

***The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian: Commemorative Edition with Letters While Living with Black Elk* by Joseph Epes Brown, introduction by Åke Hultkrantz, edited by Marina Brown Weatherly, Elenita Brown, and Michael Oren Fitzgerald. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007. Append.; biblio.; illus.; index; 6 x 9 in.; 168 pp.; \$21.95 (paper).**

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

The Spiritual Legacy of the American Indian contains an impressive collection of Joseph Epes Brown's classic essays in Native American studies, written over the first thirty-seven years of his academic career. The book, originally published in 1982 by Crossroad Publishing, has been out of print for some years. This commemorative edition contains an informative preface by the editors—Brown's wife, his eldest daughter, and ethnographer Michael Oren Fitzgerald, who was for three semesters his teaching assistant—as well as an introduction by the distinguished Swedish scholar Åke Hultkrantz. Also included within this commemorative edition is a section of previously unpublished letters by Brown, including personal correspondence he authored while he was conducting research and living with Nicholas Black Elk, or *Hehaka Sapa*, the renowned twentieth-century Oglala Lakota spiritual leader.

According to Black Elk, it was a "god-send" that Brown arrived on the scene to participate in the renewal of the primordial spiritual traditions of the American Indians. Brown (1920-2000) was a professional anthropologist who was adopted by Black Elk as a son and was given the Lakota name *Chanumpa Yuha Mani*, or "He Who Walks with the Sacred Pipe." It is rare to find an academic author whose work encompasses the fullness of a culture and its traditions as does that of Joseph Epes Brown.

Brown's works in the area of Native American studies have provided a remarkable service in advancing the understanding

of pre-reservation American Indian life. He was instrumental in championing the viewpoint that "Native American traditions ... are legitimate expressions of the *philosophia perennis*." In his original preface to this book, Brown states that "religion," in the primordial American Indian traditions, is not perceived as a separate activity divorced from everyday life, but is a central facet contextualizing all of life and every moment of human existence:

It has now become abundantly clear that it is a fundamental and universal characteristic of Native American cultures, as indeed of all primal ... cultures, that 'religion'—there is no equivalent word for this in any American Indian language—is not a separate category of activity or experience that is divorced from cultural or society. Rather, religion is pervasively present and is in complex interrelationships with all aspects of the peoples' life-ways.

Brown explains that, in primordial Native American cultures, it is the Great Spirit that brings true equilibrium and integration to both the "inner" and "outer" dimensions of the human individual. To forget one's spiritual center is to be less than human, and is a great error, according to every sapiential tradition worthy of name. The early peoples also understood that although the Great Spirit is transcendent, it is also immanent in the heart of man, as this quote from Black Elk illustrates: "[A]t the center of the Universe dwells *Wakan-Tanka* [the Great Spirit], and ... this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us."

Nature was not just the natural environment per se; it was perceived as sacred and could be regarded as the "metaphysic of nature"—the inner precinct or temple of the early peoples, as Black Elk explains:

We regard all created beings as sacred and important, for everything has a wochangi, or influence, which can be given to us, through which we may gain a little more understanding if we are attentive. We should understand well that all things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things; the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains and all the four-legged animals, and the winged peoples; and even more important, we should understand that He is also above all these things and peoples.

At one point, Brown compares the ritual smoking of the sacred pipe to the Holy Communion of Christians. He explains, "These pipes represent the human being in his totality, or the universe of which humankind is a reflection. The bowl is the heart, or sacred center, and each section of the pipe is usually identified with some part of the human being."

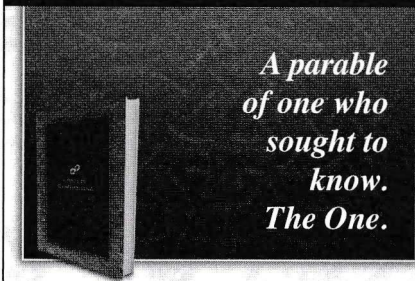
That passage reflects one of Brown's central premises: "If we can understand ... the truths the Indians find in their relationships to nature, and the profound values reflected



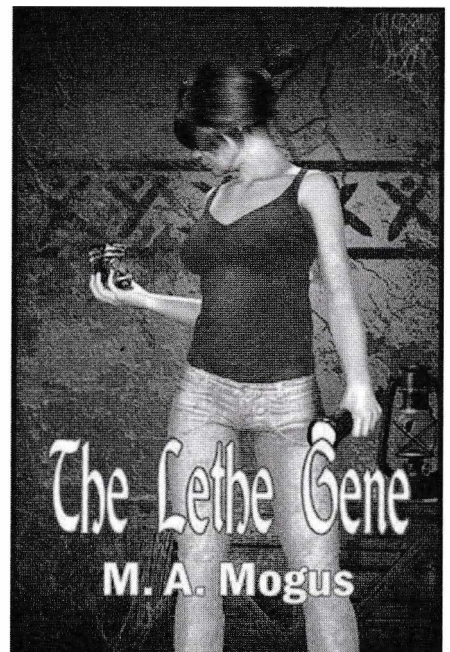
A BOOK OF RE-MEMBERING

Lessons in Death and Rebirth with Ayahuasca

www.BookofRemembering.com



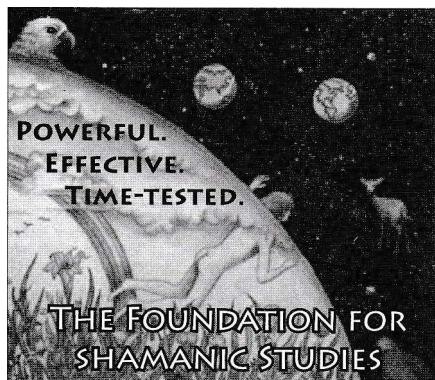
A parable of one who sought to know. The One.



Shamanic Mystery
www.Wings-Press.com

Paperback \$11.95
eBook \$6.00

www.jaguarmirror.net



**Michael Harner's
SHAMANIC JOURNEYING CDS**

Original authorized versions for shamanic journeying as described in Harner's book

The Way of the Shaman

Solo, double, multiple drumming, rattle, musical bow, singing chorus, & didjeridu.

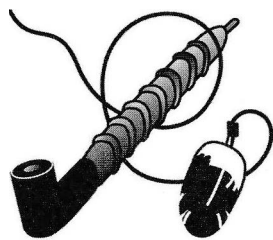
NEW! DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

Order online at

WWW.SHAMANISM.ORG

Complete shamanic supplies – Drums, rattles, books, DVDs, kits.

**Seven Circles
Foundation**



a non-profit organization
dedicated to the preservation
of Native American lifeways

Native American Ceremonies
Pipe Ceremony
Sweat Lodge • Vision Quest

Educational Programs
Classroom Presentations
Lectures

Sweats for People in Recovery
Healing from Addiction

Seven Circles Foundation
P.O. Box 559
Lagunitas, CA 94938
(510) 222-3822

www.sevencircles.org
Newsletter • Schedule of Events

REVIEWS

by their many rites and symbols, then we may become enriched, our understanding will deepen, and we shall be able to give to the American Indian heritage its rightful place among the great spiritual traditions of humankind."

Brown identifies three central stages in spiritual development that are also found in some form or another in the world's religions: purification, perfection or expansion, and union—"each in turn is realized and then integrated within the next stage, so that ultimately they become one in the individual who attains the ultimate goal." In primordial traditions, he explains, life is renewed and the sacredness of existence is perpetuated through ceremonial sacrifice, and "where there is no longer affirmation or means for sacrifice, for 'making sacred,' where the individual loses the sense of Center, the very energy of the world, it is believed, will run out."

The previously unpublished letters of Joseph Epes Brown contained in this book are an invaluable resource, complementing his other works, especially his classic text *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1953). These letters are particularly significant in that they provide new information regarding Black Elk's relationship to the Catholic Church and Lakota spirituality, and they disclose intimate details of Brown's participation in the work of restoring American Indian traditions.

Brown's letters indicate that the imminent crisis currently confronting the world was clearly foreseen by American Indian spiritual people. In one letter, he relates how Black Elk confided to him: "[W]e have reached the end of a cycle; and leading into the beginning of the next new cycle there is a very narrow bridge ... a great disaster is impending which shall bring this cycle to a close."

Nonetheless, Black Elk's perennial wisdom posits that there is an alternative to the present disintegration of the modern and post-modern world, and that is to bring back the "Eye of the Heart" (*Chante Ishta*). Black Elk explains it in this way:

I am blind and do not see the things of this world; but when the Light comes from Above, it enlightens my Heart and I can see, for the Eye of my Heart sees everything; and through this vision I can help my people. The heart is a sanctuary at the Center of which there is a little space, wherein Wakan-Tanka dwells, and this is the Eye. This is the Eye of Wakan-Tanka by which He sees all things, and through which we see Him.... In order to know the Center of the Heart in which is the Mind of Wakan-Tanka, you must be pure and good, and live in the man-

ner that Wakan-Tanka has taught us. The man who is thus pure contains the Universe within the Pocket of his Heart (Chante oqnaka).

Readers should benefit immensely from Brown's extensive knowledge of the first inhabitants of this continent. It is rare to find scholars who simultaneously exhibit both spiritual insight and profound empathy for the American Indian traditions, as Joseph Epes Brown does. We trust that this book will assist in the ongoing renewal of traditional American Indian spirituality—and also enrich the *philosophia perennis*, "that perennial and timeless wisdom valid 'now and forever.'"

Samuel Bendeck Sotillos has received graduate degrees in education and psychology. He has traveled throughout the world to visit sacred sites. He currently works as a mental health clinician in northern California.

RECEIVED & NOTED

Following is a list of relevant new books and tapes received by *Shaman's Drum* in recent months. Some we will review in future issues, but since we cannot possibly review all the published material we receive, we provide this section as a resource guide. Readers may inquire at retail outlets for titles they find of interest.

NONFICTION

Chöd Practice in the Bön Tradition by Alejandro Chaoul. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2009. Append.; biblio.; illus.; index; notes; 6 x 9 in.; 116 pp.; \$18.95 (paper).

Healing of the Soul: Shamanism and Psyche by Ann M. Drake, PsyD. Ithaca, NY: Busca Inc., 2009 (2003). Append.; biblio.; glossary; index; notes; 6 x 9 in.; 244 pp.; \$19.95 (paper).

How to Heal with Singing Bowls: Traditional Tibetan Healing Methods by Suren Shrestha. Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2009. Illus.; with CD; 5.5 x 8.5 in.; 96 pp.; \$15.95 (paper).

The Nature Way: Wisdom from a Western Shoshone Elder by Corbin Harney, as told to and edited by Alex Purbrick. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2009. Jotes; 5.25 x 8.25 in.; 118 pp.; \$18.95 (paper).

Reiki for Spiritual Healing by Brett Bevell. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2009. Append.; biblio.; index; 6 x 9 in.; 168 pp.; \$15.99 (paper).

AUTOBIOGRAPHY, FICTION & POETRY

Shaman's Eye poems by Beth Beurkens. Mount Shasta, CA: Sky Ladder Press, 2009. Illus.; 6 x 9 in.; 95 pp.; \$15.95 (paper).

The Wolf at Twilight: An Indian Elder's Journey through a Land of Ghosts and Shadows by Kent Nerburn. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2009. 5.5 x 8.5 in.; 344 pp.; \$14.95 (paper).