

## **Behind The Grey Mountain**

By: Andrew Kicking Horse

All that matters is my heart beats. In the spiritual life of Native Americans, ceremony plays a unique performance-based, dialogical, and interpretive role in communities. For Native Americans in prison, the fastest growing reservation in the United States, this is an amplified experience. The sweat lodge ceremony, a part of Native American spiritual culture here at California State Prison, Los Angeles County, has been a part of life for indigenous people for centuries. As one Elder stated, "I did not choose to be Indian...I was born Indian."

The power of the sweat is in the ceremony itself, enabling its participants to have continuing relationships with higher spiritual powers, and yet no revelation is universal. Just as there are many tribes, there are many different ceremonies and as time continues to pass, conditions change. Attending sweat lodge ceremonies is the single most important and widespread religious activity among Native American prisoners. It provides a unity of traditional and spiritual expressions and serves as a humbling experience. When someone enters the sacred sweat lodge, they do so on their knees, to symbolize their connection and closeness to the Mother of all: the Earth.

If you remain true to your faith and beliefs, you will begin to understand your path in life. I pray the Creator will continue to bless your journey.

Horse

AHO! All my relations,

Andrew Kicking

Choctaw