are good for the body, Sweat Lodges are good for the soul.

I am grateful for all the time I was allowed to spend with various medicine people on reserves in Canada. Because that first-hand experience was very different from the books and expert opinions on what Natives were like. Only by spending time with the “real deal” was I able to look at the various books and see which ones might have had some honest understanding at their core.

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A Self Sufficient World

“Can we face the possibility that hunters (of the ancient world) were more fully human than their descendants?”³ Paul Shepard

Imagine a time prior to agriculture, 15,000 years ago, where there are no cities, fences, land ownership, nor farms. Where massive trees exist in giant forests and jungles, where large animals (both carnivore and herbivore) abound, as do an incredible variety of plants. The air and water are clean, the rivers full of fish and the sky full of birds. Now imagine the early humans living there. Probably your first thought was hairy people in furs, grunting and shaking their clubs around a fire as they wonder where they can get some food because they are starving. What the movies and high school history textbooks show.

Early anthropologists set the standard that HG tribal people were savage animals, with limited intelligence, and were “incapable of long sustained labour.” They were presented as living in poverty because they had no modern goods, and always being near starvation. They were claimed to have no leisure time, thus could not create all the magnificent elements of modern civilized culture like temples, cathedrals, statues and music concertos.⁴ In writing this I watched a short video on Youtube of an un-contacted tribe being filmed by a passing adventurer. The comments below the video is a clear marker of what many modern people still think about HG people: “*backward stone agers who don't know what metal forks are and don't have Smartphones...the poor savages.*”

This view of HGs and tribal people was already in place during the 1500s as the European colonial wave was sweeping across the Earth. All of the groups they came across were presented to the population back home as savage and backward. They didn't have democracy, technology, Jesus, nor economic systems.⁵ These were the justifications for killing them and taking over their land so that it could be used “properly” (meaning in a way to make a few people rich). In the 1800s this view was strengthened via the theory of evolution, where everything in the present must be better than the past, and since the strong survive and these tribal people were primitive and child-like, they needed to be exterminated. Of course many of the on-the-ground colonists who met these tribal peoples had a very different view of them, but those views were treated as “romantic” and “unrealistic” and mostly ignored at the time.

It took until the mid-1950s for researchers to begin to realize that the ideas about so-called primitives were incorrect. A new set of researchers went to live with the HG tribal communities that still existed in the world, and they began and came to a unique conclusion: that HG life is better than modern technological living.

3 Shepard *Tender* pg.36

4 Shepard *Tender* pg. 27, originally from Graham Clark in 1946 *From Savagery to Civilization*, Sahlins chapter 1

5 Found in the books of Mander, Sahlins, Clark

These cultures lived in a way that focused on balance, not only for themselves, but also for the natural world which they inhabited. The ancient tribal goal was for every member of the community to get to the enough point, not more for some and less for others. They came to understand that there was a set up at the origin of this creation, a type of code programmed in at the beginning. Bears, tigers, fish and birds have all lived nearly the same life for tens of thousands of years without change. Run into a bear 3,000 years ago and it will probably behave like a bear now. But humans have changed from natural ways to something else we now call modern technological society. This change was not instantaneous, but gradual over some 12,000 years.

Granted, the ancient Africans or Native Americans did not have all of reality figured out. But they did live in a more sane way. Just about every anthropologist who has lived with tribal cultures over the last one hundred years presents that HG communities are happier, healthier and have more free time. Free time that they use to either to spend in quiet contemplation in a beautiful natural setting, or to be with others for dances, music and laughter. What have we really gained from adopting civilization?

Yes, we have washing machines, smartphones, trucks, and refrigerators. We also have potato chips, crack cocaine, cruise missiles, slave labour, animal torture (called “testing” by science), while almost all of the world’s water and air is polluted.

*“The Cheyenne have a tradition of a Golden Age when war was unknown and universal peace prevailed. Where all strangers met in friendship and parted on good terms. Such a far off time, when hostile encounters were unknown, is told by many of the tribes of the Northern Plains. No doubt there was fighting long before the coming of the White Men, but these were probably the results of more or less temporary quarrels, and were not bloody. The only incentive likely to have caused such fighting was the desire for revenge, and this desire, unless promptly acted upon, was soon forgotten.”*⁶ George Bird Grimwell

It has been clearly presented that HGs “work” 15-20 hours a week for things that are necessary for the entire group’s survival. In our modern world, the average person works 60 hours a week (when you factor in commuting time and work from home) to obtain pieces of paper (we call money) which is then used to focus only on themselves or their small family unit.⁷ Marshall Sahlins’ research revealed, “*primitive societies enjoyed a great amount of ‘leisure time,’ satisfied their material desires and survival needs with little difficulty, did not work very hard, there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime, and consciously chose subsistence economics (meaning obtaining only what was required). Dancing, fishing, games, sleep, and ritual seem to occupy the greater part of one’s time.*”⁸

And Richard Lee, who lived with African tribal cultures in the 1960s wrote,

“A woman gathers in one day enough food to feed her family for three days, and spends the rest of her time resting in camp, doing embroidery, visiting other camps, or entertaining visitors from other camps. During each day at home, kitchen routines, such as cooking, nut cracking, collecting firewood, and fetching water, occupy one to three hours of her time. This rhythm of steady work and steady leisure is maintained throughout the year. The male hunters tend to work more frequently than the women, but their schedule is uneven. It is not unusual for a man to hunt avidly for a week and then do no hunting at all for two or three weeks. During these

6 Grimwell pg 1

7 This is also presented in James Suzman’s *Financial Times* article “The 300,000 Year Case for the 15-Hour Week” based on his study of the Ju’Hoansi tribe of Africa.

8 Sahlins, also found in Jerry Mander *Sacred*

*periods, visiting, entertaining and especially dancing are the primary activities of men.”*⁹

A HG did not work as we think of that word, nor did they put in toil so that only one or two people in their community benefited. Effort was to benefit everyone. That is not some sort of Communist idea, which is Capitalism repackaged. This was doing their chores for the survival and balance of everyone. What we call work today is us giving up our toil so those above us in the pyramid hierarchy can, mind the pun, live like kings and queens. Our current world is set up as a giant multi-marketing scam.

I am not romanticizing HG life. It can be challenging, but in a different way than our modern society. Nor do I romanticize nature. The natural world, beautiful as it is, is also a jungle where everything is trying to eat something else just to stay alive for another day. It has its beauty, but suffering is still at the core, which was the main discussion of my book *Exit the Cave*. But there are ways to live within such a system that reduces suffering for ourselves, others, and nature, while having the most available energy and free time. The tribal people seemed to have understood these basic principles.

I give an example presented by Jean Liedloff. During her first stay with the Yequana Tribe of the Upper Amazon (who had no equivalent word in their language for “work”), she noticed that several times a day the women and children would leave the campsite to go down a large hill to obtain water. To Liedloff it seemed like a long and challenging walk, and wondered why they did not either put the camp closer to the water, or find a system to pulley the water up the slope and save all the daily trips. Soon she found out that once per day on these water gathering excursions, the women and children would have a swim in the waterfalls. They turned a daily “chore” into an activity that Western people only do on a vacation.¹⁰

Ancient life was not about depleting the planet, but staying in balance with it. They lived in small groups where everyone had a role and responsibility for the good of the whole. There was no need for commerce or money. Sharing, not acquiring, was the key mode of day-to-day operation. Groups were in life together, no one needed to make a profit off someone they relied on. They knew that if they had no fresh water and air, or no plants or animals, it would not matter how much riches they had acquired. They were adults who had gone through the process of becoming, so they were free to act as long as those choices didn't get in the way of the overall balance of the group. To be mobile and free, they needed few possessions. Even the word “possession” is telling. The question is who possesses whom, the object or the person? Thus the fewer objects one had, the less you could be “possessed” and “controlled” by them. As George Carlin said, “*Houses are just places for our stuff. And we always have the best stuff, not like other people who have terrible stuff.*”¹¹

Of course HG had objects that they used. But if another member needed a bow for hunting, you would give them yours. Even if the bow got lost or damaged, you or they had the skills to make a new one. The objects were not personal belongings. The belonging idea was not about the control of a specific object, but about people being together as one unit.¹² Today modern people define themselves by the objects they refer to as their “belongings,” indicating that the objects themselves are important for the definition of the thing labelled “me.”

There was also an understanding of finding who fits best for a specific chore, similar to

9 Sahlins

10 Liedloff pg. 17-18

11 Gray pg. 28-30, Shepard *Tender* pg 32, George Carlin “On Campus”

12 Shepard *Nature* pg. 33-34

a sports team where a coach has to figure out the best roles for the players for the betterment of the team. The idea where everyone should be equal and all get to do everything is the way of assuring nothing gets done. Everyone was equal from the standpoint of being part of the whole, but not equal from the standpoint of making good use of the various members' skills. The best canoe maker made the canoes, and everyone appreciated the quality of the finished product.

However, tribal communities found ways to be sure that no one felt superior because of the role they currently assumed.

*"HGs strongly disapprove of any flaunting of abilities or overt expressions of superiority. The weapons they most commonly use to combat boasting, or failure to share, or other tabooed actions, are ridicule and shunning...They might make up a song about how so-and-so thinks he is such a 'big man' and 'great hunter.' If the behavior persists, the next step is to act as if the violator does not exist. Such measures are highly effective in bringing around the transgressor. It is hard to act like a big shot if everyone ridicules you for it, and it is not worth boarding food if the price is being treated as if you don't exist."*¹³ Peter Gray

Hunting¹⁴ and gathering require intelligence and memory. You can't be stupid or ignorant and be successful in a constantly moving lifestyle. All the migratory patterns of the animals have to be remembered, where water can be found, and where safe places are to camp. A plethora of plants have to be quickly identified as to which are edible, medicinal (and for what purposes) and which are poisonous. One mistake in any of these areas can mean death. Furthermore, a hunter has an acute awareness. They have to be aware of their surroundings for when game comes by, and then to act quickly and swiftly. People today pay hundreds of dollars to be told about "mindfulness" in weekend workshops, which can be obtained for free from thirty minutes in the forest. As one Aboriginal Elder claimed, "*Anyone who does not know how to find food and feed himself is always frightened inside like a little child who has lost his mother and with that fear, the vision of the spirit world departs.*"¹⁵

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Coming-of-Age Process

*"It has often been said that one of the characteristics of the modern world is the disappearance of any meaningful rites of initiation."*¹⁶ Mircea Eliade

The coming-of-age process was important for these tribes to create a society of healthy adults. Adults who understand their place in the world, and do their best to maintain balance, harmony and clear thinking. These tribal communities focused on making the transition as smooth as possible, by working with it when it was biologically scheduled to occur.

One of the earliest books on these ceremonies was *Rites of Passage* in 1909 by Arnold

13 Gray pg 31

14 A tribal hunter does not like to hunt or kill, especially animals to which they feel closeness. But they understand the "game of life," one thing must die for another to survive. Thus when they hunt, they use every part of that animal, and a prayer given for its sacrifice. The same occurs when a tree is cut down, to acknowledge it and its life before taking it. That is the way the native medicine men I knew taught me to interact with nature, as equal living and feeling creatures.

15 Told to Robert Lawlor in 1988, in *Voices* pg 373

16 Eliade Introduction

van Gennep. He presented that there were three stages involved in the puberty coming-of-age process. However Van Gennep, and countless researchers who have used his work as a guide, missed the actual first step. That was presented by Mircea Eliade in his 1958 book *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*. The true first step which was the creation of a sacred ground for the ceremony.¹⁷ The location of this space was often laid out to mirror the believed conditions at the Origin of the world. Thus the young participant would not just be learning about their tribe's origin myth, they would be personally experiencing it, which would generate an inner power to understand the conditions of the First Time.

From my own personal realizations regarding reality, it seems that when this Matrix was created it came with a particular set of operating principles, a type of original computer program code. The HG tribes wanted to live in a way that worked with these original principles (or codes), not against them. For example, the HGs did not want to switch to agriculture because that was not the way things were at the First Time. Doing so would only set into motion elements (government, commerce, conquest for example) that would oppose the Origin.

Van Gennep's three stages, thus become the second to fourth of the overall process. The second stage was the young person to be separated from the world of childhood and their parents. The third stage included teachings from a group of elders (usually all of the same sex) who along with tests, help to transition the youngster into the adult mindset. The final stage was a reincorporation phase (that included a type of welcome ceremony) back into the overall community.¹⁸ What our modern world has done is kept the final part of this process, the return back to the world, but left out the important first three stages. It is these which create the adult, not the gathering of friends for a final party.

For modern civilization to succeed, meaning conquer and take the ownership of the Earth's resources, all of the operating principles that come from this Origin time had to be erased from human memory. New ideas about how to live had to be implanted to keep the ever increasing population stunted, needy and self-important. Eliade remarked that while Ancient Greece and Rome had a type of puberty rite, the rites had already "lost the religious aura which they possessed during the prehistorical period."¹⁹ Meaning the knowledge of the Origin's principle codes, and why the human world needed to mirror them, was already gone 3000 years ago. Likely gone even by Sumerian and Egyptian times. Once the glue that can keep the human world in a type of balance is gone, the demonic infiltration of this reality happens quickly. And this seems to have happened with the tribes who avoided civilization. They also became distorted and corrupted, though not as much as the rest of the world who chose the new gods of agriculture and cities. This distortion of these tribal communities I believe became reflected in their ceremonies as well. Thus we need to examine everything with clear eyes, to find out what there is in these old tribal ideas that has the least distortion.

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Lost powers

17 Eliade pg 4-5

18 Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* pg 67

19 Eliade chapter 6

Over the last 12,000 years we have not only lost forests, salmon, buffalo, tribal peoples, we have also lost the wisdom and ceremonies that kept the human and natural world in a stable sustainable way of life. I began to understand some of the depth of this loss from a conversation one afternoon in 2002 while I was in a sweat lodge with Bruce. He told me that the songs and ceremonies that they currently have are just a fraction of what they used to have before the colonists came and killed off most of the tribe and destroyed their traditions. He said he could only imagine the great power that existed when his ancestors still had access to all of these ceremonies. I saw personally what Bruce, and his fellow medicine men, could miraculously do to help the people that came to him. So I wondered what more there could be.

This got exemplified to me one Saturday afternoon. Bruce had asked me to come out to his house as he wanted to have a sweat that day, but none of his other medicine friends were available. So I came out, ran the fire, got the rocks ready, and began to get my mind in place for a private sweat. Just the two of us. I was excited when these occurred, as these were the days Bruce tended to share the most information with me.

I was in a calm place, just sitting on an old lawn chair that was the place where the fire watcher sat, keeping an eye that the fire was burning in the way it was supposed to. I was just about ready to go and get the pitchfork to take in the rocks, as we were about to start, when a car drove up. It was a very old man in his 70s (though still in very good shape) and what turned out to be his 25-year-old granddaughter. They spoke with Bruce while I watched the fire.

Bruce came over to let me know, *“My friends are going to join us in the sweat. They are from the north, near Edmonton. He is a very old medicine man. I knew him when I was much younger. He taught me many things. So you can take the rocks in now.”*

“Great,” I replied. Though I was slightly conflicted. One part of me knew that while more people in a sweat was good for the power of the songs and prayers, another side of me was disappointed not to have Bruce all to myself. I nodded and began to take in the rocks, thinking my special day of power might have been altered. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Bruce went into the sweat first, as he always did, but this time did not sit in his usual place at the far end of the lodge, which was where the leader sat. He sat one seat to the left (where you might call the second in command would sit). I moved and sat beside him on the men’s side, while the young woman went to sit on the woman’s side. Then the old man came in and took Bruce’s normal seat. I closed up the sweat lodge tarps to get the darkness full. Then the old medicine man began the ceremony.

Almost at once, even though the songs were the same as Bruce, and followed the same order, it was a completely different sweat lodge. I can say that figuratively, and literally, the lodge was shaking. The power and experiences that were happening are impossible to place into words. I was there, and one thousand other places at the same time.

An hour and a half later, after all of the rounds²⁰ had been completed and we were standing back outside in the sunlight and fresh air I went over to this man, to whom so far I had not spoken to. I just said, *“thank you.”* I learned from this experience that the power of a sweat partially comes from the ceremony itself, but also comes from the power of the person who leads it.

20 Sweat Lodge ceremonies follow a certain number of “rounds,” each of which includes certain songs and prayers, then the door is opened to let the steam out and fresh air, until a new round begins.

And this power was not about light shows or sounds that can happen in some sweats. “Shiny things” as Clayton (another medicine man I knew) referred to them. These shiny lights make people think something is happening, putting on a show which some medicine people know how to do. But Clayton was clear that the most powerful experiences had no shiny things, they just created a feeling, a power. And until one has had several experiences, from several different medicine men, only then could one start to tell the difference.

I mention this in regard to all the fake people out there, running sweat lodges (and often charging large sums of money to do so). This is not how ceremony is seen in the Indigenous tradition. It takes years to learn the process and the energies one is dealing with. Bruce suggested his own son might need ten more years of being an assistant like myself before he was ready. Never once did he charge me even one dollar to be there. I brought gifts, but they had to come from me, not from him asking. But the more I generously gave, the more the sweat seemed to speak to me.

Today some of the North American tribal communities are trying to bring back these coming-of-age ceremonies on the reservations. Mostly it is the girls’ puberty rites (as the boys were claimed to be lost). Yet even these girls’ ceremonies (examined in an upcoming chapter) clearly seem to be missing something. Modern civilization has corrupted everything.

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What It’s Not

An internet search for “ancient coming-of-age ceremony,” tends to reveal websites that are looking to shock the viewer by presenting some of the most extreme boy’s tests from around the world, such as needing to be stung by ants or getting hit repeatedly by a stick. These are presented with no explanation, only to generate attention. One example that appears often in these searches is described as the *Cherokee Ritual*. The premise of it is that a father takes his young son out into the woods, then places a mask on the child and tells him he will have to stay in the woods blindfolded for the entire evening. Then the father tells the boy that he will return the next morning. The premise is to evoke some sort of terror in the child, of what might happen to him alone in the wilderness. The idea being that the boy needs to learn to overcome his fear, steady his inner awareness, and then be able to monitor his environment. When morning comes, the boy takes off the blindfold to see that the father had been sitting close to him the entire night. They hug and return home, and now the child is supposedly an adult.

I did such a personal exercise by myself in 1998, but did not go blindfolded, and stayed seated on a rock in the woods for the night. At first the experience was terrifying, as I wondered what every noise might be. But as I began to acclimatize to nature, I became more calm. That is when the real strangeness started. I began to notice what I can only call “beings” poke their heads out from behind a tree and look at me. When I turned my head to try to see the being full on, they were gone. This happened again and again. So I learned I had to see them from the sides of my eyes, to see them without looking directly so they remained in my view. At first there was a terror at coming face-to-face with beings I had been told don’t exist, but soon I got the understanding that these beings were just checking me out. Because of course, I was in their home. Hence they wondered, who is this person and why is he here just sitting in “our” forest? I saw them as protector-like beings of the area, and once I talked a bit to them about why I was there and what I was doing, they left me alone. I never saw them again

for the remaining six or seven hours I was there.

I can say that I did not feel like some sort of adult after my experience. I don't doubt that this challenge might have been one of several tests that were a part of the old Cherokee one-year isolation from the parents. But this on its own as the only ceremony would do very little, other than bond the young boy more closely to his father. But that is not what we are talking about in this book. The girl or boy has to stop being the child of the mother and father, has to physically leave them for a time, and become an adult man or woman of the entire tribe.²¹ At that point they are ready to start to make their own, ones that the parents may or may not agree with.

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A little known modern example of this period is the Amish Rumspringa, when sometime after age 16 the young person is free to leave the Amish community and interact with the modern world. They can wear modern clothes, go to bars and whatnot. Then if they choose to come back and be a member of the community and fully accept the views and rules, it can be said they have joined the Amish from their own choice based on a testing phase in the outside world.

I know about this personally because when I was in university I became good friends with an older student. He was in his mid-20s, and he and his wife were members of the local Mennonite Community. We had similar life outlooks, laughed at similar jokes, and liked the same music. He often brought me over to visit with him and his wife, and have (of course) a spectacular Mennonite dinner. During much of this time I enjoyed hearing the views of his community, and we had lots of discussions about it.

One day he mentioned that a 19-year-old relative of his wife (that I had met once), was ready for this going out to test the world phase. He asked if I would be willing to show her around the big city. I said sure, happy to help. It did not take long after meeting her, and taking her to experience her first bar, that I realized she was different from all the university girls I knew. I could not put my finger on it at the time, but now can say, she was very feminine. Of course, I was there to show her around as a friend, but the more of her feminine energy I experienced, the more attractive she became to me. I considered that maybe I should date this girl.

Once while sitting on a bench in a busy park I half-jokingly said to her that maybe we had this backwards, and that she should be taking me into the Mennonite world for a month.

"A reverse Rumspringa you mean?"

"Yes exactly. Do they have that?" I wondered.

"I don't think so. But even if they did I am not sure you would want to spend all day with a butter churn."

"I would spend all day churning butter?" I asked.

She laughed, *"No, just kidding. You're easy to joke with."* She leaned in, placed her head on

21 I know that some will say that certain rituals from India or Judaism is this coming-of-age process. But I will be describing an ancient process, which can include up to a one year segregation from parents and all childhood activities, in order to become a member of the tribe as a whole, who is no longer linked to the parents at all.

my shoulder, and we just sat there for an hour watching the “world,” and all its activity, pass by.

That was some 35 years ago, and we lost touch after I graduated. I am fairly sure she chose the colony, but of course I was curious over the years as to which path she chose and how things turned out for her.

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The Process

*“The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another, and one occupation to another.”*²² Arnold van Gennep

Many books in the last fifty years have been written around the subject of ancient puberty rites. Most tended to be written by psychologists, and focus on the ideas of Freud, Jung and the mind. And while this is an aspect of what was occurring with these rites, it is but a fraction. In the last twenty years, a new group of books on the subject, often written by either Indigenous peoples or those who have lived with Indigenous communities, have been published and they offer a better examination of what this process was meant to do.

For girls, this teaching process began via a physical sign, her first menstruation. At this point the girl was taken away from her dwelling to have a specific ceremony, led by an elder woman of the tribe. The ceremony, such as the Apache Sunrise or Lakota Isnati, was designed for the girl to not just meet the main goddess of the tribe, but to become her. While the ceremony is the doorway, the girl has to intend to do the work herself to move into becoming a young woman, one who would become an expert in relationships (both with humans and with nature).

The boys’ process was more involved. It did not occur with one specific physical marker, nor was the ceremony individual. Usually a group of boys, who were all deemed to be ready, were taken from the village to live with elder males for up to one year. The famous French caves with painted walls are likely some of the earliest surviving places where boys were initiated into men.²³ This was much more than them becoming hunters, as is the standard research explanation. There would have been some sort of work for the boy to find his purpose. In most Native American societies, this happened through the Vision Quest, where the boy would sit in a sacred space for days without food or water until the spirit gifted him the vision of his purpose, which would guide the rest of his the life. A young man must not only have a purpose, but it must be HIS purpose. Following someone else’s purpose (or life goal) will make every subsequent action on some level be flawed. Some elements of the process for boys were brutal, involving great pain and suffering. In the boys chapter I will explain more of this issue.

Martin Prechtel in his book *Long Life: Honey in the Heart*, described the process of Mayan initiation in the village he was a part of in Guatemala. He discusses what happened to the village as the young men and women became infatuated with the money and goods of the colonial world, forgetting the understandings of the initiatory process. The key of the ceremonies was to not stay stuck in adolescence, but move past that as he explained, *“Making love or babies without the maturation of initiation was too dangerous for the young, and unhealthy for the*

22 Van Gennep pg 2-3

23 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250319-rarely-seen-cave-art-holds-prehistoric-secrets-in-france>

village. Families whose children didn't go through initiation would feel they had failed their children, or worse yet, their children would be held suspended in eternal childhood (our modern world)."²⁴ The only way an adult relationship should occur, was for the adolescents to stop being adolescents and to become adults.

After reading a book like this, many may wonder how they can bring these ceremonies back to help make our world better. The problem is that you can't bring these ceremonies back as they were, because they are not meant for this civilized world. They were about keeping the natural and human world in balance, not to create more of a resource-demanding, self-important, me-first society. Prechtel wrote a wonderful appendix in his book which discussed this problem, "*Perhaps they (modern parents) think that by simply obtaining a tribal initiation for their children, the same way one buys medicine, that the children will achieve that look of wholeness and belonging into their eyes (that tribal people have), thus avoiding the whole frightening landscape of the alienated synthetic existence of modern life.*"²⁵

More simply said, you cannot bring back an Indigenous mindset without also bringing back the natural world that it inter-connects with. As long as a lion is in a cage in a zoo, it is not really a lion. It will behave differently. "Lion" and "living freely on a Savannah" go together. Get rid of the Savannah and you also get rid of the lion. In a zoo you are left with a lion-like thing. A human in a modern city (or village or town) is the same as that lion in a zoo. The thing walking around looks like a human, but because it is not in its natural habitat (nature), it won't function as it was built to. To get the human back, you also have to get its "natural habitat" back.

Civilization has made everyone dependent on it. All land now has owners, so no one can live freely in a forest to hunt, fish, and gather. Even to own land and think you can have personal self-sufficiency on it, fails to see the trap set by property taxes, water taxes, school taxes, and license fees. Soon there will be a pooping and breathing tax. Thus even if you can be self-sufficient on the land you "own," you still have to exist in the system to make money to pay these fees, or someone from the government will come and take the land from you. On a more basic level, almost everyone is dependent on grocery stores for food, the tap for water, and trucks to bring in supplies to malls. Because of the dependence, even if people don't like the system, they will fight to keep it in place because it is the thing keeping them alive. People only want to change "who" is running the system..

*"Call it a clan, network, a tribe or family., Whatever you want to call it, whoever you are, you need one."*²⁶ Jane Howard

Another reason that it is impossible to bring this back into the world is because we lack real communities. Today we have social groups of work colleagues, soccer parents, or selected neighbours on our street. But they are groups we spend time with, not a community where each is dependent on each other for survival. In case you are wondering, *natural adults* make the best community members. If you had enough of them, it would force the others to either rise themselves up to a similar level, or be forced to find a "less aware" community to be a part of. This lack of real communities is one of the problems with modern relationships as Esther Perel presented, "*Today we turn to one person to provide what an entire village once did, a sense of grounding, meaning and continuity. At the same time we expect our committed relationships to be romantic and emotionally and sexually fulfilling. Is it any wonder that so many relationships crumble under the weight of it*

24 Prechtel pg 87-88

25 Prechtel pg 354

26 Howard "All Happy Clans"

I also want to briefly mention *Lord of the Flies*, the William Golding masterpiece. Almost everyone has mis-interpreted the symbolism of this novel. It is not about a bunch of children who get stranded on an island, and then become savage and destructive to each other, claiming that without modern civilization humans would become like this. The standard belief is that civilization (as represented by the navy captain) comes to the island at the end of the novel to rescue the children. When you understand the children on the island represent our current civilization, they are the “adults” of our modern world, it begins to become clear what Golding is presenting. The captain is not coming to save them, just move them from their insane island back to the insane world of colonial civilization. He follows a similar theme in his next novel *The Inheritors*. I will examine Golding’s work in more detail in a future article on my website.

This thing we call modern civilization will either a) crash and burn down, or b) will find a way to hook the brains and energy of humans into the machine and create a new artificial reality that everyone believes to be real. Civilization cannot be transformed, improved, nor become sane sustainable living, because it is dependent on exploitation and growth. As with all things, growth ends. It will deplete and destroy everything, including itself. Ancient teachings do not fit in civilization, for it is civilization which caused the teachings to become lost.

But perhaps by some people holding on to these old understandings, they may become useful at the “correct” time in the future when a gap appears. If civilization does break down completely, it would be challenging for a while, but a sustainable world containing *natural human adults* is possible. I don’t believe it is likely, but I do have to admit that in theory is possible. So the basis of this book is not to change the world, but to find and embrace what *natural adulthood* means and be a good role model of it. Then should the conditions for it reappear on a global scale, there are enough to lead the way.

While modern society may not be able to make this shift, each individual person can move into the *natural adult* state if they have that intention. These old ceremonies are not really “lost” somewhere in the past. They are lost within each of us. This process is part of our natural human heritage, and only when the shackles of the civilized mindset can be shaken off, will it reappear within.

You do not need to copy an ancient ceremony for this to occur. They are simply guides. One woman I know created such a ceremony when her daughter turned 18, which turned out to be a powerful and emotional event for both of them. They looked to the past and then to the future, so mother and daughter could show their love for each other, and at the same time reveal that the daughter was capable enough to take the next step and move on with her own life without the mother’s direction anymore. She was wished well, thanked, and a new relationship between the two could get redefined where they could now spend time as two adult women, no longer as mother and child.

If this transformation happened for you while in your adolescent teen years, consider yourself lucky. If not, then there is no better time to finish the transition than right now.