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- Returning Home from Standing Rock



ROLLING THUNDER
A Medicine Man Remembered

Rappé Amazonian Snuff

Creating Sacred Space
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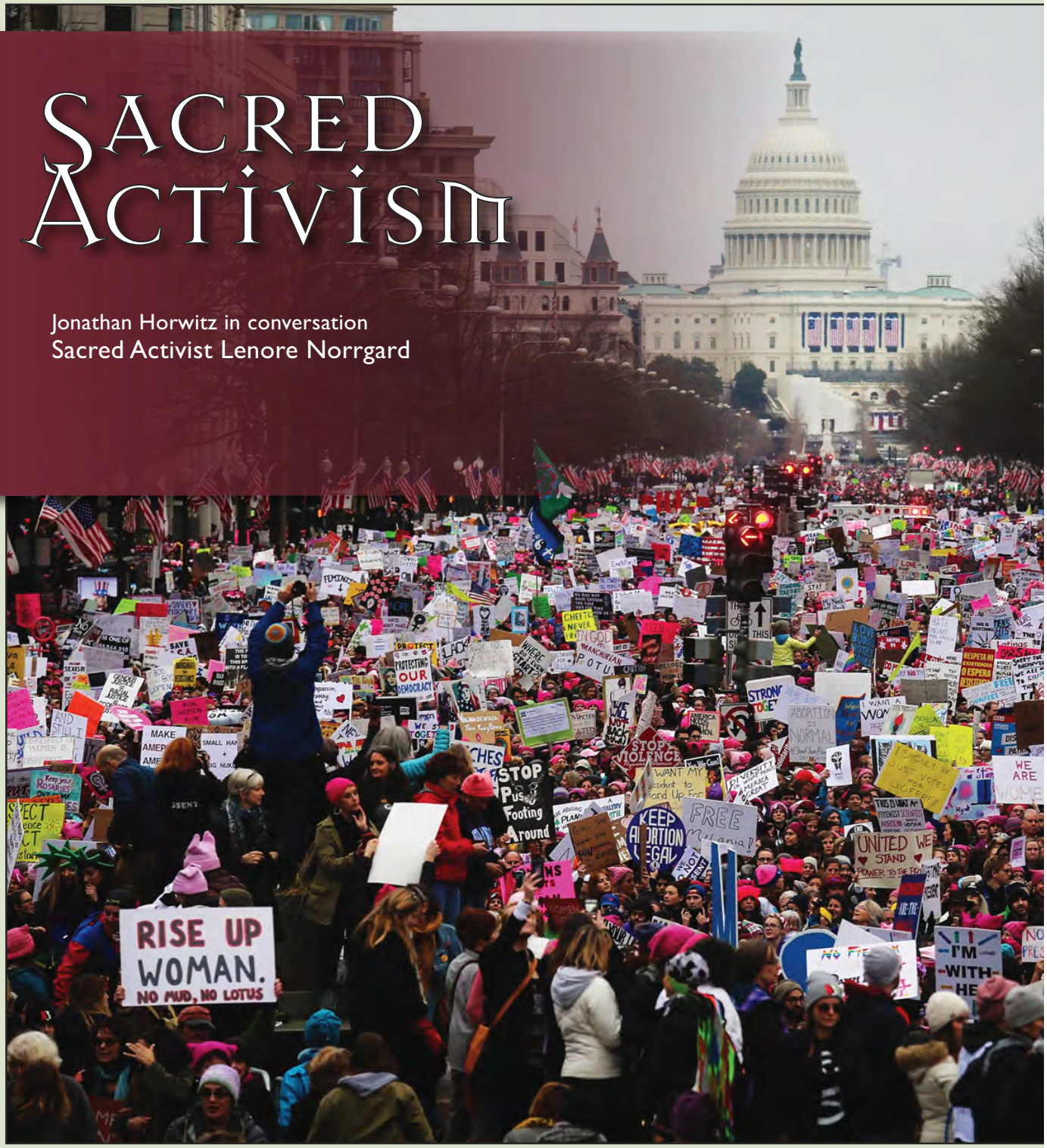
Psychotherapy Meets Shamanism

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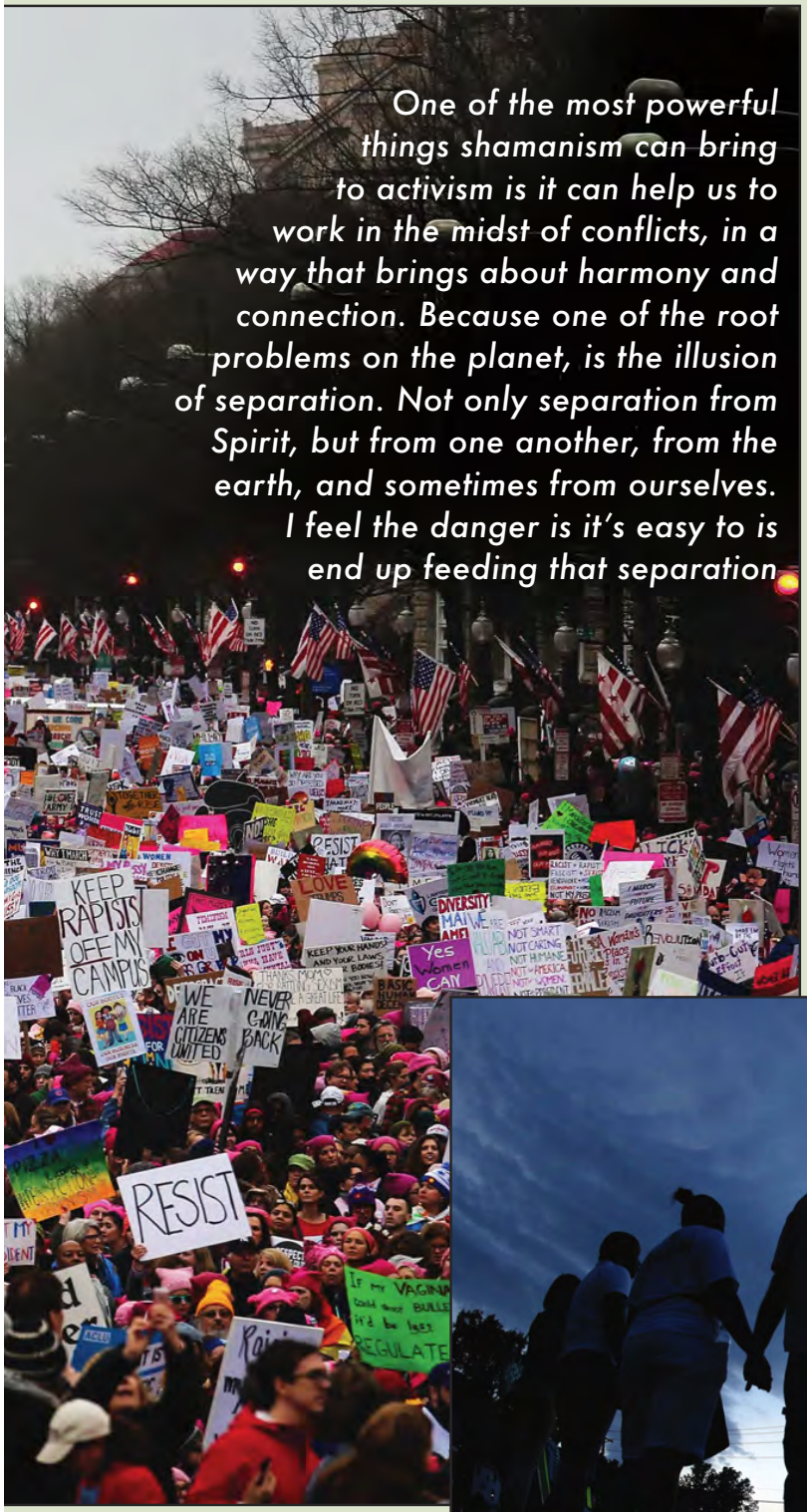
Jonathan Horwitz in conversation
Sacred Activist Lenore Norrgard



Above: the Women's march in Washington DC, done to protest Trump's presidency

Jonathan: I think, initially, many of us come to shamanism because we feel we need empowerment, and shamanic healing and practice is very empowering. I feel strongly that shamanic practice is about taking what you get from the spirits, and taking it further, together with the spirits. And as I've watched you work, I see that is what you're doing with your 'Shamanic Activism' which can include political activism and ecological activism. I see that pathway as one of the possible routes that a living shamanic practice can take.

Michael Harner always used to be adamant that shamanism is not political. A lot of people,



One of the most powerful things shamanism can bring to activism is it can help us to work in the midst of conflicts, in a way that brings about harmony and connection. Because one of the root problems on the planet, is the illusion of separation. Not only separation from Spirit, but from one another, from the earth, and sometimes from ourselves. I feel the danger is it's easy to is end up feeding that separation

especially younger Americans, say, "I'm not into politics." They just can't see that that, in itself, is an incredibly political statement.

So I really get worried when shamanic practitioners tell me - with a perfectly straight face - that "politics doesn't matter, the earth will survive," as if 'surviving' was enough.

I look at them, and say, "Listen, the earth is losing 100 species every day - what about them? They're not surviving. I want the earth to thrive. So, I'm interested in trying to get shamanic folks to become more active. To be activists.

So what's your story? How did you come to the path of Shamanic Activism?

Lenore: Well, I grew up in a religious family that was very supportive of the Civil Rights Movement. My father was a pastor who preached something called 'the social gospel,' applying Jesus's teachings to contemporary social issues - not unlike Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

My younger brother was adopted from the Menominee tribe, so between the Civil Rights Movement and my awareness of my brother's ethnicity, I was conscious of race and racism from a very early age.

Now, my parents' religion didn't catch with me, but their social values did. In my early teens I protested the war in Vietnam, and was an early feminist, and in the mid-1970s I became involved in radical politics.





Right: the author speaking at a spiritual activism gathering in America

However, as an artist I found party politics too constricting, and went my own way, remaining an independent activist, and becoming a photo-journalist and writer.

But how did you get from there to shamanism?

I had never considered myself spiritual, but I carried deep wounds from my childhood, and struggled with clinical depression for decades.

In 1987 an animal spirit intervened and blessed me with a spontaneous healing. My depression was finished overnight. What could I do but become spiritual?

One of my very first thoughts, after gratitude, was, "Oh! This is what's been missing from the political work!" If I can receive such a miraculous healing, personally, why can't we have miracles of social healing, too?

At that point I shifted from a paradigm of social revolution to one of social healing, and started naming things like racism and misogyny as social wounds, and wondering how we could heal them.

I was alone with my initiatory experience, and didn't know anything about shamanism.

When Sandra Ingerman's book, 'Soul Retrieval', came out in 1991, I read that, and I immediately realised that we had experienced soul loss as a nation, with the assassinations of Dr. King, the Kennedys and Malcolm X, and also with the betrayal of the Democratic Party convention in 1968 and, later, Watergate.

Our citizenry was a broken body politic, paralysed in the face of a right-wing reaction to the gains of Civil Rights, feminism, labour, etc.

I received intensive training with the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, and then started teaching, all along thinking about this question of shamanic social healing.

The first social healing ritual I developed, in 1994, was 'Dreaming the Dark,' a celebration to honour and receive healing from the spirit of darkness. The intention was to heal our relationship with 'the dark,' the Western repository of all bad things. Dreaming the Dark became a highly-anticipated, annual winter solstice celebration in the Pacific Northwest.

I suppose some people understood the ritual as political, and others did not.

True. In fact, I think there are different ways for shamanic practitioners to influence the political situation.

We can participate in community organising meetings, and bring the



Right: a gathering of people at Standing Rock in North Dakota, USA

perspective of the spirits into planning that work. And there is very private work, such as the Buddhist practice of tonglen[1], and other practices to help shift the social and earth vibration, that we can do alone. Another level is doing closed healing rituals and other circle work that is focussed on social healing, like 'Dreaming the Dark.' And we can do very public things, like bringing ritual into public protest, and thereby transforming it.

I've had decades when I've been out in the streets protesting, and years where it's been more about writing. I've worked privately in shamanic circles, and I've also done a lot of very public, interfaith work, infusing shamanism into interfaith social activism, and also bringing the power of ritual into public protests.

Now I'm making a dramatic film, 'American Ubuntu,' which weaves together shamanism, earth activism, and politics.

When you're working in shamanic circles, doing work on behalf of social or earth issues, how do you approach that? I can imagine all kinds of interesting ethical issues arising, like how much can I ask my spirits to interfere with some monster dam project in the Amazon basin, that kind of thing.

Yes - as with all shamanic work - I am careful about not asking for specific outcomes. I usually include a caveat that our work ultimately serves the highest good of all, because we don't have the whole picture. Through our shamanic work, we can get a peek at the big view.

So I think one crucial thing in shamanic activism is to have humility as we stand before the Great Mystery, and to know that we haven't got the meta view. It is hubris to think that we can know how the specific outcome of each individual struggle will affect the whole. Does that make sense?

Of course it does.

This came up recently in my drumming circle. Someone said that the Monsanto Corporation is the embodiment of evil, and we should ask the spirits to destroy it.

After discussion, we asked instead for whatever was necessary for harmony and healing on the planet with regard to Monsanto, and left it up to the spirits as to how they want to handle that.

Another time I was teaching a 'Shamanism for Activists' weekend, and it happened that the World Trade Organisation was meeting at the same time. Naturally, people wanted to journey about putting a stop to globalisation.

I told them, "My heart is really with you, but remember what I said, about having humility before the Great Mystery? We do not know, ultimately, what the role of globalisation is in the evolution of the world." The amazing thing was that these activists all nodded their heads, soberly, and we reframed the journey question as a mission to ask, 'What is our right relationship to globalisation?' It was a very powerful journey, with not a few tears.

Sometimes I'm really torn, when I become very emotionally involved and really want to do something like that. One way is to ask to see a given situation through one of my spirit helpers' or teachers' eyes. And although sometimes you don't get a total view, you often can get a more nuanced view. You can see a lot of things that aren't immediately apparent.

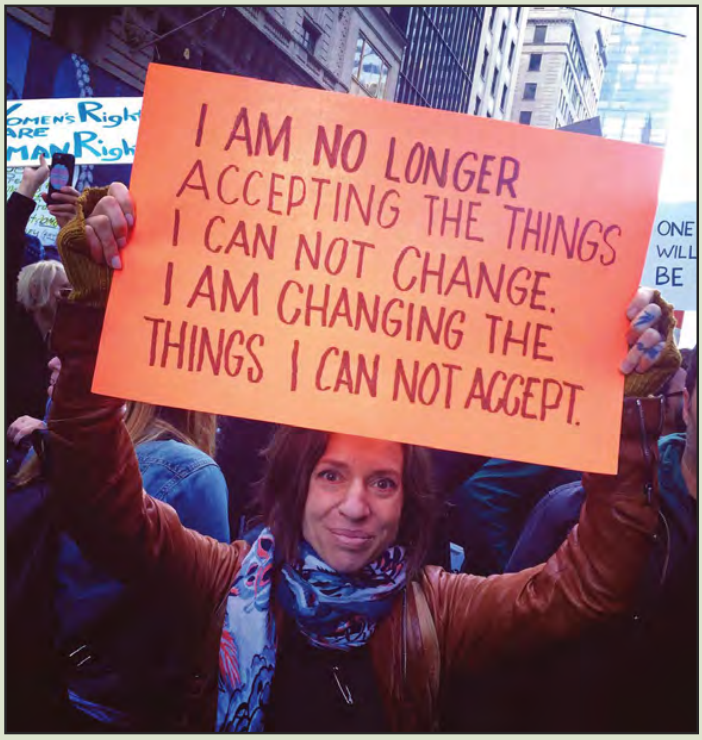


Above: recent protest by Naelyn Pike - a 16-year-old San Carlos Apache woman - in Times Square

Yes, exactly.

Because if you're going to work with the spirits to engage as an activist, you have to go into the activism from their point of view, and not from your personal point of view.

Right. One of the most powerful things shamanism can bring to activism is exactly this. It can help us to work on issues, and work in



Left: singer songwriter and feminist activist Ani Defranco taking part in one of the recent women's marches

SHINING LESSONS FROM STANDING ROCK

An update from Lenore Norrgard

The Water Protectors of the Sacred Stone Camp continue to be a source of tremendous inspiration to social justice warriors and defenders of the Earth around the world. Let's look at some of the key stances they have taken that lift everyone involved to a higher spiritual plane:

• **Protect the Sacred.** Refuse the powerless frame of 'protesting' to the powers that be, and instead stand in their sacred duty to protect the Earth as their prime directive, following it wherever it takes them. Protecting the Sacred is tantamount to physical and cultural survival, and stands above any personal needs or desires.

• **Take direction from the Ancestors and Great Spirit.** Rather than debating strategy from a human-centered perspective, seek spiritual wisdom all day, every day, and particularly before and after every strategic action. Decisions are spiritually integrous, rather than materially 'realistic' or personally expedient.

• **Prayer as action, action as prayer.** Every action taken, whether preparing food, setting up a sweat lodge, or holding the line from encroachment by police, is performed with fidelity to Spirit. By staying in constant alignment with Spirit, the corporate Faustian bargain for oil is exposed for what it is.

• **Peacemaking.** Indigenous nations with centuries-long feuds made sacred ceremonies to end said feuds with mutual honour, in order to come into harmony and defend the Sacred together. Such unity on Turtle Island had been unprecedented.

• **Inclusivity.** Non-indigenous solidarity, predicated on respecting indigenous leadership, was fostered, not only in the form of donations and legal support, but also in action on the ground, in shoulder-to-shoulder community. Non-Natives experienced a kind of love and community never before known. This created an unbreakable solidarity in defending the Sacred.

• **Centre women's leadership.** While the beloved indigenous youth founded this movement, and Water Protectors honor all their elders, it is the women of all generations who have been honoured as the central leaders of the various camps. This is a struggle to Protect Life, and indigenous people know women are the carriers and nurturers of life, and their leadership must be centred.

• **All are One - Really.** The Water Protectors have refused to be divided from those assigned to suppress them. On arrival last spring, each Water Protector walked down a long police line, stopping to smile into the eyes of each officer and shake his hand. Even as the officers have acted on orders to attack them, the Protectors remind them that they are protecting the water for ALL their children -- the children of those attacking, as well as those defending. When, in the dead of winter, the Morton County Sheriff's Department put out a call for supply donations on its web site, the Water Protectors sent them a hefty in-kind donation from their own cache. Imagine this: Supplying those bent on suppressing you.

• **Nonviolence.** When we truly know we are One, violence is not an option -- any violence becomes violence against oneself, one's family and tribe, because there is no 'other'. By abstaining from violence and remaining prayerful, the violence of the State is thrown into relief.

• **Healing is always possible.** When veterans came to Oceti Sakowin to pledge fealty to indigenous leadership and place their bodies between the Water Protectors and the police, the Lakota conducted ceremony in which any veteran who wished could atone for the genocidal history of the U.S. military. Members of the 7th Cavalry, which in 1890 massacred 200 Lakota, participated. Forgiveness was bestowed. Many tears were shed, and many hugs were shared. A bloody part of history started healing that day.

The power forged by adherence to the above principles is superhuman in nature, and cannot be conquered by guns. What would it mean to apply these principles in other struggles?
What if, instead of an anti-Trump movement, the U.S. managed to birth a generation that defended sacred Democracy in a sacred way?
In a recent shamanic circle, we worked to bathe the entire world in love. In my personal journey, my spirits showed that we need to infuse Donald Trump with great love; that he doesn't know what it is, and it's the only thing that will actually disarm him.

the midst of conflicts, in a way that brings about harmony and connection. Because one of the root problems - if not the root problem - on the planet, is the illusion of separation. Not only separation from Spirit, but from one another, from the Earth, and sometimes from ourselves. I feel that the danger in getting very vociferous, is that we end up feeding that separation.

So, we need continually to ask our spirits how to enter into these crucial conflicts in ways that reduce separation, and in ways that bring about the sense of interconnection. That is the very foundation for shifting our relationship with one another - and with the Earth.

This shift in consciousness is crucial, or we can get all caught up in how 'evil' Monsanto is. Actually, we could say that Monsanto is the ultimate expression of the human illusion of separation - thinking that we can somehow manipulate genes, that we can take land and seeds from other people and destroy their lives, and not be affected ourselves. We've created that - humanity has created that illusion of separation. Monsanto actually is a manifestation of a fundamental misunderstanding on the part of humanity.

You're onto something. Separation is our guiding illusion, and propagates fear and greed, which are like the forces of Mordor driving the human world today. So when we are going into an activist setting, going in with an angry 'Us versus Them' attitude is a dangerous thing.
I think the best way to get to an equanimous state is to try to see things as the spirits do. And often the spirits have an agenda. But if they have an agenda, I'm willing to work for it - I trust their agenda more than I trust mine!
Tell me more about the interfaith activism.

That really started when I attended the West Coast founding Conference of the 'Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP),' which was initiated by Rabbi Michael Lerner in 2005. The Conference was overwhelmingly Christian and Jewish and White. So I helped start a



Above: women have played an important roll in the stand at Standing Rock

diversity caucus at the conference, to promote racial and all kinds of diversity, including spiritual - after I had campaigned for months to get an interfaith healing ritual on the agenda of the East Coast NSP founding conference in Washington, DC.

It was a tremendous amount of work to get that ritual accepted, but many joined me in calling for it, and when it was won, I invited Myron Eshowsky to collaborate with me.

We performed the ritual across from the White House, in Lafayette Park, and when we told the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and spiritual-not-religious participants that our intention was to heal the history of violence in the name of religion, they got it, immediately - their response was, 'Oh, yeah, we really need to do that.'

Wow. That's really brave of you. What happened?

Some of the participants said it was the most powerful spiritual experience they had in the four-day conference.

When I returned to Portland - where I was living at the time - another interfaith peace group had heard about the D.C. ritual, and asked if I would do one for them. So we talked about it, and I journeyed, and we did a public peacemaking ritual for our neighbourhood, which was torn by gentrification.

It turned out that the day before the ritual there was a huge escalation in the Gulf War, and many people were upset - so not only did people from the immediate neighbourhood come, but also many from beyond it. They said they came because they felt helpless, and wanted to do something positive, instead of just another anti-war protest. They left feeling empowered and hopeful.

That reminds me of when I got back from Viet Nam in 1966 and I joined in the Anti-War movement. But a few years later I got involved in the Peace Movement.

Exactly! In 2008, I wrote an article for Sacred Hoop Magazine about my vision of transforming mass social protests into massive public rituals of social healing[2]. I had come to feel that the practice of protest had become disempowering..

In anti-war demonstrations, we would be given a prescribed route to march, then we would hear a bunch of speakers and performers, then we were asked for donations, and then

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we were dismissed to go home. And I thought, 'Disempowered, again!'

It had become awfully rote, and instead of people connecting with their own power, and expressing that together, on behalf of the greater good, it'd become like the worst of going to church - you know? You get a moment to feel good that you did the right thing - but did it affect anything?

What if, instead, we all encircled the Pentagon and created a huge field of love around it? The Pentagon is filled with people. We can affect their hearts, and affect what they actually do. So instead of making a big 'Us versus Them' protest, and feeding conflict, we can create peace. I also wrote about bringing in the ancestors to help us to do this, and connecting with the spirits of the land.

Do you see these public rituals going beyond the interfaith activist movement?

They must – and they have. This happened for the first time in 2009, when I was asked to put together a ritual for the National Conference of the Peace and Justice Studies Association.

That was a real turning point, because it was the first time a secular group had asked me to put together a ritual. I journeyed and asked, 'Please show me a peace-making ritual for a secular group, that reaches them, and that they will participate in.'

My spirits showed me that what we needed to do was a 'Coronation of the Collective Heart.' They said, "People will understand that. They know the word coronation. It's about crowning a sovereign. This is about installing the collective heart as the sovereign of the world."

That's beautiful. And by going to your spirits with this it gives a perfect example of what I think of when I talk about shamanic activism.

It was really amazing. I saw in my journey a huge garland of flowers for this coronation, and I thought, 'That's a cool metaphor, how shall we do that?' Later I learned that the word coronation comes from the word corona, the Latin word for garland!

Ultimately, we actually made a 100-foot-long garland. Some shamanic folk made a base garland of greens, and blessed it - and a florist donated hundreds and hundreds of flowers.

The ritual itself was very transformational. One man, who at the opening had his arms folded, stayed and participated in weaving the flowers into the garland, and hoisting it. At the end, he was wiping tears from his eyes, and he joined in the crowd's cheers for accomplishing this Coronation of the Collective Heart.

The energy generated was palpable and lasted several days, staying with people as they dispersed to different parts of the country.

That's how it should be.

One thing I've found is that, as we enter the political arena, it is a fantastic arena for our spiritual unfolding.

This is the direct opposite of what many experience. Say more.

Well, here's an example. As I was developing the ritual I just described, I kept getting email reminders about registering for the conference the ritual was for. However, the only way to register for it was to pay the registration fee.

So I emailed the man who had requested the ritual, and said, "Hey, I'm happy to register, but since I'm putting together and leading this ritual - and also teaching a workshop for free - can you just add my name?"

He wrote back to me and lambasted me for suggesting I shouldn't have to pay. His response, in fact, was very angry and toxic. He suggested that he would be happy to drop me from the program, and that 'given my attitude,' this probably was just as well. I felt the force of his rage - I'm sensitive and it really affected me. Of course, part of me reacted and wanted to just write back and say "To hell with you, I don't need to work for you for free, and then pay you to boot." But I also was struck that this man is a leader of



Below: a San Carlos Apache man stands firm at Oak Flat - a sacred site to his people. The site has been sold to Resolution Copper Mining, an Australian-British mining company, who want to dig a vast mine there which will obliterate the Apache's sacred site completely

some renown - as I was becoming - and thought, 'What power has a peace movement if we can't even sort things out among ourselves?'

So I slept on it, and the next day I went online and registered, and paid. Then I wrote to him and said, "Look, I must have hit a raw nerve with my request. I have just registered and paid for the conference, and would like to go forward with the ritual. And if you don't want me to, then I'll just consider my registration fee a donation to a good cause."

Paying that fee really stretched me - in more ways than one - but I did not want to lose the opportunity to bring ritual activism into a secular environment, and felt that making this sacrifice was part and parcel of the peacemaking work.

The man wrote back, and said; "You're right, I'm overwhelmed, you did hit a raw nerve... Thanks for handling this with much more grace than I did."

So this process somehow lifted both him and me up, and I think this was not only part of my own spiritual practice, but also part of the social healing involved in that piece of work.

As it does so often. So where does your film-making come into all of this?

In the late 1990s, I went to film school in San Francisco.

I understood the power of stories in creating ourselves and our world, and I had an idea that we needed new stories, but I wasn't aware of any particular new story I had to tell. In Spring 2001, I returned to Seattle, and thought it was time to advance the shamanic social healing work, so in August I announced a Fall circle called 'Reweaving the Web: Healing Our World.' Flyers for it went out, and people were signing up, when one day I was doing a soul retrieval, and my spirits piped up, "You need to do film." I said, "Well, I'm helping people, I'm doing good work." They said, "No, you have a big message, and you need this bigger tool."

Your spirits knew before you did.

Yes, and I knew what that meant as soon as they said it. I knew I had to return to the Bay Area, and would have to commute to lead the 'Reweaving the Web.'



Above: Native Americans at the California Native American Day

So I left Seattle with a car-load of my things, and overnighted with some friends near sacred Mount Shasta. That's where I was on the morning of 9-11.When I got to San Francisco late on 9-11, I curled up on my futon, asking myself, 'How do I respond to this, as a healer, as a filmmaker, and an activist?'

For days I meditated on this, and that is when the characters who would later populate my screenplay for 'American Ubuntu,' first revealed themselves and their predicaments to me. I didn't actually start writing the story for a few years, though, after I'd moved to Portland.

And Portland is where you engaged in all that interfaith activism?

Yes. And throughout the ritual activism my spirits were tapping their paws, saying, 'What about film?

This needs to be done'. In between the activism and the demands of my shamanic practice I occasionally would steal a week or two, and go away and work on the script, but it was coming too slowly, and I constantly felt torn.

Finally, I got clear that I really needed to focus on the film: it was my activism and social healing ministry, as well as my art, rolled into one. If I was going to actually make this movie, I had to focus, or it never would happen.

After several drafts, 'American Ubuntu,' finally arrived at the current draft. The story is a culmination of all the things we've been talking about - shamanic activism, and the collapsing of polarisations.

As Christina Pratt[3], host of the 'Why Shamanism Now?' online radio show said, "This is a movie that shows how shamanism actually works - grappling with real world problems, and solving things."

I can't wait to see it!

I usually include a caveat that our work ultimately serves the highest good of all, because we don't have the whole picture. For example, with the election, I wasn't willing to do shamanic work specifically for a victory. How would I know the best outcome of the election?



Above: Shameeka Dream walks along a line of State Troopers while burning sage in protests for the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland, USA April 2015

Below: Alton Sterling peacefully confronts during a recent 'Black lives matter' protest in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

I can't wait either. I moved to Oakland in the summer of 2011 to set about bringing it into production, and then the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement began, and I was powerfully drawn to it.

Of course you were! There was a lot going on in Oakland, too, wasn't there?

Yes. It was huge. I started getting involved. I wrote about it from a shamanic perspective, held a teleseminar, and did a Tuesday Morning Conversation with Christina Pratt.

But I saw the writing on the wall: 'Lenore' - I told myself - 'If you get involved in this, American Ubuntu never will be made'. I feel that making that choice - to hold back from getting deeply involved in Occupy, and keep a clear focus on the film - has served well.

That's a really good point, how important it is to be really present, and aware of your role in a given situation.
So there were all these temptations, but you kept your focus throughout. I think focus is something that we can lose very quickly and easily.
Would you tell us a little about 'American Ubuntu'? You call it 'a healing story for the USA.' What does ubuntu mean?

Ubuntu is a Zulu word. It means, 'I am what I am, because of who we all are.' In the story, I apply this philosophy to the very diverse country the USA is today: Americans are what we are, because of who we all are.

That's a very powerful, and important, statement in a country as split as the U.S.

It is truly a shamanic tale of our times. One of the main characters is in the ancestral realm. The script has won an award, and at this point renowned indie producer Debbie Brubaker (Diary of a Teenage Girl, La Mission, Blue Jasmine) and I are seeking investors to bring the film into production and distribution.

I've always known this film would be made through a groundswell of support from the shamanic community.

For me, what you have been talking about is what I see as the role of the shamanic activist: to bring healing to our world with the help of the spirits, living the teachings they give us, following the path they show us. Thank you for doing that. It's been inspiring.

Lenore Norrgard, founder of Circle of the Living Earth, has taught and practised shamanism for 25 years. She is a writer, filmmaker, and offers training in shamanic activism. She currently resides near Seattle, Washington, USA.
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A version of this interview first appeared in 'A Journal of Contemporary Shamanism' Volume 6, Nr. 1, Spring 2013.
www.shamansociety.org

NOTES:

1: Tonglen is a Tibetan Buddhist practice where someone else's illness, or environmental polution is taken - through meditation - into the practitioner's body and transmuted. This is done by visualising the breath coming into the practioner's body containing the harming substance - often seen in the form of black smoke - and the practitioner then internally tranmutes it and breaths out once again - often visualised as white smoke or light.

2: See Sacred Hoop Magazin Issue 58

3: For more information and to listen to episodes of Why Shamanism Now: www.whyshamanismnow.com

