
Ecoshamanism and Earth Healing

Reactions, Critical Learning, and Transformation

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Incidunt quis, vulputate sit amet, placerat vitae, mass amet, placerat vitae, massa.

Ecoshamanism and Earth Healing was a course constructed from a 4-day Introduction to Shamanic Earth Healing workshop, and my own readings of Ecoshamanism, Celtic Spiritual Beliefs and Plant Spirit Medicine. Looking back upon this “journey” I feel that this course, along with the previous Art and Spirit in Nature course, offered me a new and complimentary spiritual lens with which to look at nature. My previous coursework in Permaculture and “unlearning” now seem to be more “rounded out” through this new lens of inquiry. Where previously I was able to examine nature as a complete and interdependent system, I now feel I have penetrated a layer of spiritual connection that I had yet to explore.

Early Interests and my Shamanic Experience

While living in Madison, Wisconsin in the year 2000, I attended a “Drumming in the New Year” shamanic drumming event. This was my first introduction into the realm of what was called “Core Shamanism.” In a grand circle of 30 people, we all drummed together, journeyed to our “Power Animal” or animal guide, and shared our visions and hopes for the new year. This event was so powerful for me, that I attended it the following year as well. In the second drumming event, a woman named Ana was invited to sing a song that she had created, which served to pour

out her grief to the Earth, and call us all to be more conscious of the desecration and damage the Earth had experienced.

Powers of the East Wind, I hear you calling...

Power of the Eagle, the Mists and the Dawn

Powers of the East Wind

My heart is aching

Powers of the East Wind

Please answer my call

Chorus:

Be here and See here that we are calling You

Be here and See here that we are One,

Be here and See here, our hearts are aching

Powers of the East wind

Our work has begun...

Immediately after the drumming event, I emailed Ana Larramendi, to ask if she could share the lyrics to this song with me, and to thank her. Ana's song has stayed with me since I first heard it in 2001.

I then crossed paths with Ana once again, when I returned to Madison in 2004 to take a 3-day workshop entitled "The Way of the Shaman." This was a foundational course in Core Shamanism, given through the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. Ana was assisting Myron Eshowsky in the facilitation of this wonderful course. Core Shamanism is a practice which illustrates the basic shamanic healing practices of all of the shamanic peoples across the world. It is a synthesis of these practices, as taught by its originator, Michael Harner.

From time to time over the past few years, I would visit Ana Larramendi's web site, The Hollow Bone (www.thehollowbone.com), to see what workshops she would be offering. Then in late 2006, I noticed that Ana was leading a two-year Caretaker of the Earth Apprenticeship. In reading about this apprenticeship, I was completely intrigued and interested. However, a two-year commitment was a daunting factor.

Finally, after speaking with Rose Ann Steenhoek and Oliva Frey, I approached Ana with a request for a shorter, more introductory workshop, that we could offer through Starwalkers, the intentional learning community we had created. Ana agreed to come to Northfield in September

of 2007 to facilitate a 4-day experiential workshop entitled “Introduction to Shamanic Earth Healing.”

The Introduction to Shamanic Earth Healing workshop has been the most successful workshop hosted by Starwalkers thus far. It was also the first time we hosted an outside teacher to facilitate an entire workshop. But more importantly, to me, I am thrilled to have made yet another connection with Ana, and to learn from her wisdom and experience.

Ecoshamanism vs. Tribal Shamanism vs. Neoshamanism

James Endredy’s book, *Ecoshamanism: Sacred Practices of Unity, Power & Earth Healing*, has become a true inspiration and treasured resource to me. In the very first chapter, he provides a working definition of Ecoshamanism, clearly distinguishing this new practice from that of traditional tribal shamanic practices, as well as those known as “neoshamanic” practices, or the revival of and interest in tribal shamanic practices by modern-day people.

Endredy offers the following comparison of shamanic definitions:

Classical (Tribal) Shamanism - All of the duties and practices of the shaman work within and around the specific culture of the tribe he is a part of.

Neoshamanism - The practices are a blend of material drawn from different cultures, or are even created independently without a specific cultural framework.

Ecoshamanism - Our shamanic practices and duties come from a deep connection and devotion to the land where we live, and address specifically the needs and wants of our modern culture.

Endredy also speaks about the value of learning from the natural world, as more valued and crucial than that of learning from other indigenous shamans or teachers.

“Even though during many years of my life i have learned directly from tribal shamans that live separately from the modern world, the more I learn about shamanic practices the more I realize that human teachers are not nearly as important as learning to hear what the natural world is telling us in any given moment. Many of us have and will receive the call to learn from indigenous shamans, and we should certainly honor and respond to that calling. But even more important is to learn and apply our shamanic techniques like the ancient shamanic tribes did - by immersing

ourselves in our land, learning from the spirits of our place, and learning how to navigate on our terrain.”

“This implies that what is needed first is not the elaborate and complicated shamanic techniques of some faraway tribe, but rather a simple and down-to-earth encounter with the natural world in which we live.”

These very words echoed many of the sentiments I had heard previously at a conference and gathering of the Sisters of the Earth, in a speech given by Sarah McFarland Taylor.

“Do not spend your time visiting Native sacred places as simply a path to your own well-being. Do not co-opt a spiritual practice for your own gain. Do not visit sacred spaces merely to recharge your crystals. Clean up the damage in your own back yard! Stay in place. Dig in. Clean up the damage done by your own spiritual and cultural heritage, and attend to those places that have been wounded. How convenient it is to merely step outside one’s own history and tradition, to go to a sweat lodge and forget about the damage done by you!”

Since hearing these words by Sarah McFarland Taylor, I have been pondering upon what I feel to be the emergence of a new set of ethics for holistic healing practitioners. Both Taylor and Endredy seem to be resonating a sentiment, that it may be more important to tend to the very land we find ourselves, to develop a direct and personal relationship with it, and to “dig in” rather than seek spiritual answers from “faraway tribes” or practices outside of our own cultural heritage and existence. More importantly, our practices and beliefs must reflect a direct commitment to the Earth and her healing. Moreover, we must learn to live up to the promises we make for this healing, and the consequences of our very actions or inactions.

Journeying to my Celtic Roots

It had been quite some time since I had done any “formal” shamanic journeying. Perhaps however, my newfound comfort in exploring and drawing out my dreams at Starwalkers, or the creation of my own Nature art led me to what I feel to be one of my greatest “heart-opening” experiences - that of my journey work with Ana Larramendi. The visions in each of my journeys came to me quite easily, and vividly, and have created much joy, curiosity, and contemplation.

My journey of Terrapomp, to the place deep in the Earth where transformation takes place, was probably the catalyst for my newfound interest in Celtic beliefs and practices. Previous to this journey, I had no awareness of the many sacred wells that have decorated the landscape of England, Ireland, and Scotland. I had not learned of Brigid, the guardian of sacred wells, nor had I read about the imagery of the Tree of Life, both in ancient Celtic and Celtic-Christian traditions.

Almost as soon as my curiosities of ancient Celtic peoples began brewing, I learned from my mother, that one of my cousins had traced back the ancestry of my mother's maternal side of the family, the Petticords. As it turns out, unbeknownst to any of us, the Petticord line of my family immigrated to the United States from England in the early 1800's. While I have not yet examined my cousin Libby's ancestral research, it is somewhat thrilling to find that 1/4 of my ancestral lineage can be traced back to Gloucester, England. This finding has prompted a flood of greater curiosity into the traditions of the Celtic people of that area. Looking back however, the genetic line of men and women with red hair (a recessive genetic quality now found to be of Celtic origin) in my family can be traced exclusively through this Petticord lineage. As well, ironically, my name, Scott is of Scottish origin. My mother, Bonnie, also has red hair, and is the daughter of Fern, my grandmother. I now ask myself, "Why did it take so long for me to discover my ancestry and some of the deeper and more metaphoric meanings it could hold for me?"

While the Celts had no word or concept of "shaman" or "shamanism" - they were a people who celebrated deep and meaningful, direct connection to the Earth and to Nature. To them, there was no separation between human and Nature. While I am not sure if any of my ancestors considered themselves to be "of the Celtic people" - I do know that they were mostly farmers, who relied heavily upon their direct relationship to the land - for their food, livelihood, and very survival.

Deeper Questions

The images of the Tree of Life and the masked woman at the "Well of Transformation" have intrigued me continually. Though the journey's intent was to be one of the transformation of negative energy from deep within the earth, I experienced it as a most amazing re-birthing ritual. It was as beautiful as my journey to the "Upper Realm" to spirits at my "crossing over" into death. These two visions of upper and lower realm transformation, have brought to me plenty of wrenching questions as to the role religion may continually play in our very relationship to the Earth.

In a theology where salvation, rebirth, and resurrection occur on symbolic “higher planes” of existence; far above and disconnected from the earth; somewhere “out there” or “up there” - is it any wonder that humans have so abused the Earth? Our spirits and souls will not dwell upon this earth when we pass from this plane, and our transgressions will be forgiven by an all loving god, whom we have never seen nor touched.

I often wonder how differently humans might interact with the Earth if our deeply held theological and spiritual framework included a relationship to a salvation or “soul’s resting place” not disconnected from nature. Is it the height of arrogance and control to create an image of God in one’s own image, and then to place him in a realm far away from any natural Earth existence? Is it the height of desecration when we impose this religious paradigm onto people we call “savages” - to break them of their “primitive” earth-based religious practices?

Moreover, are we as “new enlightened Westerners” still reaching through this “above and below” paradigm when we seek answers from a spiritual perspective from “far away” or from traditions that we are ancestrally disconnected? I am as guilty of “Neo-holistic” practices as others. I practice a form of healing called Reiki, a hands-on energy technique which originated in Japan and Tibet, but I have no ancestral relationship to either place. I describe my massage techniques as a melding of “Swedish and Asian” techniques. I am guilty as charged. I know that these questions and internal challenges, while at times tormenting, are beneficial to me as I grow and develop. Perhaps though, having the capacity and energy to challenge and question my own beliefs is a positive quality.

Who bestows the title of “Shaman”?

Much of Ana Larramendi’s shamanic practice has been taken from the shamanic traditions of Peru. She has traveled there, and has worked extensively with people who are open and eager to share their knowledge and healing ways with westerners. I did bring up the question of ancestral heritage and the practice of an indigenous practice that was not our own in the Introduction to Shamanic Earth Healing workshop. Ana also explained that this is a tight road for her to walk, but that she shares the knowledge and wisdom she has been given because of the sheer friendliness, openness, and love that her teachers in Peru have given her. They have openly given her permission, directly, to share their practices.

Others may attend workshops or apprenticeships, and then call themselves “shamans” or “shamanic practitioners.” By whose authority are they bestowed the title of “shaman”? Should a person be free to call himself a “shaman” if that name is not bestowed to him by his community? Also, are we still practicing the takeover or “colonialism” of a culture, if we adopt their practices without any ancestral connections - or without any permission from someone of that culture? A question that also sits with me is the bestowing of the title “Ecoshaman” or “Ecoshamanic Practitioner.” Can we learn in direct relationship with the Earth and Nature, to let Nature herself apprentice us in our lifetimes?

Integrating Ecoshamanism into my life

Throughout this course, and throughout the last year, I have been extremely thankful to have Nature as a wonderful teacher. In connecting with the natural world through the shamanic journeywork and counterpractice I have done, I have begun to find much insight into solving some of the conflicts and problems that have haunted me since childhood. Nature has gotten a lot of “bad press” in our modern world. Phrases such as “killer bees”, “torrential rain”, “ravaging tornados”, etc, have subconsciously implanted the message in us that “Nature is going to hurt you.” But now, plants, trees, and animals have become my friends, my teachers, and my guides. Now that this deeper relationship is being forged, I feel that I must keep my commitments and promises to the Earth, or suffer the consequences of my apathy.

In his book, The Mist Filled Path, Frank MacEowen describes the Celtic people as a “people of deep longing, and a feeling of deep and personal connection to the Earth.” I share that longing, and I long for a deeper connection to the natural world around me. I long for wisdom in a time when we sit at a very crossroads in our history as a people of the Earth. Will we be stewards of Nature and live in harmony with the Earth, or will we destroy her? Will we blindly destroy ourselves in our quests for world domination, or will we find new ways to heal our deep wounds, and our own deep longings?

Whether or not I trace my ancestral and spiritual lineage back to Euro-Celtic tribes, or a I reach to find answers to questions from “afar”, I am, in essence, nothing more than a man who exists in THIS very time and place in the world. I am both excited and cautious in my investigation and journey into the ancient Celtic ways. One thing is for certain - it is up to me alone to forge my own relationship with Nature, and to heal the rifts in my own back yard, caused by the damage and desecration of my own “modern people.”