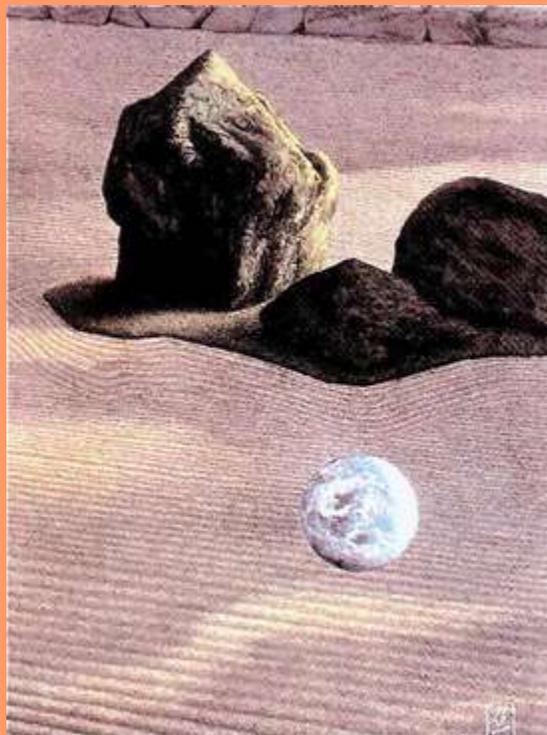




Volume 5, Issue 5

May 2011



Life is like school. We move through it learning many things, cloaking ourselves in environmental knowledge. You are on the warrior's path toward enlightenment. You must one day peel away accumulated knowledge like layers of an onion and move back into the source of your power. When contemplating a Zen garden, you find that the source of your power is the

essence of the Great Spirit. We come onto this earthwalk like a giant piece of smashed mirror, every one of us reflecting the light of our god. The experience of life is a process of piecing together these scrambled fragments into one great mandala, reflecting the one source of all being. Like the center of a cyclone, we sit at the one point of stillness, the pandemonium of life circulating madly around us. Choose equilibrium, not frenzy. Live life from your center. The essence of you and the essence of the primal moving force of the universe are one. ("Essence" card, [The Power Deck](#))

Dear Friends,

Many years ago, in springtime, I did something quite ordinary that led me into an extraordinary adventure. I planted bamboo around my home. I would sit and meditate under the bamboo, listening to the wind as it moved through the hollow reeds. I often felt like that, hollow, with the essence of the Great Spirit blowing through me. During all of these years of medicine learning and teaching, one thing always remained constant, my desire to be close to, and love for, the Great Spirit. I do believe that we all yearn for this relationship, our own love and connection with God, however you define that in your life.

I had come through a difficult period, when I had to release many of my family members who had passed on — including my mother. During one of my meditations under the bamboo, Agnes Whistling Elk came to me in a vision and granted me an invitation to come and work with her and Ruby Plenty Chiefs, two of the members of the Sisterhood of the Shields and my teachers.

On this day Agnes came up behind me in my dreaming. She placed her spirit hands on my shoulders, gently but firmly.

“It is time, my daughter,” she said, her voice like the rushing sound in the wind. “It is time to hold a ceremony to bring in the powers of the west, of rebirth and transformation. We will meet by the new moon in my cabin in the far north, and we will hold hands across this illusion of time that separates us. I will make your future journey known to you. You see, my daughter, the bamboo is an invitation to you. As the dolphins led your way to Australia, the bamboo is like a chimera. It reminds you of something, but you know not what. It stirs a memory within you, and you feel a longing. Do not get lost in your longing. There will be a time to understand this feeling, but it is not now.

“You have been through a test of wills. You have moved through a darkness like the shadows that surround a dying person. You had to

move through the darkness of your pain alone, so that you could emerge on the other side through the effort of your own individual will.

"From your extraordinary isolation of will, you feel the first taste of true achievement. This achievement looks like understanding, like a knowing in the silence of the night, but the day of wisdom will come and the sun will rise, and there is a meaning to all the pain and all the joy.

"An experience is stalking you as a story stalks you. It circles you in the light of day through the stalks of bamboo. At night it comes in your dreams, and it is the meaning of the hooded figure you see before dawn."

I did travel to the far north to work with Agnes and Ruby in the dream lodge they had built for me. This type of shaman dreaming is very difficult, and takes a great deal of training to accomplish. I was so very fortunate to have Agnes and Ruby guiding and protecting me at this time. I did, indeed, have a new experience stalking me, an experience which led me to a powerful woman named Shakkai, whose apprentice I was to become. Her name means the 'captured landscape', and her way of teaching was foreign to me. Shakkai had constructed a magnificent garden outside of her home in a rural area near Mount Fuji. Every stone, every tree, every blade of grass was planted and positioned to reflect Shakkai's inner landscape, her own reality and her relationship with the Tao, or the Great Spirit.

There, I learned how to be the architect of my own special garden. As I translated these teachings into my current life, I see that each one of us can build our lives as we wish them to be .. and yet, there is still so much confusion and loss and chaos that we must also move through to get to the flowering of our own souls.

Shakkai's face beamed with light as she smiled, her round cheeks glistening. She danced and chanted, honoring the Goddess of Fire. Her movements were very precise, very simple, very controlled, just like the gardens. She would sing in long, unceasing tones, almost like the wind. She raised the power like any other shaman in the world, making the powers stand up and take notice. She awakened the different elements. She awakened her drum, the heartbeat of Mother Earth. She danced with the powers of the earth and welcomed magic and beauty to live within us. Then she held up her wand of sacred bells, which sounded like the east wind dancing through wind chimes, and we moved in a ceremonial way into the temple of her garden to give thanks to the great Tao, the Great Spirit, that had brought us together.

The next day, I sat by the pond with Shakkai. I asked, "Shakkai, why have you devoted your life to the art of constructing sacred gardens?"

Shakkai reached out and touched my arm, her eyes crinkling at the corners as she smiled. "You see, the garden that we sit in represents a universe to me. The stones there" â€" she pointed to the black and gray stones on the other side of the pond â€"

“represent a sacred mountain. Every steppingstone represents a moment in my life when something sacred has happened. It is history, it is future, and it is the eternal Tao represented in a microcosm of reality. So many of us move outside ourselves to find truth. We go out into the world in search of something larger than ourselves. We do not realize that truth lies within, so I have contained myself. "Shakkai" means, literally, ‘captured landscape,’ and that is, in essence, what I have done with my life.

“You see, in a way I have created my own paradise. You understand, do you not? What we create in the world we must first create within ourselves. A long time ago, I realized that we can either live in hell on this earth or we can live in a land of peace and joy, what one might call a paradise. There are really only two ways to live.”

Shakkai took me down to the pond. We meditated on the lotus flowers there for awhile. She spoke again, “You see, it is a wonder, it is a miracle, isn’t it, that something so beautiful as this lotus blossom could grow out of that mud?”

“Life is a miracle,” she continued, “The world is as it should be. It is so hard for us to find our way through the mud, to celebrate the innocence and the seeds of knowledge that we plant there. We must foster those seeds and give them life.” (From [Shakkai, Woman of the Sacred Garden](#), by Lynn Andrews.)

My experiences with Shakkai made me realize that we can all move through the mud of our lives and come out like the lotus blossom. We need not go into a monastery type of existence to accomplish this. It is not our time to do so, and for most of us, impractical at this point in history.

Find a place where you can sit relaxed, in a room in your home, or a special place in nature where you will not be disturbed. If there is a breeze, listen to it. If there is not wind, or if you are indoors, imagine that you are in Shakkai's garden.

You sit next to the pond and you meditate on the lotus flowers you see there. Feel in your heart your desire, your yearning for love, and know that the Great Spirit loves you and cares for you always. Sit with this feeling in your heart center, and allow its bliss to nourish every cell in your body. Our first lesson of power is that we are alone, and the last lesson is that we are all one, we are connected to each and every other living being in this universe. Allow yourself to feel this oneness, and love yourself and your relationship with Spirit.

*Great Spirit, whose voice we hear in the winds and the trees,
Mother Earth, whose breath gives us life:*

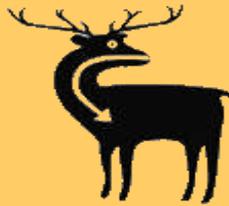
Help us to walk in beauty and strength, and to learn the lessons that are hidden in the stones and the trees and the waters of the sea. Give us the strength to fight our greatest enemy - ignorance.

Great Spirit, hear the sounds of our grateful hearts, and help us to find the wisdom and joy and power that is locked within each of our souls.

We are the reflections of you, Great Spirit. Join us on our path as we join you, for all the days of our lives. HO!

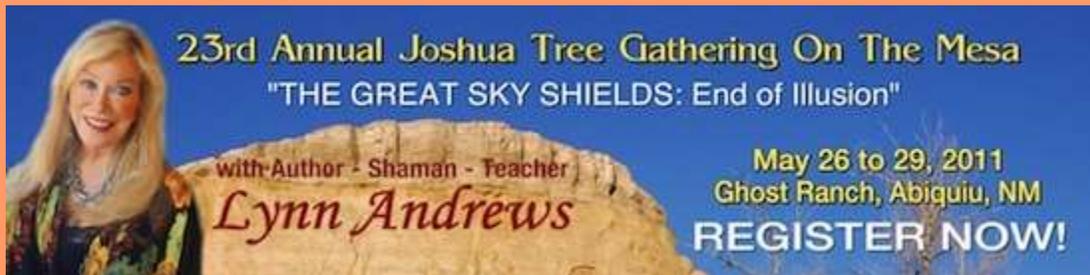
In love and spirit,

Lynn



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