

Medicine for the Earth



A Conversation with Sandra Ingerman, by Lenore Norrgard

Sandra Ingerman is best known for her books "Soul Retrieval" and "Medicine for the Earth." Lenore interviewed Sandy about Medicine for the Earth, shamanism, paganism and activism for RQ.

Sandy: It seems like things on the planet keep getting worse. We really have to start focusing our energy, let go of our differences.

Lenore: What you're saying reminds me of Left politics in the 1970s — the sectarianism, the splitting, the egoic investments people had in their positions — I think that's part of the sickness.

Sandy: Right. I really do believe the Republicans hold power right now because they succeed in splitting everybody else.

Photo by Lisa Dillon

Lenore: Are you familiar with Reclaiming?

Sandy: I'm familiar with Starhawk's writing.

Lenore: Reclaiming identifies as Pagan, saying, "We embrace the living world and the cosmos as sacred." How do you see the relationship between shamanism and their paradigm?

Sandy: In shamanism, we experience everything as alive, there's a soul that lives in everything. We honor the cycles, and all life, and in classical shamanism we experience the web of life that connects us all. I think that paganism and shamanism really speak to the same thing. The ceremonies and the rituals are quite similar, so I've never seen much of a difference — I think people have chosen paths that have different labels, but we're talking about the same thing.

Lenore: I think the Witches in Europe practiced a culture-specific shamanism: they worked with the earth, and with spells — what we call word doctoring. As persecution spread out from Europe, shamans on other continents were labeled "witch doctors." In Reclaiming practice, "As within, so without; as above, so below," is often invoked. Does this phrase relate to shamanism?

Sandy: Since in shamanism we experience everything as interconnected — whatever you do to one aspect of the web, you do to yourself. Whatever is happening for you will make an impact in the world, and vice versa. Shamans have always known that no one can really separate — they got that from years of initiation that broke down their egoic barriers, so that they carried the principle of unity in their very bodies. In modern culture, where we've overemphasized the process of individuation, some of that teaching is

being lost; people use the words, but don't know what it means in their bodies. So "As above, so below, as within, so without," is part of classical shamanism. It's part of alchemy, Christianity, paganism, Judaism, quantum physics, Hinduism, Islam — there is no mystical tradition that does not understand that our outer world is a reflection of our inner world.

Lenore: Would you talk about the evolution of your own practice? You've said your spirits directed you to step into a collaborative relationship with them. Can you relate this to the way people are being asked to evolve at this time?

Sandy: In modern cultures we look to authority figures, and since shamanism doesn't have any, we've put our spirits in that place. In classic shamanism there was fear of making a mistake, spiritually — of moving out of harmony — and of negative consequences; but the spirits were not authorities. We've taken a childlike stance, and it's time to grow up and experience our own potential, our own power! If we want the planet to survive, we really have to take responsibility for how we live our lives, and also see that we have the same power the spirits do. As above, so below; as within, so without. The power the spirits around us have is the same power we have inside ourselves. A key part of my work is getting people to look at their personal power, their own divine nature. We need to teach people how to experience their interrelatedness with all things, to remember in our bodies, not as a mental construct, that this is a unified universe. What quantum physics teaches today, shamans have been teaching for thousands of years: We're not form, we're light, we're energy; the power to change the world is inside each and every one of us, right now. We have created tremendous toxicity on the planet, how can we transmute that? Shamanism needs to look at the current problem, which is inner pollution and outer pollution. That means growing up, taking responsibility. We need to work in partnership with the spirits in both our inner and outer work, and not abdicate our own power.

Lenore: Maybe the global crisis is our culture's initiation into adulthood.

Sandy: Right! Absolutely!

Lenore: We must leave our egoic self behind to practice Medicine for the Earth. Must we transcend material iden-

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tification with the body? If so, does this practice feed the split between matter and spirit?

Sandy: In Medicine for the Earth we practice actually experiencing completely, physically, our energetic unity with everything. If you keep seeing everything as form, and you try to heal things, you'll work in a Newtonian way: you'll see this ill person, or that contaminated water, as separate from the perfection of the universe. So, while there might be perfection in other things, because this water is contaminated, it's no longer perfect; since this person has cancer, they're no longer perfect. That is over-identifying with form, believing separation, and that prevents miracles. So in Medicine for the Earth, I don't promote separation of form and spirit. Rather, we see that everything is perfect and divine, right now. When the practitioner of Medicine for the Earth transfigures, actually shape-shifts into their own divine nature, the water also does that, the ill client does that. By breaking down the over-identification with form, miracles happen.

Lenore: Medicine for the Earth grew from your passion to right environmental imbalance. How might collective transfiguration rebalance the human web?

Sandy: Simply stated, the practice of transfiguration brings people the experience of their own divinity. When you break down the ego and experience unity, love comes in. And with the principle of "as above, so below; as within, so without" — if you're in a state of love and harmony, and experiencing yourself and everything around you as light, energy — then healing is going to come in, whether the imbalance is a social or chemical pollution.

Lenore: What do you mean by "divinity?"

Sandy: Divinity, going back to the Aramaic, is letting go of your form and what keeps you feeling separate; going into a place of union, experiencing yourself as absolutely perfect energy and light.

Lenore: A couple years ago when you talked about spreading Medicine for the Earth beyond shamanic circles, I suggested reaching out to activists, and you had reservations. What were they?

Sandy: I'm now combining Medicine for the Earth with activism in my own way. But in some activism, people are so entrenched in anger. Back in the 1960s I was an anarchist against the Vietnam War, and I saw activist groups identify as an "us" that is against "them." That creates the potential for another war, on a different level. Seeing nothing change out there in the world burned me out, and forced me to look at where I can create change. In Medicine for the Earth there is no "us" versus "them." All mystical traditions believe that everything manifests first on the spiritual level before manifesting physically. So, how can we all work on the spiritual level, so that we manifest something positive here? The spiritual level is where we can have tremendous power. We need to learn to focus our prayers, thoughts, feelings about the preciousness of life. That focus alone can create change. On the manifest level we need to keep communicating, raising awareness of what's really going on.

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that hill, we have seen the enemy, and that enemy is us. If we as a species can't learn to accept, to forgive, and to care for the morally damaged among ourselves, then we can love nothing at all, and we will be nothing at all. The death penalty stands as an exemplar of human violence and hypocrisy. We must work to end it.

Contact California People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, cpfadp@pobox.com, PO Box 60904, Palo Alto, CA 94306-0904

Mary Klein is serving a life sentence of privilege and uncertainty in Palo Alto. She earns good time by managing an adult literacy tutoring program.

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Lenore: So internal work isn't enough?

Sandy: It could be, but I think so many people are unaware that there's an issue.

Lenore: There are not enough of us yet.

Sandy: Right. So work on both planes is necessary. We need more people focusing. The more people focusing, the stronger our power. So many people are unaware of what's happening. One of the blunt statements I feel I need to put out there is, "The sun gives us life, earth gives us

life, water gives us life, air gives us life—we've contaminated everything that gives us life." Americans don't understand that the elements actually bring us life, and that we've destroyed them. Europeans understand, and they're afraid of the consequences of American ignorance.

Lenore: I've imagined thousands of activists circling a WTO meeting and transfiguring en masse, holding


those in the meeting in perfect love.

Sandy: That would be great! I had a similar fantasy recently: all of us outside, transfiguring and toning for peace at the same time. Bush maneuvers by planting the seeds, "If you say anything against me, you're a terrorist — no matter that I'm destroying life." That's scary. I'm aware that we no longer live in a democracy. We haven't for a long time, but now it's really here. And it's frightening that people are supporting his stance, because it gives permission to destroy life. Not only other people, but look at how Bush now has opened up the national forests for mining and logging. But let's do our spiritual work. That's the place where we'll always have power. It cannot be taken from us.

Lenore: I really appreciate something you said at a Medicine for the Earth gathering, you were talking about people craving security and safety, and you said, "Well, there just isn't any! In the physical realm there isn't any, so we may as well just forget it!" (laughter)

Sandy: This is recognizing that you're spirit, not form; the heart is the only place you can find safety. The spirit can't be hurt, only the form. There is a lot of ignorance. A lot of people only educated in the principles of separation will go with the Bushes of the world, believing that's how they'll stay safe. We may not be able to reach everyone, but we can unify the hearts of those who know that something different is possible.

Lenore: What is the connection between Medicine for the Earth and the practices of Mahatma



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Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Subcommandante Marcos in contemporary Chiapas? These men embodied love, refused to hate, maintained a powerful connection with spirit, and were able to raise the vibrational level of political movements for liberation.

Sandy: They all recognized the spiritual realms, and educated people that anger was not the solution. They also succeeded in keeping people inspired, and not in a place of fear.

Lenore: They said, "It isn't going to work for us to hate or harm people. The goal is brotherhood. That's the only way we'll become really free."

Sandy: Exactly. Rather than "us versus them," we find another solution.

Lenore: How do we bridge divisions between people of different faith traditions around the globe who are working to heal the world? How can we earth-based folks successfully collaborate with those who practice religions that wrought the destruction of our ancestors?

Sandy: By keeping a clear intention. Remember that the intention is to promote life and harmony and peace. Realize that every prayer, no matter how anybody's doing it, is creating a healing energy field. Again, when we let go of form, we can see how we're unified. The unity

comes from our shared intention. The intention of all the prayers is wanting life to continue in a good way. In experiencing the unity of intention, we heal divisions of form. We need to shift our focus from differences to how we're the same, know we're actually together creating a field of healing for the earth.

Lenore: Sometimes I feel an odd excitement and optimism, and gratitude, for these incredible times, when there's a real opportunity for us to turn a really, really big corner.

Sandy: Yes, I feel exactly the same way — excited about the possibilities. It's easy right now to say, "Well, I've done all this work, and look at the world, it seems like everything's getting worse." But we are, collectively, at a real choice point, consciously, on the planet right now. What we need to decide is whether we want to keep feeding division, which keeps the shadow forces in power, or to create the

paradigm shift we want by feeding unity, and choosing the unified heart.

Lenore Norrgard is founder of Circle of the Living Earth. She offers a Shamanism for Activists training in Boulder Creek, CA, January 16-18, with Medicine for the Earth principles. Contact CopperPersephone@aol.com, call Lenore, (415) 820-1655, or visit www.circlelivingearth.org

A longer version of this interview may be read at www.circlelivingearth.org

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