

H Sacred HOOP

CELEBRATE THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

STORIES and STONES

A Network of Tales

- Living with a Landscape of Personal and Cultural Stories

The Queer Spirit

- Homosexual and Transgender Spirituality across Cultures

Pacifying Ghosts

- Shamanism in Nepal and the Troublesome Dead

Four Directions

- Understanding our Place in the Cosmos

Working with Teenagers

- Sacred Work with Young People

The Stones are Sacred

- Medicine Stones and Healing
- Ancient Shamanic Stone Divination

Cleaning up the Mess

- Dealing with Toxic Nuclear Waste





Two Spirits and Sacred Queerness : pages 15-21

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PUBLISHING POLICY:

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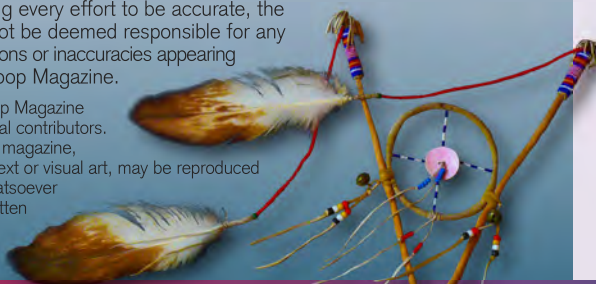
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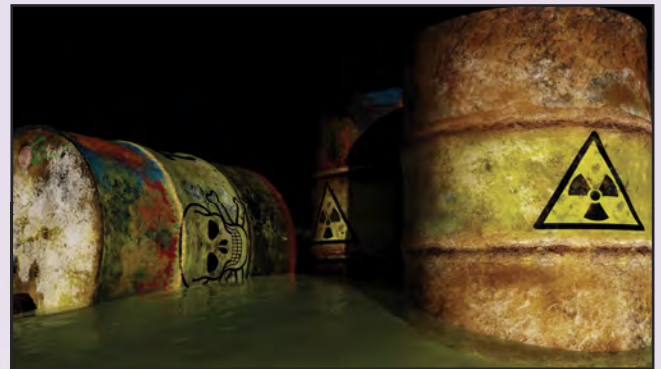
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Two Spirited people - LGBTQ+ people - have always been at the centre of the World's sacred traditions. **Shokti** looks at the 'queer sacred' in different cultures, and about reclaiming it here.

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When an unfortunate death occurs, perhaps through suicide or accident, the spirit can be 'restless.' **Bhola Banstola** shares a ceremony from his Nepali culture to bring peace to ghosts.

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So many cultures the world over have the concept of the Four Directions. We take a look at some of these and the importance of standing with beauty all around us.

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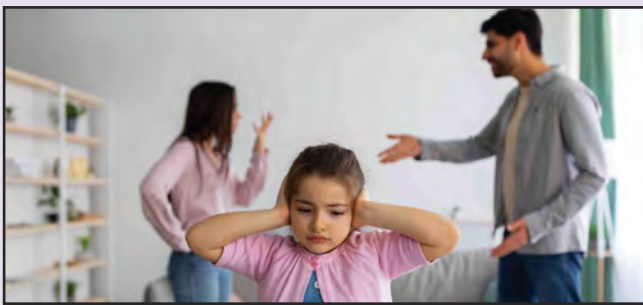
Stones are not only ancient, but our sacred connection to them is ancient too. **Nicholas Breeze Wood** explores the concept of 'medicine stones' and working with them for healing and insight.

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THE FOUNDING INSPIRATION FOR SACRED HOOP MAGAZINE IN 1993

"Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and around and about me was the whole hoop of the world... I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit and the shapes of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the Sacred Hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight and in the centre grew one almighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one Mother and one Father, and I saw that it was holy."

(From the vision of Nicholas Black Elk Lakota Holy Man: 1863 - 1950)



Helping the Spirits of the Dead : pages 22-29

From the Editor

Welcome to the 123rd issue of Sacred Hoop. I hope you enjoy the issue.

Stories, in different ways, seem to be the theme of this issue. We each of us create stories about ourselves, in an attempt to give ourselves shape, and we do the same for all the aspects of the world; the landscape around us, the animals, the plants, even the stars above us at night. We live within a story.

But stories can be lost, and stories can be poisoned to make them affect people badly and cause great damage; stories are double edged swords, and we need to be very careful about them.

They can become 'gossip pollution,' and when spread deliberately can be used as a curse. But on the other edge of the sword, stories can empower and bring beauty and enrichment..

All sacred traditions are stories - they are like 'road maps' which try to describe the territory, but they are not the territory itself; and so we tell stories - whether of a formal religion, or a deeply magical sacred tradition. None of them are 'true,' they are all just the clumsy ways we use to describe the undecipherable.

So, what is your story? Is it one which empowers you, or one which limits you? Is it one that binds you and makes you little, or one which helps you fling your arms open to the great unending wonders of the world?

We can not escape stories, we cannot live without them, be it the story of the Four Directions, the story of living stone friends, the story of our family, of our culture, our sexuality. All we can do is look hard at our stories, with the keenest of eyes, and ask ourselves "Does it serve me? And if it doesn't, ask; "What new story shall I wrap myself within?"

Blessings to all Beings
Nicholas Breeze Wood



FINDING the STORY

Discovering and Connecting with the Stories
in the Landscape, the Culture and the Family

Eddy Elsey

*A thing that brings
indigenous cultures power
is that their spirituality is incredibly
local, formed around landmarks that
exist in the local landscape. The
centre point of their cosmology
may be a local mountain, or other
landmark, that the community life is
based around. Within any animist
worldview, these landmarks
are enlivened and
owned by the
spirits that
inhabit
them*



Humans are woven together by story. Stories are how we relate to one another. They assist us in orienting ourselves in the world and inform us of how we remember the past, and how we imagine the future. I would go as far as to say that without stories, nothing in this world exists for us.

I have been incredibly fortunate to experience the work of several wonderful teachers, and the one thing that they all had in common was that they all understood the huge value and importance of stories.

Your personal story, your ancestral story, your cultural story, the earth's story, and countless other stories are constantly rubbing up against, pulling, pushing, absorbing, and rejecting each other in a beautiful and unimaginably intricate dance.

In the centre of that dance, we each exist, and when it comes to healing, some of these stories - our family and personal stories - may trap us; forcing us to believe that we are not capable of healing, and that to exist outside of these stories means to not exist at all.

But some of these stories - the earth's story, or our cultural story - may empower us - giving us the strength to connect to larger powers than us, and thus imbuing us with the confidence to step out of our comfort zones and into new ways of being.

Art, mythology, and legend are important parts of all cultures. One possible difference between our brain, and that of the Neanderthals, was our enhanced ability to communicate with symbolic representations, which allowed us to plan and scheme, but which also led to story, music and art.

In a big way, this is what made us the humans that we are today, and the passing down, and preservation, of the stories of each culture's cosmological beginnings are of vital importance to the survival of their traditions.

Without these, there is no start point; no 'staff in the ground' that the threads of a culture can be woven around in order to clothe its identity. Without knowing where and what we come from, it is impossible to know what we are.

It is hard to come to terms with the true importance of storytelling

as a Westerner. There is a deepness and richness to stories that can be hard to comprehend.

This is perhaps a little ironic, as we are the ones who have witnessed the era of billion dollar blockbuster movies and iconic movie stars, some of whom have been elevated to an almost celestial status. But we rarely let these stories unfold within us, and in general we watch stories, or read them, to escape from life, rather than to dive in and swim amongst it.

We see mythologies as playful stories about things that never really happened. Folktales are for children and hold little meaning for grown-ups, and local legends are just that - echoes of faint murmurings from a time gone by that don't bear much significance for a city dweller, who laments on their journey to work each day with their flat white coffee.

But, this is a tragedy, and we shall see that by forgetting what stories mean for us in their most sacred sense, we are cut off from vital energy that can greatly assist with our personal and collective healing.

There are great psychological health benefits for us by having a sense of belonging and sense of self-identity; as cultural and family stories can greatly benefit us on our healing journey. When we look at traditional animistic and shamanistic cultures, to take inspiration from them, we can start to live our lives more authentically.

LOCAL CULTURAL STORIES

A connection to our local cultural story provides us with a firm sense of identity, and sense of pride, that

Part of why indigenous spirituality is so powerful for Westerners is because these cultures have many of their local cultural stories intact

When you experience a traditional ceremony, it is very moving and meaningful, not only because of the magic that is created through the spirits, but also because there is a timelessness to the ritual that makes it feel incredibly special and precious

can help to prop us up in times of struggle.

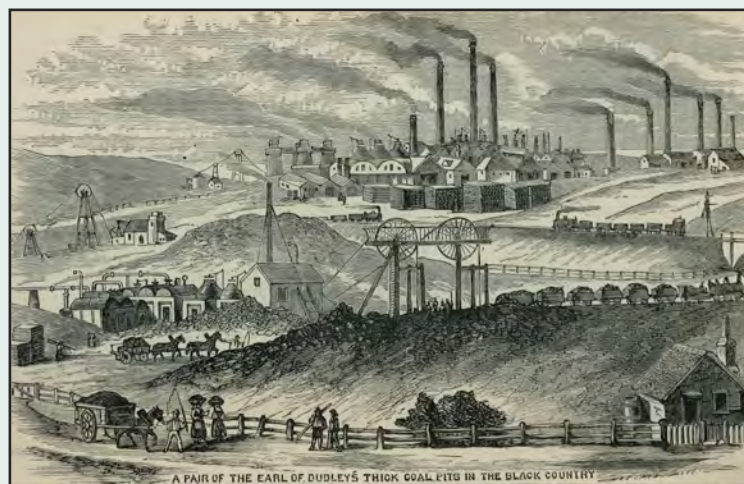
At the start of the Covid pandemic, I moved to a small town in the English Midlands called Dudley, where my wife is from.

Living there for two years, it was easy to sense a harking back to older times, when the city was a thriving jewel of the region - called the 'Black Country' - with a bustling coal mine that had opened in 1856 at the centre of it.

Her ancestors, like many others in the city, were miners; and whilst mining was an incredibly difficult life, and came with many dangers - including early death through an illness called Pneumoconiosis - it gave the city real pride and a sense of meaning.

From speaking to local people, it seemed as though the miners, and their family members felt that through their work they provided a crucial service to the industries of the country.

Previous page:
Eightercua
stone row, near
Waterville on
the Iveragh
Peninsular,
Kerry, Ireland



Left:
an illustration
showing coal
mines in Dudley
from 'Griffiths'
Guide to the
iron trade of
Great Britain'
Published 1873

In search of the Queer Spirit

The Role of Gay and Transexual people
within Shamanism and Animism

Shokti



There has been, throughout time and across the planet, a clear and direct association between gender-fluidity, same-sex eroticism and the sacred dimensions of the spirit world.

The modern LGBTQ+ movement - born in our secular age - has not really addressed this spiritual aspect of our collective history, except in a few magical circles and academic corners of our 'queer universe;' and I'm not sure it gets very much discussion in anthropological, or spiritual circles either - but it should be.

When understood, this innate connection between homosexuality, gender-fluidity and the spirit, shines light on the morbid obsession of some religions, with their condemnation of these, entirely natural features of human existence.

The religiously sanctioned suppression of gender-variance and same-sex eroticism, was from the start, a patriarchal usurpation of spiritual power, away from women, and feminine men, who had long served in sacred roles in early civilisations.

QUEER ACROSS THE WORLD

As Europeans from early modern times ventured into the rest of the world, explorers and anthropologists recorded the queer goings on they found among nature-connected peoples. The educated among them however,



Left:
Rabbit-tail,
a Two Spirit
Shoshone
warrior, who
was employed
as a scout in
the US Army
during their
suppression of
other Native
American
tribal groups.

Often members
of tribes who
were enemies of
groups being
suppressed by
the Army would
join the army as
a way of making
war on their
enemies. This
was part of a
deliberate
'divide and
conquer' policy
of the US.
Government.
Photo C1890

Right: a Yuma two-spirited female warrior. The Yuma people - also called the Quechan are a Native American people who live in Arizona and California
Photo late C19th

recognised parallels with the homoerotic practices and gender-fluid nature of the pagan priesthoods of ancient Europe.



Below: the dogs of Vasco Nunez de Balboa attacking and killing Native American two spirits people in South America
Engraving by Theodore de Bry 1528-1598

Joseph-François Lafitau - a late C18th - early C19th French Jesuit missionary in Canada, wrote a book based on his observations there; 'Customs of the American Savages,' in which he recorded that:

'Among the Illinois, among the Sioux, in Louisiana, in Florida, and in Yucatan, there are young men who adopt the garb of women, and keep it all their lives. They believe they are honoured by debasing themselves to all of women's occupations; they never marry, they participate in all religious ceremonies, and this profession of an extraordinary life causes them to be regarded as people of a higher order, and above the common man.'

'Would these not be the same peoples who were the consecrated priests, dressed as women, to the Goddess of Phrygia, or to Venus Urania, who had an effeminate appearance, painted their faces, and hid their true sex under garments borrowed from the sex whom they wished to counterfeit?'

The Finnish philosopher and sociologist Edward Westermarck wrote in his 1906 book 'The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas:'

'In America, homosexual customs have been observed among a great number of native

tribes. In nearly every part of the continent, there seem to have been, since ancient times, men dressing themselves in the clothes and performing the functions of women, and living with other men as their concubines or wives.

'Such a companion was regarded as a great acquisition; and the effeminate men themselves, far from being despised, were held in repute by the people, most of them being wizards.

'Among the Illinois and Neudowessies, the effeminate men assist in the solemn dance in honour of the sacred pipe. They are called into the councils of the Indians, and nothing can be decided upon without their advice; for because of their extraordinary manner of living, they are looked upon as manitous, or supernatural beings, and persons of consequence.'

The word given by French and English explorers to the queer medicine people of the native American tribes was *berdache*, although this has been replaced by the term 'Two-Spirit' - which we will come to in greater depth later on - since the 1990s.

Berdache is a Persian word - meaning 'slave' or 'kept boy' - although it was common in Western Europe, where it meant, 'a bottom', the passive partner in gay sex acts.

The gender-bending and unashamedly homo-erotic behaviours of some Native American peoples was shocking to the Europeans, who forced shame on the natives through the use of the berdache term.

Often, Europeans would simply kill them, to cut off the tribe's connection to ritual and spirit.

The C18th Jesuit missionary Père Lafitau, who was by all accounts a keen observer and broad-minded man, wrote in his 1724 book 'Savages Américains:'

'The spectacle of the men disguised as women surprised the Europeans who first landed in America, and, as they did not at all understand the motives of this sort of metamorphosis, they concluded that these were folk in whom the two sexes were conjoined: as a matter of fact our old records always term them hermaphrodites.'

The mode of life of these men caused them to be regarded as





Bringing Peace to the Dead

Exorcism and the Quietening of Ghosts and Trouble Spirits in Nepali Shamanism

Bhola Nath Banstola

Above: a rural village in Nepal

There can be many reasons why a spirit may need to be removed from a place, or from a possessed person, and often the root cause is an inauspicious death.

Suicide and murder, of course, are always potential causes for spirit unrest. In comparison to many other countries however, there are not many suicide cases in Nepal, although, in recent years, the trend has been increasing.

Dire poverty, an incurable disease, depression, mental health issues, the death of an important loved one, a loss of social status, the loss of everything and possession by terrifying malignant spirits – any of these may pull a person to commit suicide.

In recent years, especially with the onslaught of Covid-19, the money borrowed by people against the value of their houses and other properties has been lost forever. Many young Nepalis abroad have also lost their jobs and money, and these kind of situation has caused an increase in suicides.

In a mountain village in eastern Nepal, a young man, whom I will call Kumar, committed suicide by hanging himself from a wooden beam on the top floor of his house.

This self-termination of life was seen as an 'untimely,' 'unnatural',

or 'inauspicious' death, and because of this incident, his family and close relatives faced the emotional, spiritual and cultural problems of dealing with his spirit.

They were not confident that the proper observance of the post-mortem rituals would effectively transform him into an ancestor, and then in due course, allow him to be reborn again. Instead, it was likely that his spirit would remain a ghost [*vayu*], wandering around his house and property from dusk to dawn.

Convinced that the man's spirit needed to be given the right direction, they therefore performed all the appropriate mortuary rituals.

Seven years later however, after a thread of misfortunes – including such things as animals becoming sick, poor crop harvest, and frequent illness of the family's children – Kumar's wife, together with his brother, consulted a specialist ritual shaman to ask them to deal with Kumar's 'raw, untamed soul' [*kacho vayu*], one of the forms the *vayu* ghostly spirit may take.

As many people in the family suspected, the cremation ceremony and the rites of passage performed for him at the time of his death had failed to uplift Kumar's spirit into the line of ancestors.

Using several methods of divination, the shaman diagnosed the troubles caused by the man's ghost, and strove to remedy them, and remove all of the troubles that Kumar's close living relatives had faced

As an intangible spirit, Kumar would inevitably be forgotten by his relatives, who would not include him when they offered food at the annual worship of ancestors [*shraddha*].

As a consequence, because he was manifesting as a *vayu* spirit, a special ritual – a *Vayu Utarne* – was performed, in order to exorcise his raw or untamed *kanchu kayu* soul, and transform it into a deity-like, 'matured' or 'tamed soul' [*pako vayu*], which would be revered daily by its household.

The term *vayu* refers to the dead person's soul, which manifests in one of the family members and possesses them. The wind is also referred to as *Vayu* as a generic term, but in this context is the soul of the dead.

Over time this *pako vayu* soul may become the focus of a lineage and all the future offspring of the lineage, and thus be remembered for many generations to come, because it would be included in the worship and when the lineage gave food offerings.

to the Corners of the Earth

The Importance of the Four Directions
within the World's Sacred Traditions



In beauty I walk

*With beauty before me I walk
With beauty behind me I walk
With beauty above me I walk
With beauty around me I walk
It has become beauty again*

*With dew about my feet may I walk
With beauty before me may I walk
With beauty behind me may I walk
With beauty below me may I walk
With beauty above me may I walk
With beauty all around me may I walk*

*In old age, wandering on a trail
of beauty, lively may I walk.*

*In old age wandering on a trail
of beauty, living again, may I walk*

Diné Night Chant

We are not nebulous gas clouds; even though, we - on an atomic and sub atomic level - somewhat resemble galaxies; being made up of billions and billions of infinitely tiny dust motes of matter, the star-like components which all together, define us as individual

beings. And all of those motes, floating in the vast emptiness between them all - just as stars in the night sky float in space - form a connected part of the even greater universal atomic 'starfield' that makes up everything, everywhere... All things are connected in so many ways, everything is made up of those star-like atoms, floating in a vast, endless ocean of emptiness. Now, that's quite a thought to get our heads around isn't it?

But, reining ourselves in from the cosmic perspective, we are - for all intents and purposes - solid beings, with a front, a back and two sides; and beyond those four sides, we have a top and a bottom too - the top of our head and the bottom of our feet. We exist as six directional beings.

We face forward; literally. Our faces face in one direction, despite our ability to turn our heads, and we move our arms and legs for the main part, in that same, frontal, direction too.

So, it is not really surprising that cultures across the world, and across time, have divided the world up into four basic component

directions
- front, back
and two sides, or to put it another,
plainer way, the four directions.

In recent years, especially with some concepts from Native American sacred traditions creeping into Western consciousness, this map of reality has come to be called a 'medicine wheel,' especially when it takes the form of a circle with a cross inside it.

This is the 'Sacred Hoop,' the symbolic 'Hoop of all Creation,' upon which all beings sit in a great council circle, but beyond that, it also shows the place where we stand - the sacred centre - with the four directions stretching out from the four sides of us, and - and when with an added circle - the great hoop of the horizon all around us at the apparent edge of those four directions.

This concept of the four directions is so loaded with a plethora of sacred meanings - all of

which vary from culture to culture - that it forms a central aspect in many wisdom traditions found worldwide.

We generally call Native North American sacred wisdoms 'medicine teachings' and their four directions system 'medicine wheels,' because when French explorers met the Ojibwa people in North America and Canada, they discovered that the Ojibwa called their sacred traditions *midewiwin*, which the French mistook for their own word 'médecine.' As the midewiwin ways included many traditions of healing, médecine - medicine - seemed - to French ears - to be the same word; so now we have medicine wheels, medicine teachings, medicine rattles, medicine bags and all the rest.

There is not just one four directions system worldwide however, every culture that works with a system like this has their own, and their own set of teachings based upon these directions too. Not all cultures have a system like this, but many do, and so, an awareness of the four directions - often depicted as a cross, or four dots around a central dot - is very universal, as we are all beings with four sides.

COLOURS AND ELEMENTS

Many of these four direction systems have elements associated with them, and they are also given different direction colours.

The colours are often - but not always - red, black, yellow and white; and these colours are used because they are commonly available - it's not deep cosmic coincidence across widely scattered cultures, it's sheer pragmatism.

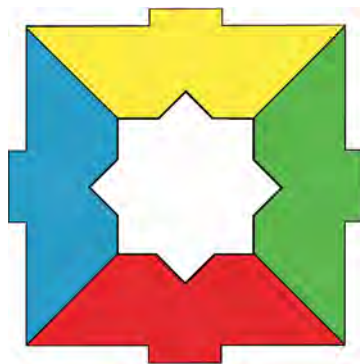
White is chalk or crushed shell, or white clay; black is soot from a fire, red and yellow are ochres. These are the 'earth pigments,' humanities first colours, widely available everywhere. Other colours to make pigments from - blue, green, purple and the rest - are much harder to find in nature, much rarer and not available everywhere, so they are used far less as direction colours.

The elements of earth, air, fire and water - and often space or ether or 'the void' for the centre - are generally associated with these

four directions and with a colour, but all the traditions vary.

A common medicine wheel teaching tradition found in the West, one that came from the teachings of Hyemeyohsts Storm - a medicine teacher of mixed Cheyenne, Crow and German decent - has red in the South for water; black in the West for earth; white in the North for air; and yellow in the East for fire.

These colour associations vary across all Native American traditions which use such a system however - there is no 'one' set of medicine teachings. The same is true in Tibetan traditions, the colours vary across different lineages, but generally they are yellow in the South for earth, red in the West for fire, green in the North for air and white in the East for water, plus blue in the Centre for Either or Space.



There is however a Tibetan system which also uses red, black, white and yellow.

In the shamanism of Nepal, again these colour associations vary, but one tradition is red in the South for fire, blue in the West for water, yellow in the North for earth and green in the East for air.

In Native American, and also Nepali teachings, North is normally at the top when we draw a medicine wheel, however with Tibetan traditions East is normally placed there, and North is where we would place West.

There is evidence that the directions were once part of sacred teachings from Western Europe too. In the previous issue of Sacred Hoop we published an article by Sam MacLaren about ancient Irish cosmology and the four directions.

SPIRITS AND ANIMAL TOTEMS

As with colours and elements,



Above: a Tibetan mandala showing the four directions and the centre

Left: a Nepali shamanic mandala showing the directions and the centre

Below: the 'Lamb and the four Living Creatures' a Christian Tetramorph Spain C1100

most traditions around the world think of the directions as having a spirit associated with them and also a totem animal, which sometimes can be one and the same. Again these all vary.

In the Christian tradition - and yes, there are traces of four direction teachings within the Christian church - the four spirits are archangels - big spirits. These four are Michael in the South; Gabriel in the West; Uriel in the North; and Raphael in the East.

This is what is called a *tetramorph* - from the Greek tetra, meaning four, and morph meaning shape, which associates the four





Walking the wheel with Teens

Helping Young People
find a Sacred Cosmology

Efrat Shokef

The medicine wheel is a foundational map; a guide to a journey of transformation; can children and teens benefit from this sacred map? Can they work with it? Walk through it?

My experience working with teenagers has proven to me that they are capable of it all. Some will mentally understand more of the underlying concepts, and can work with the wheel in awareness; while others can experience the transformation it offers energetically. Words and explanations are not always necessary, as working energetically, perhaps with *kuyas* - sacred healing stones from the Andean traditions - is so much more powerful.

Over the past three years, I have been working with a group of teens, meeting two or three times a year, for periods anywhere between one to four days in length, taking this time to deepen and practise our tools.

Beyond the intentions of personal healing and acquiring sacred 'life' tools, the most significant gift of being part of this group is that it serves as a gathering of like-minded souls - a peer group of natural-born 'sacred travellers.'

The meet ups are a sacred space in which their intuitive abilities and spiritual awareness can be shared, perceived as common, and comfortably expressed and explored.

When we first met, the members were all between the ages of twelve and fourteen, although two younger members, who are both fourteen now, joined the group later; so, the current age range of the group is fourteen to seventeen.

During our work together, they often asked about my mesa - my bundle of sacred stones and objects in the Andean traditions. They asked me about its meaning, the traditions related to it, and its origin.

When responding to their inquiries, I learned the power of words, their energy, and the importance of using our words with awareness. These young people are my teachers more than I am theirs.

The group I work with were all teenagers, so, what would be the right age for introducing young people to the medicine teachings? At what age is someone ready to 'walk around the wheel,' or transform their beloved stones into a mesa bundle of sacred objects?

There are many established traditions about gathering a mesa bundle and becoming a mesa carrier, and these are a mix of both modern and ancient ways and perceptions. Therefore, in order to take a group of teens through these processes, I needed to disassemble each aspect, stage, and tradition, into its elements and its essence.

This is an approach I chose to take with every sacred tool that I've acquired from the many amazing teachers I've had the privilege to learn from; I've learned that offering sacred 'life tools' to the younger generation is best taught, beginning from the essence of each tool, instead of from the form it eventually took, as it travelled from place to place and culture to culture.

A significant question that guided my agreement to introduce these teenagers to the wheel, was the extent to which I felt committed to sharing the indigenous knowledge, as I had received it. Which perceptions and traditions - passed down from generation to generation - should be shared as they are, and which should not?

As I walked the sacred traditions myself, I discovered that, when I looked for the sources of many



Stone Power

Working with Pebbles, Fossils and Crystals

Nicholas Breeze Wood

Above: the Makapansgat Pebble, a naturally formed stone which resembles a face, or a skull, discovered in a cave inhabited by early humans three million years ago

Stones are our friends, and we have a very, very long relationship with them, 2,600,000 years or so in fact, which is the oldest discovered use of stone tool making. Of course, a stone axe, or sharpened flint scraping and cutting tool, or an arrow head, is a practical tool, and yet, I would not be surprised at all if its user didn't also have a personal relationship with it which had a spiritual aspect.

In our modern 'dead-matter thinking' world, a tool is just something to use, but to our

ancestors - with their 'live-matter thinking' worldview, everything was alive, and there was no such thing as 'just a tool.'

Nature provides us stones which 'call to us,' and who hasn't walked somewhere, perhaps a beach or some other place, and had their eye drawn to a peculiar or striking pebble, which has demanded to be picked up and stashed into a handy pocket. It is what we do, we barely even think about it.

Sometimes a stone catches our eye because it is in the shape of

something else, perhaps an animal for example. Stones like this are often considered to be sacred in nature by members of animistic and shamanistic societies.

STONES, FOSSILS, CRYSTALS

The oldest example of a stone which had caught someone's eye is the Makapansgat pebble, a naturally formed stone which resembles a face, or a skull, around 8cm high, discovered in a cave in the Makapan Valley, in South Africa.

It was found in remains of human habitation which been dated to around three million years ago. The stone shows no evidence of having been worked, no tool marks, and is therefore a naturally formed pebble which someone found and prized.

Naturally formed stones are the origin of the famous Zuni stone fetishes, from the Southwest of the USA, which are carved to resemble animals, the original one however were 'nature carved' and highly prized as sacred stones.

Such stones - and also naturally shaped bits of wood or roots - have long been prized as sacred objects, within which a spirit resides, or which a spirit has touched in some way. They are natural treasured gifts from our Grandmother the earth.

Of course, stones don't have to be of a special or unusual shape, they can come in special circumstances which make them special.

In Native American traditions, the Lakota call such special stones woti, they are 'rock friends' powerful rock spirits who protect a person. They come in unusual ways, often brightly flashing light at a person to draw their eye so the stone is found. Carried in small bags or suspended on cord, they are worn close to the body, specially in times of danger, and many Native American warriors - both historically and in modern times, will carry such a rock.

The Crow Nation, who lived close to the Lakota on the Great Plains, often made elaborate 'nests' for their medicine stones, which they wore on cords around their necks. These nests were generally beaded and hung with larger glass trade beads, which provided additional decoration.

In Western Europe, there seems to have been a great appreciation for white quartz pebbles, some of which were painted with dots and other patterns, although most were kept plain, the painted ones seemingly confined to places in Scotland.

Archaeological excavations of sites from the Neolithic, through the Bronze and Iron Ages, and right up to Anglo Saxon and early Christian times have unearthed caches of these stones.

The stones were sometimes brought long distances, to places where they do not occur naturally, and seem especially to be a type of offering left by people visiting a grave or other sacred site; although sometimes they have been discovered inside excavated huts. Of course, such stones found inside a hut may have simply been there, stored, for future use as offerings elsewhere.

White quartz pebbles, smoothly tumbled by water, are prized finds for many people as they beach walk and gaze at the sand in front of them; they are alluring little pebbles.

One well known type of stone which has a long history in magical folklore are 'hag stones' which are also known as 'holey' or 'adder' stones. These are stones, most often found on beaches, where the action of running water has 'drilled' a hole right through them. The hole needs to be natural, drilling a hole in a pebble does not make it a hag stone.

They are considered to be protective charms, worn around the neck on a cord if small enough, or kept in the home

Stones can also be fossils of course, and ammonites and other types of fossils have long been prized.

In India, Nepal and the Himalayas, ammonites are considered to be connected to the naga spirits and also to snakes in general. They are called saligrams, and are also considered to be a sign of the god Vishnu.

Another common fossil, with a very long association in folk magic are fossil Sea Urchins, Echinoids, which are commonly known as 'shepherd's crowns' or fairy loaves.

In the South East of England, 'fairy loaves' - inspired by their round loaf-like shape - were considered to be magical charms against witchcraft and ill-intent, and were placed besides the



Left: a Diné [Navaho] medicine stone and its beaded buckskin bag. C1890



Left: a Crow Nation medicine stone and its beaded 'nest'. The nest is heavily hung with larger trade beads, brass bells and strips of pink-dyed animal hide with fur on, possibly from a rabbit C1900

Casting ^{the} Stones

Forty-One Stone Divination

A Traditional Method used by both Shamans and Ordinary People across Central Asia



Above: a Tuvan shaman performing a stone reading

The casting of stones and bones is an astonishingly ancient method of divination, and techniques for this are found all across the world.

In Central Asia, several different stone casting systems are practised, but across the whole region, techniques involving the use of forty-one different stones can be found.

These forty-one stone methods can often be quite complex, and they are also often extremely sophisticated.

I was taught one method of casting from a traditional Mongolian shaman, as the shamans in their lineage all use it,

to help diagnose people who come to them for healing.

That particular method is kept 'secret,' being part of the 'hidden teachings' held by that traditional lineage, and as such, I cannot openly pass it on; but here is a similar - and slightly simpler - forty-one stone divination system from Kazakhstan, called Qumalaq. It is a method used both by Kazak shamans and ordinary people too.

To perform the divination you will first need to gather forty-one stones. These can be all the same kind of stone, if that makes it easier, and sometimes, instead of stones, coffee beans - or even dried sheep droppings - are used.

Ideally, the stones should be small enough for you to be able to hold them all in your out-spread hands, so you can hold them up to pass them through smudge smoke.

The stones in the photos are my own set, for use in the Mongolian shaman's divination system I practise, and, as in that system each stone has a specific meaning, mine need to be all different, so each stone can be identified as an individual.

You will also need a cloth to place the stones down upon. It is good to have a set of stones and a cloth that are just kept for the divination.

Start by smudging all the stones and the cloth, and become clear about what you are asking, then place all the stones in one large pile on the cloth at the bottom, and, roughly - without counting them - divide this large pile into three smaller piles.

❖ Then take four stones away from the left hand pile, and then four more, repeating this until you have only one, two, three, or four stone(s) left.

❖ Now you put those remaining stone(s) in the top left hand corner of your cloth. In the photo, there were just two stones remaining.

Keep all the stones you have removed on the side, as you will need them again in a moment.

❖ Now do exactly the same with the central pile of stones that are at the bottom of the cloth, putting however many stones are left - after you have taken away groups of four - in the top centre of the cloth.

Then repeat with the right hand pile of stones at the bottom, to make a small pile in the top right hand corner of the cloth.

❖ Now, bring together all the discarded stones, left over from making the three small piles at the top of the cloth, and place all of these at the cloth's bottom in a new, large pile.

❖ Divide that new large pile at the cloth's bottom into three more rough piles - as you did at the start of the divination.

❖ Then repeat all of the stages you have just done, taking away groups of four stones from each of the three bottom piles in turn, to make three new small piles.

❖ Place these new piles beneath the first three small piles at the top of the cloth. These will be the middle row of the nine piles.

❖ When you have done this, again gather all the remaining stones together at the bottom of the cloth in a new large pile, and as before, divide this large pile of stones into three rough piles, and repeat all of the steps yet again.

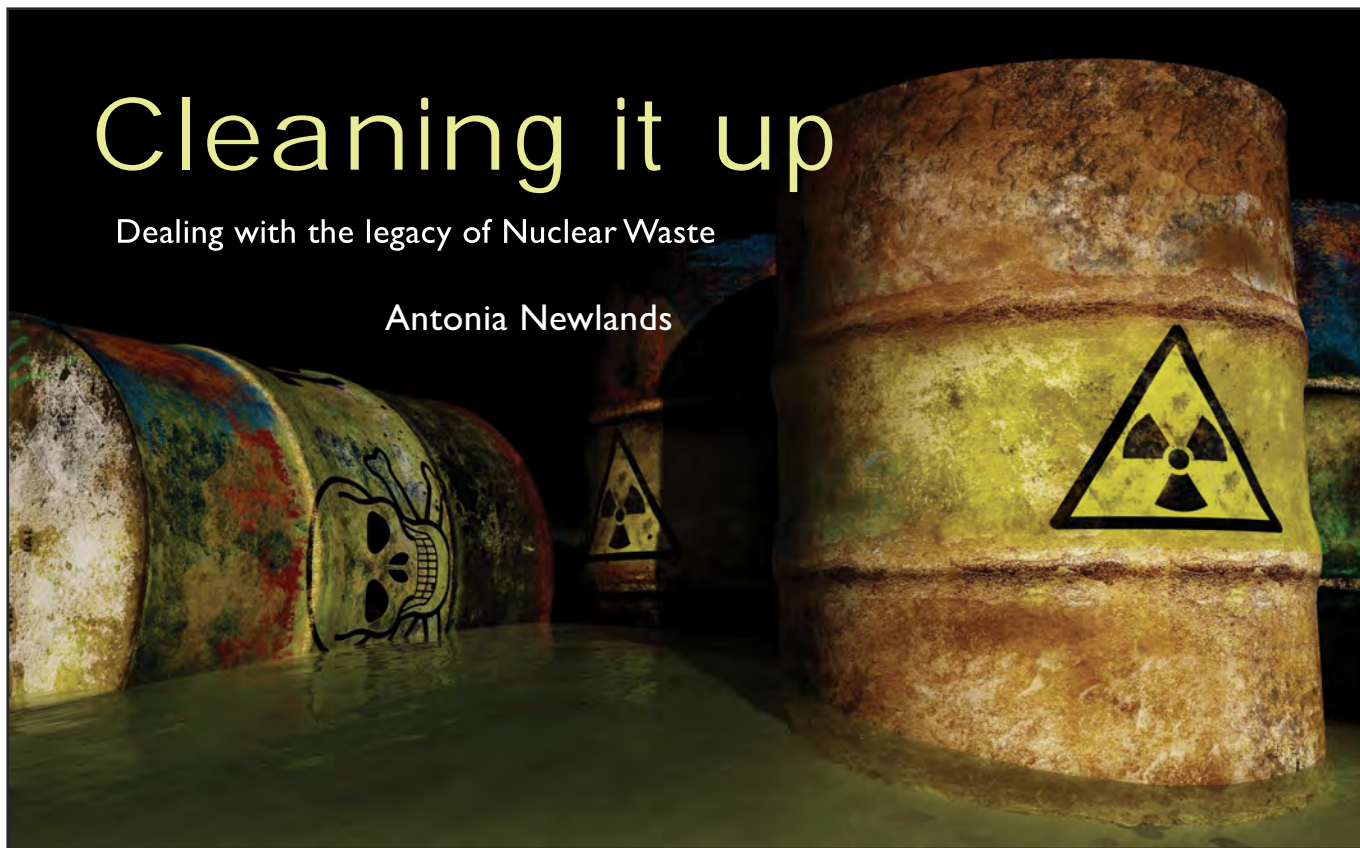
You now have a grid of nine small piles, and all of the stones that are left over can now be put aside, or back into their bag, as you will not need them any more for this

[one] Left Eye	[two] Head	[three] Right Eye
[four] Left Hand	[five] Heart	[six] Right Hand
[seven] Left Foot	[eight] Horse	[nine] Right Foot

Cleaning it up

Dealing with the legacy of Nuclear Waste

Antonia Newlands



This article is a call to heed the spirits of the land, the sea and sky, the ancestors and the descendants and ourselves as well.

As human residents of the earth who share this beautiful planet with the spirit realm, I think it is time for us to be aware of the spirit realm relationships with human-made radioactivity.

Humanity exists because of natural radioactivity, which is the act of emitting energy created by radioactive decay.

Radioactive decay is an inherently natural process, which has been ongoing within the earth's interior since its formation 4.6 billion years ago, and it has been happening in space for way longer.

Radioactive decay happens when an unstable atom's nucleus loses energy and emits radiation. During the process, inside the atom, its component particles, in effect re-arrange themselves in order to become more stable, and this releases the energy that we know as radiation.

Radiation can generate immense amounts of heat; it is what causes vast amounts of the earth's interior to remain molten, which in turn,

propels the tectonic plates across the surface of our planet. Those moving tectonic plates helped give rise to both the seas and an atmosphere, and the rest is history.

Natural radioactive substances exist widely in space, and also at very low concentrations within the surface of the earth; which makes them rarely a cause for concern here.

The problems start however, when humanity begins to tamper with the process, and changes the form of the radioactive substances forcibly, 'shape-shifts' them, so to speak.

We generally rely on uranium for the creation of radioactive fuel. This is a natural material, a radioactive metal, whose ore is extracted from the ground.

It is then refined into uranium concentrate, by being crushed into a fine powder and formed into a rod, called a 'fuel rod'. This makes it useable as nuclear fuel, and different from the raw uranium we find in nature.

Once this is done, the radiation the fuel emits can be harmful to both human health and the general environment; and it remains so, emitting radiation, over many thousands of years, before it finally shape-shifts naturally into a more stable - non radioactive - form.

However, many people consider that this forcible shape-shifting of uranium into fuel, can help our current climate crisis, by using it to produce nuclear energy.

Britain currently relies on nuclear energy for approximately 15% of its electricity needs, and other countries around the world will rely on it to a lesser or greater degree. For example, France relies on nuclear energy for approximately 68% of its power production, whereas Germany only relies on it for 6%, and the USA for 19%.

A key principle of the production of nuclear energy is that a small amount of radioactive matter can be converted into a large amount of energy.

This is due to the nature of the nuclear fission process. Nuclear fission is a process where the nucleus of an atom is split into two, or more smaller parts - called nuclei - and this process creates great heat, which is then converted to electricity.

These smaller nuclei are still highly radioactive, but they cannot be split again, and so the spent fuel - which is in the form of rods of now 'depleted uranium' - become nuclear waste, which has to be dealt with in some way.

Native American Plains' Medicine Bundles

A selection of small personal medicine bundles and stone bundles, all from the Crow Nation of Montana.

They are all made from buckskin, and they are decorated with trade glass beads which were mostly made in Venice or in Bohemia

Late C19th or early C20th

