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Ceremony

Ceremony is the emotional story of a Native American, Tayo, haunted by the memories of his captivity in Japan, during the World War II, “Sometimes the Japanese voices came first, angry and loud, pushing the song away...” (6).

When he returns to America, he feels disconnected from the values of his group, and he struggles to fight the nightmares, which follow him in his dreams: “So Tayo had to sweat through those nights when thoughts became entangled; he had to sweat to think of something that wasn’t unraveled or tied in knots to the past—something that existed by itself, standing alone like a deer” (7). But a deer wasn’t strong enough to fight the demons of his nightmares. A search for the ultimate remedy will unfold. Tayo starts to realize that a journey into his heritage holds the key to his mental peace.

Tayo senses that some of his friends are still fighting with the traumas caused by the Japanese war, “there was something in Harley’s laugh he had never heard before. Somehow, Harley didn’t seem to feel anything at all, and he masked it with a smart talk and laughter” (23). This discovery creates an emotional reaction for him: “Tayo felt something stir along his spine” (23). He will cry for his friends, although they thought he cried for himself. This emotion will serve as a guiding light for Tayo. He seems to awake from his numbness and starts to care for the land of his ancestors.

His defense seems to break down, and unlike his friends, he stops locking inside his soul all the bad memories. The land of his ancestors and their customs seem to help cure his hurt soul: “The noise of the wind was too loud for conversation, so Tayo closed his eyes. He relaxed...He was tired of fighting off the dreams and the voices; he was tired of guarding against places and things which evoked the memories. He let himself go with the motion of the mule, swaying forward and back with each stride, feeling the rise and fall of the mule’s breathing under his legs” (26).

His mental wounds were deeper than his physical injuries, healed long time ago; and the old healer, Ku’oosh, sensed that: “There are some things we can’t cure like we used to, not since the white people came” (38). The old man confirmed his fears, and he helped him understand his hidden suffering: “It only took one person to tear away the delicate strands of the web, spilling the rays of the sun into the sand, and the fragile world would be injured” (38). Tayo’s sickness was hidden inside his hurt soul. His spirit was deeply wounded by the horrors of the war. Only time, the power to forgive and forget, and a strong re-connection with his ancestors will bring him peace.

In the search for his cure, Tayo will visit an old healer, Betonie. From his wise words, he gets closer to the truth: “There was something about the way the old man said the word ‘comfortable.’ It had a different meaning—not the comfort of big houses or rich food or even clean streets, but the comfort of belonging with land, and the peace of being with these hills” (117). Tayo’s problem was partly due to the fact that he didn’t feel like belonging to anything or anyone. His mother dishonored his family. As a half-breed his

own family rejected him for a long time. But the death of his brother brought him closer to his family, which seemed to have accepted him.

Tayo feared the old healer, but somehow he wanted to trust him with all his heart. He didn't trust anyone, and the old medicine man seemed like his last hope. So he fought his fear and trusted him: "He was tired of fighting. If there was no one left to trust, then he had more reason to live" (122).

Tayo realizes that his cure can't be found in modern medicine: "His sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything" (126). The feeling of belonging to something real will help him find himself. The old medicine man with his precious knowledge held the secret to his cure: the secret ceremony of the ancient Indian people, the connection to the old, magical and uplifting ancient culture—almost forgotten.

As he starts to care for his family, it becomes very important for Tayo to find the lost cattle. They were on a white man's property, and he wanted to get them back. His involvement in the search for the lost cattle represents, partly, a search for his broken spirit, because of the white man. The attempt to return home the lost cattle, helps him to win some of the battles with his broken spirit. But the lost cattle weren't lost, but stolen—like the land of his ancestors. The search for the cattle helps him to forget the past and to understand why his ancestors spoke of yesterday and tomorrow in the present tense: it was the only certainty. Dealing with the present moment helps Tayo to partly forget the past.

Although he will not be able to return the stolen cattle, he finds himself closer to his heritage and the land of his ancestors.

Tayo was relieved to realize that he wasn't crazy. "He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time" (246). Suddenly, Tayo realizes that the pattern of the ceremony was in the stars, guiding him in the right direction: "His protection was there in the sky, in the position of the sun, in the patterns of the stars" (247).

He tells his story to the old men, and they start to cry because he has seen the mysterious protector of the Indian land, and they feel they will be blessed again. And he feels the blessing and the divine protection when, after revenging his friend, his crime will never be discovered, and the FBI will call it an accident.

Tayo's long suffering and despair will finally come to an end, and after all these years he finds peace for his restless spirit.

Works Cited

Marmon Silko, Leslie. *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin Books. 1986.