

VIDEO #3 – “Meaning and Significance of Smudging”:

- Boozhoo Diinaahwehmahgahniitook, Geh Neen Anikay-Keesic Dezhahniikaaz, Maang Dodem. My given name is EJ Kwandibens and I am an Indigenous Cultural Educator. I originate from the Robinson Superior 1850 Treaty Territory. My First Nation name is Waahbiidaahgaah which translates to Whitesand First Nation. I am a proud member of the Loon Clan and I am presently residing in the beautiful City of Toronto.
- In today’s video, we are here to discuss the significances and meaning of “Smudging”
- Many Non-Indigenous People will have questions with regards to the term smudging and what is all involved and what does this mean. I suppose the best way to start the video would be to define what smudging is but before we do that it is important that we also acknowledge that many of the different cultures and ethnicities around the world do engage in some form of preparation their beginning their ceremonies or their prayers, their functions in their religious dwellings. So often we would see the incense burning in these spaces.
- In Indigenous culture and our traditional ways of knowing and being smudging is one of those practices that we have much like burning incense. Smudging will mean many different things to many different peoples and its important that we must not generalize the usage of the word smudge and its practice because not all Indigenous People from different nations practice smudging for example: Those Peoples of the Inuit Nations, from the true north may not practice smudges much like the Indigenous Peoples of the Interior or the western provinces or the eastern provinces or the southern states. Being aware of that is a good practice to understand that knowing that there maybe some nations of people that do not practice smudging in the generalize sense what Indigenous People do.
- Saying that, what is smudge? Its typically is the ceremony where burn a number of medicines, now some of the medicines used in ceremony are the four medicines which include cedar, sweetgrass, sage and tobacco. I want to clarify the tobacco aspect. We use traditional tobacco; we do not use commercial tobacco. Tobacco that is used in ceremonies are free from chemicals and any of the additives you would find in commercial tobacco. We use the traditional tobacco leaf, and it is used in ceremonies in such a way that it is used in smudge, smoking the ceremonial pipes but typically the use of tobacco is not inhaled as you would see in commercial use of tobacco products.
- So, in terms of smudging, as I mentioned, we have 4 different types of medicines and it depends on which region you come from right and which Indigenous People you are referring to. I come from the Northern Woodland Anishinawbek Peoples and yes, we typically use the four common medicines however we also use different kinds of roots that are indigenous to the territory that my people come from. Perhaps we would also use Chagaa, Bear root, or Wiikeh as added medicines in the smudging practices but to also understand that when we are smudging you are preparing yourself, the physical self with a connection to the spiritual self. You are engaging in a ceremony where you are the preparing the mindset to be open to what it is that you are about to engage in. So, for example, if you

are sitting in a ceremony or lets just say your sitting in a conference, workshop or work meeting where smudge is going to be used and present, the first order of business usually if I am going to use the word of business is that everyone is silent. As the smudging ceremony begins, the moment that the smudge is being lit, the ceremony begins. And it requires all of us to be silent. To be still and to be conscious in the moment of where you are at and be aware of what it is you are engaging in.

- Now there are a lot of different messages being conveyed in Indigenous ceremonies and the usage of smudge and the different types of usage of fire when lighting smudge. So sometimes we would have people say that we are not permitted to use lighters because they are synthetic where we are only supposed to use matches because it is the closes state of natural fire. Where I come from, the teaching that I received when using smudge, fire is fire regardless of which medium that is coming in. We must be open as in life, we have to be openminded and accepting of the different ways that people practice their ceremonies. And so if you come into the territory where I come from, it would be common to use a lighter or matches whereas in other territories using only matches would be acceptable. It depends on the geographical region of which one is engaging in. And to be open minded with that.
- And so, as the smudge is being lit and the ceremony of smudging is beginning, it than sets the tone and everybody is now silent. And whomever is conducting the ceremony or the smudge, will explain the process of what to expect so to speak the do's and don'ts that occur during the smudging process. Again, depending on which region once again that one comes from where the smudging is taking place, there is this understanding in some regions the smudging upward towards the physical self would be a preferred way of smudging. Whereas in other regions, if one is smudging downward, this would also be the preferred way of smudging.
- When smudging and gesturing the smudge to come towards you that you are gesturing it to your mouth so you would be able to utilize good words when one speaks. When you gesture the smoke to wards your eyes, that your able to see good things. When you gesture the smoke towards your ears, that you are able to be open to hear the messages all around us unfold everyday. When you gesture the smoke or the smudge towards the heard and the mind that you are able to good thoughts and engage in the ceremony in the most impeccable truthful way that is founded on humility. Then as your gesture the smudge to your heart, some believe that its to set the tone or how it is as to how we are all to feel and that we engage in whatever it is we are engaging in that we are doing so from a humble, kind and a place where we show compassion and feeling each others energy and that we are being respectful of that. Often times when smudge is being introduced to a workplace where there is perhaps a lot of different personalities, perhaps tensions or disagreements or ways of doing things, smudging is a way to set the tone and to calm things. So if we have people in a work meeting that are in opposition or always in conflict with one another, its intended to set the tone that we must be able to come to the table in a respectful fashion and to also approach matters in such a way where its ok to agree to disagree that we do not always have to agree with everything or understand the perspective of someone but when in ceremony like smudging, it helps to set the tone where everyone is equal, that everyone here possesses all types of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values , that everyone one can contribute and understand and learn from one another. That there is not one person that is greater than another. This is the reason why we smudge. To set the tone, to understand that the space we are engaging in is now becoming a sacred space and knowing it is a sacred space,

that is requires all of is certain roles and responsibilities that we must follow, that we must be able to walk with humility and respect for one another. This is the simplest way to describing what smudging practices will mean. Again, it will mean many different things to many different Indigenous peoples from varying territories.

- The point of this video is to enlighten the viewer that when you are in a space where smudging is taking place, it requires you, regardless if you are Indigenous or not, like we do in anything in life, to just pause, reflect, to look inward with the knowledge that is within you but also acknowledge all that is within others. And to approach things from humility and compassionate respectful understanding way. Meegwetch.