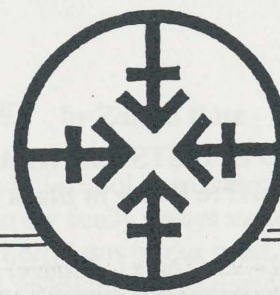


gender quest



THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF KINDRED SPIRITS

WINTER 2000

Vision Quests by Michael Young

Vision quests, as a spiritual rite of passage, have been with us for thousands of years. Though we usually think of vision quests as Native American in origin, they are actually indigenous to many earth oriented cultures from the Vedic cultures of India through the pre-Christian Celtic people of western Europe. Both Moses and Christ removed themselves from their communities for 40 days to fast and deepen their connection to the Creator and to clarify their next steps.

During the industrial age, the forces of society moved toward values that were much more external. It wasn't who you were anymore. It was what you could do and what you owned and who you knew. Needless to say, a rite of passage whose focus was ever inward was lost to us as "modern" people.

As we pass into the 21st century, it is useful for us to look at where being "modern" has led us. Many of us have no idea why we are here, what the purpose of our life is and where we are going. A deep feeling of alienation and meaninglessness pervades much of our culture. Surely the purpose of human life is more than just watching TV, working 40 hours a week, buying a house, raising a family and dying. It reminds me of that old Peggy Lee song, "Is That All There is?"

How do we turn ourselves around and get back on our own personal track? One possibility is to explore participating in a vision quest. There are few rites of passage that are as confronting and illuminating. First of all, they take time. A good quest requires at least 7 and preferably 10 days of your time. Two to three days to slow down and get prepared, four days to actually quest, and a couple of days to integrate before returning to your everyday life. Very few people are willing to allow that much time just for themselves.

The heart of the quest is the four days in the middle. This is the solo time where the quester retreats to a place that feels just right for her or him. This place is usually a place of personal power. The quester has been attracted to it for some reason, though they may not know why. During this time, the quester fasts, drinking only water. They have a small lean-to for shelter in case it rains, and a journal. They can sit and move around only within a 30-foot radius of their chosen spot. This is about *being*, not about doing.

What happens during these four days can be quite miraculous. All familiar daily reflections have been removed including mealtimes. The quester is surrounded by the earth and sky. As hunger fades, a heightened sensitivity appears. The initial fear of being alone diminishes as does the chatter of the mind. A quiet and new voice begins to make itself known. It is a voice of knowing. Sooner or later it begins to direct every action taken and every word that goes into the journal.

Many questers begin to experience that the earth, sky, trees and animals are conscious and aware of them and what they are in the process of becoming. To feel that a tree is not only conscious, but conscious of you is quite a revelation. Perhaps you experience that the tree is not only aware of you, but also pleased that you are there and engaged in your process. Many questers begin to feel that all of their experience is being orchestrated by something immense, and yet so intimate and personal -- that there is a Great Spirit behind all things.

For some questers, their whole personal experience takes them through many personal gateways of fear and separation toward love, trust and connectedness. It is always different and highly personal for each person. Some questers have a very visual experience where they have spiritual beings appear to them who heal and teach them. These folks return from their solo time noticeably different.

For many, the changes are deeply internal and not as apparent. For them, the depth of transformation becomes apparent when they return to their everyday life, and find their day to day experience is deeply changed. Some are no longer afraid or anxious. Others have a deep clarity and commitment regarding life decisions that they need to make. For many, everything just seems to shift into a whole new paradigm of living. It is best to wait six months before asking a quester what the full significance of their quest was really about. It usually takes about that long for it to bubble up into their consciousness.

It looks like humanity as a whole is beginning to shift its consciousness so that personal behavior is more and more directed by one's inner spiritual self. Most of us have directed our lives from our linear mental aspect. Both our law and education systems are products of this type of human mentality, and it pervades our whole

continued on last page

KINDRED SPIRITS RETREATS in 2001
at the BodhiTree House in Black Mountain, NC

February 22 - 25 (Thurs. - Sunday)

SEEKERS JOURNEY

Involves fasting, sweat lodge, meditation, drumming, dancing, journeying, and vision seeking. Culminating with a rite of passage and "break-fast". A strong prerequisite for any shamanic work. Led by Marc Eden.

March 29 - April 1 (Thurs. - Sunday)

GENDER QUEST

If you feel "other than" strictly a man or a woman, or a CD or TS, and want to explore meaningful ways of recognizing and expressing your *true* nature beyond the gender system - and still function in this world -- this weekend is for you. Facilitated by Holly Boswell.

April 13 - 16 (Fri. - Monday)

SPRING CIRCLE

Scheduled over Easter, this gathering will celebrate an Appalachian Spring, combining elements of Equinox ritual and Beltane frolic. Outings include The Light Center, hiking and picnic. This is one of our four major Holydays, and is a time for blossoming. Come & play...

April 19 - 22 (Thurs. - Sunday)

PARTNERS RETREAT

A powerful opportunity for partners of transgendered people to have personal, otherwise neglected, issues addressed in safe space, and to honor their own part in furthering the evolution of gender. Led by Zantui Rose.

May 3 - 6 (Thurs. - Sunday)

MEDITATION RETREAT

Silent Zen-style sitting, walking, working outdoors, evening discussions and nourishing meals. A nurturing space to find both your questions and your answers. A way to do the real inner work. Led by Zantui Rose.

June 21 - 24 (Thurs. - Sunday)

SUMMER CIRCLE

Spiritual circling in observance of the solar Solstice, plus hiking, swimming and picnicking at Lake Lure, drumming at the Peace Chamber, and a very festive celebration with local kindred spirits. This could be your very own summer vacation with kindred spirits.

July 19 - 22 (Thurs. - Sunday)

MOUNTAIN MAN WEEKEND

For male-identified FTM's to socialize, discuss issues, hike, fish, river raft -- whatever. Safe space to explore yourself with others in a spirit of brotherhood. Lots to do, or simply sit back and be. Hosted by Marc Eden.

August 31 - Sept. 3 (Fri. - Monday)

AUTUMN CIRCLE

Spiritual circling over Labor Day in early observance of Equinox, plus hiking, swimming and picnicking at Lake Lure, drumming at the Peace Chamber, and a decadent slumber party. A festive celebration of summer's end.

November 8 - 11 (Thurs. - Sunday)

SEX & GENDER

Frank, non-experiential sharing and exploration of the uncharted sexuality that results from gender-shifting beyond sex-role expectations. Singles, partners & couples welcome. Facilitated by Zantui & Holly.

November 22 - 25 (Thurs. - Sunday)

ALE-HELPSTI

We honor the core of Cherokee spirituality here, in their ancestral home, with a feast of thanksgiving on Saturday. No place at the table with blood kin? Come count your blessings with us.

December 29 - Jan. 1 (Sat. - Tuesday)

WINTER CIRCLE

After the fever pitch of commercialized holidays, you are invited to retreat in quiet reverence with kindred spirits. Bring a log for our mountaintop bonfire under the full moon, and start your year in Yule Circle.

The BodhiTree House is available for you to come and host your own retreat any time. See new web site: www.BodhiTreeRetreat.com



Traditional Vision Quests and wilderness camping can also be arranged at Dixon Mountain. See contact info below.

Kindred Spirits Retreats & Guesthouse

Founded in 1993, and dedicated to the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical well-being of all transgendered people. We address these concerns through regional gatherings, guest facilities, a traveling medicine show, electronic and print media. Submissions to this newsletter are always welcome. Send simple text (no attachments) to: hollyfairy@juno.com, or hard copy to: Kindred Spirits, c/o 395 Lakey Gap Acres, Black Mountain, NC 28711-9558. Any issues to which you have contributed will be free of charge. A year's subscription to *gender quest* (4 issues) costs \$8. Make check or money order payable to: Kindred Spirits. For more information, you may phone: 828-669-3889 (9:00am - 9:00pm) or visit our website at: www.TranSpirits.org.

Ale-heli'sti Gathering at the BTH

In honor of the native Cherokee practice of "gratitude in all things", kindred spirits gathered in Black Mountain over the Thanksgiving holidays. Some came early to visit, but most came on Saturday for a delicious potluck feast, hailing from Boston, Atlanta, Raleigh, and all over western North Carolina. All the LGBT sectors were represented, plus several young people. There was good drumming, as always, and a very heartfelt sharing of gratitude in sacred circle. We were all truly blessed to be there.

Kindred Spirits' First Winter Circle

Who would have thought that, despite all the busy-ness and troublesome weather over the Yuletide holidays, we would have our largest gathering yet at the BTH. Coming from as far away as California, Boston, and all over the Southeast, people sought quiet reflection and renewal over the New Year's weekend.

We took a long, meditative and very *brisk* walk each day through the winter wonderland just outside our door, marveling at the tightly curled rhododendron leaves and frozen waterfalls. Our circles were deep and healing, centering around the transformation of "out with the old, in with the new". Letting go of all the unnecessary burdens and limitations, and inviting whatever new energy and direction was desired.

After decorating our Yule logs with symbols of what we would surrender to the fire, we shared our supper in silence, then gathered our drums and met down at the bonfire (below). Relinquishing our logs with vows, we drummed each other on, and drank toasts with cider to usher in new blessings. With up-turned crescent moon, and Pleiades directly overhead, we'd forgotten it was New Year's Eve until some fireworks exploded in the valley. The new cycle had begun.



My Altars: #3 by Zantui Rose

Attending parochial school as a child, one can imagine that meal time in my family always started out with a prayer. "Come Lord Jesus be our guest, and unto us this food be blessed." Mealtimes now decades later, do not begin with a verbal prayer. But something about blessing the meal time has stuck with me.

I have created a mini-altar on the diningroom table which pretty much occupies the center of our house. An approximately 6" tall jade green translucent Kuan Yin is my guest at every meal. She emerges not from a lotus as usually seen, but from a brown multi-toned African basket approximately 8" in diameter. This basket is important to me because what I know of Africa, I love. The closest I've been to experiencing this deep, dark, earthy continent was walking into a "hole in-the-wall" African import store on the "seedy" side of NYC where I purchased this basket. While I came away with some genuine inexpensive African art, I completely missed an opportunity of a lifetime. The owner, an African woman who's family and family home still remained on the Ivory Coast, was immediately responsive when I indicated my love of her home land. After a lengthy talk she invited my then partner and me to her apartment in NY to discuss plans for opportunities here in the states for her young daughter. Even though a long distance dialogue was continued on these subjects, they failed to materialize. I was inches away from connections for a trip to Africa that could have altered the course of this life. Instead, years later, I sit down at a table of bounty in Black Mountain, NC.

Sharing this special basket on my table with Kuan Yin is an assortment of shells, stones, crystals, and seed pods collected from my travels over the years. (None of which were to Africa!) Also nestled here are three special items: 1) a very unique lion carving on a seashell that I found buried in my yard when I purchased this house, 2) a clay rose given to me and made by close friends, and 3) a small vile made out of cows utter, also a present from a friend who traveled through India. I've draped a small strand of garnet beads on the shoulders of Kuan Yin which create the look of a prayer shawl. I wore these garnet beads as a choker for years using the intense life force energy of garnet to revitalize my root chakra. I did this during a time when my energy on the physical plain was weak due to an illness manifesting as an inability to digest my food. Feeling vital and alive now, I offer these healing stones in gratitude to the Divine Force immortalized in Kuan Yin, the Goddess of compassion and mercy.

continued on last page

Are We Shamans Yet?

This long overdue dialogue occurred mostly on our TranSpirits list, as a result of the following message:



from Singing-with-the-Owls:

I am a Native American who was honored by the Grandmother of my Tribe by being selected to learn the Ancient Teachings from her. I am humbled by her selection of me... As I browsed through your website I read where Kindred Spirits are able to consider themselves Shaman... a very honored and holy word in my culture. Becoming a Shaman in my culture requires many, many years of study, reverence, humbleness and discipline. It is not something that is assigned to one just because they are of Native blood, and certainly not because they are born of the two-spirit identity. As one learns and listens one realizes that Father Sky and Mother Earth live within ALL of us. It is a lifelong process. I must say to you in all sincerity and without malice that your Kindred Spirits may have good intentions but it is another form of diluting and destroying my almost destroyed culture. To follow the Path of the Ancients is a positive step, but for one to consider oneself a Shaman just because they are a member of your Circle is very sad to me, and my Elders. It is very damaging and serves as a mockery to the teachings of the Ancients.

I wish you no ill harm. But I do wish you would not dilute the very difficult and very sacred teachings of the Native Americans much maligned heritage and teachings. So much has already been forgotten. I wish you great happiness and the ability to grow through the lessons on your journey. I hope that you accept my observations with open ears and an open heart.

from Holly Faery:

I thank you for your wise and caring words. The caution you advise has actually been a great topic of concern within our circles already. Perhaps we would do well to refine our language when discussing shamanism. We certainly do not mean any disrespect toward you or your culture -- quite the contrary.

I have been uncomfortable when I hear certain of my peers claiming the title of shaman, because of the very concerns you express. "Shaman-in-training" would be more apt, but by whose definition? It was Rena Swift-hawk, a transgendered shaman of the Ute tribe, who first began telling us we were shamans. Even so, I really felt that she was speaking more about our strong potential as transgendered shape-shifters, bridging the worlds of gender. For as you say, "Father Sky and Mother Earth live in ALL of us".



As I'm sure you know, shamanism is being re-explored by many people these days all over the world. Though some may be trendy and shallow in their pursuits, others are quite earnest. And while all sorts of shamans have practiced in many cultures throughout history, they have been defined differently. Those definitions are continuing to change today. I don't see that any one culture or tradition holds ownership over the word "shaman". The integrity of each aspirant must be tested within the context of their own culture and spiritual reality. While I have deep respect for traditions such as yours, I also see a need to reinvent shamanic practice from its essence, in order that it be relevant and effective in today's world. I believe shamanism is universal and timeless.

So I see part of our difference as semantic, and part as coming from a neo-shamanic approach vs. a traditional foundation. What I do take to heart is your request that we not call ourselves shaman before we have earned the title. I will respectfully share your good counsel and concerns within the circles of my Kindred Spirits, and humbly thank you for speaking your heart to us.

from Angela Brightfeather:

I, too, have experienced this feeling of robbing the ancients and the ways that have been passed down from our ancestors to us. I have studied, learned, listened to my spirit and live the healing path, having approached shamanism from both the spiritual and methodological sides, but most of all from the calling within my own heart.

Although many of us are called or appointed to this way of living and knowing, we must learn and practice it with great respect, for we come from all parts of Mother Earth and have landed in planes and ships upon these shores. Our ancients and ancestors are from everywhere, and they are universal in so many ways. So rather than going back to where we came from, we have chosen to stay in this place and form a Universal Community of thinking, of drawing on our ceremonies and cultures so that all of our ways may be honored and respected together and as one.

Perhaps we should ask the Indigenous Peoples and Nations of this wonderful land for their blessings on our being here and using what the Creator has gifted us with. But as relocated peoples, we should not be considered a threat in any way, or a usurper of their ways. I do not think it is fair to say that all Euro-ancestored people are like those who came here to take and kill what was here before them.

If I am called to the fire to sit with others who have given me the gift of seeing a better way, should I not respect that and, like Singing-with-the-Owls, take on the responsibility of learning and knowing the old ways to use in my lifetime and to pass along? I honor her for accepting the difficult path of Shamanism, and if she was with me in Wales or Ireland, where many of my ancestors came from, I would welcome and trust her with an open heart to bring her knowledge and ways, and use those plants and things that are there, with the same respect.



I know that it was not her ancestors who went to the Britons to burn, kill and ruin -- it was mine who came here. I cannot tell her the grief I feel in my heart about those times and the way people acted, and I beg her forgiveness and understanding, and I promise that I will never forget these things. With her help, I will walk in this life with respect and honor for her ways.

from Nancy Nangeroni:

Just as a surgeon's knife cannot change the sex of the person that one has become over many years, so too the desire to be a shaman does not convey shamanhood, however fervent the desire or intense the study.

It seems to me that the first requirement of a position of esteem is a special humility which would not dare to so label one's self. Better to be an unacknowledged shaman than a fool who thinks they're being wise. The former may not profit as comfortably, but is also less likely to cause needless hurt to others.

As transpeople and human beings, we seek ways to heal ourselves and our too-often damaged self-esteem. We do well to pursue spiritual enlightenment. We also do well to lose our need for position, recognition, reward, and title. We do well to love ourselves as we are, however spiritually gifted. We also do well to respect a request to avoid appropriation of what has been so freely and brutally stolen by so many others. It is our choice. We don't have to do what anyone else tells us, or politely asks, but we might be wiser if we did.

from Michele Brown:

Berdaches were not necessarily shamans, but a good many of them were considered to be. The shaman needs to have the presence to perform powerful ritual, to have a special connection to spirit, both of which a berdache automatically was seen to possess from early childhood, and which were cultivated in them.



The Navajos and Lakotas have many berdache chanters, called *nadle* and *winkte* respectively. These chants are healing chants that can take many days to perform over the sick person. The Cheyenne usually had a berdache medicine man traveling with them to heal the wounded on raids.

Berdaches were quite often consulted by shamans for advice. They were seen to be holy already and did not have to cultivate their power in the way a shaman does. They were called upon to bless ceremonies and look after grieving families. Their roles being specified in these rituals gave them status and a real sense of belonging to the community.

The shaman lives in a liminal world... between the spirit world and the human world, between masculinity and femininity. These are the gaps through which a shaman can slip to intervene with the spirits and travel wherever he wishes to go. It is not surprising that the berdache and their [FTM] counterparts were celebrated in some tribes simply because they were already in that state, able to see both sides, and another, uniquely their own.

from Zot Lynn Szurgot:

Professor Eliade, who brought us the word "shaman" from Siberia, describes a life-threatening crisis that precipitates a call to shamanism which must not be refused. Young shamans almost always try to refuse it. Our experiences as transgendered souls often have some similarities and may in a very few cases lead to the call, but never in and of themselves rise to the level Eliade described. Those whose experience does not fit his description should not use his word. All the more so for words from tribal languages.

We are special spirits with special qualities, many of us with a calling to special ritual roles, but most of us are not shamans. We can come to our own roles and dignity without stealing from anybody. Spirit will grow all archetypes up through the soil of each new generation like mushrooms, regardless of tradition or genetics. Recognizing this and finding the place for each of us, without yielding to our unconscious impulse to colonize another culture, is our challenge. Some of us are developing new language and rituals.

from Dana Dancing Rivers:

We know our path is a healing one. We know the world is more gracious and loving because of our gentle searching. Our hearts beat with a rhythm that inspires many, and lets Spirit shine in dark places.

So, if we are shaman, or physician, or priest, or peasant... that is for those who need our magic to decide. Our power rests in our devotion, our faith, and our abiding sense of wonder in how beautiful the world is, and how magnificent we all are. There is no disrespect in this awareness. Nothing is taken or hurt by our presence.



from Ken Dollarhide:

There are four classes of "holy" or "sacred -- wakan" people [among the Lakota]:

1. Wapiyapi -- curers,
2. Wakan kaga -- performers,
3. Wicahmunga -- wizards, and
4. Winkte.

I have always thought the word "Shaman" was a derogatory term, used by monotheist priests and pious bigots, to attack what they cannot understand. To call someone a "Shaman" I think is to poke fun at them, because the way the term has been used is to associate it with a rather crude and primitive religious leader. It is really a term used by anthropologists and religion scholars. I have never heard this term used on the Rez.

I have had the honor of meeting some who are healers, some whom others have called wakan. I have even had the honor of being healed from a rather nasty spider bite from a woman elder, but I have never met a shaman and I am not sure I would want to. I think what a sacred person does, one who is blessed (and we all are, most of us just are not aware of it), is to do nothing except to make it possible for us to open our eyes and spirit in order to view ourself, and thereby becoming able to view another and the other, in ourself.

from Chelsea Elisabeth Goodwin:

How does one define shamanism? There are some like me who maintain that Lenny Bruce was a shaman. There are many rock stars and jazz musicians (Sun Ra and Little Richard come readily to mind) who, consciously or otherwise, practice shamanism. Dr. John has purple candles and authentic Vodoun ritual incorporated into his performance. That's a form of shamanism.

Like jazz, in every tradition, be it from the First Nations, Latin American and African cultures, etc., a true shaman takes from the tradition and adds his own unique personality and develops his own way of going about things, creating rituals that are steeped in one or more traditions and yet individual and unique, rather like Bird did with jazz.



from Dana Tree Spirit:

Can we honestly believe that shamanism, starting far before the Native Americans, has stayed the same throughout history? While I am but a mere fledgling student, even I would have to think not.

Recently, I was introduced to the modernized concept of "Urban Shaman" -- exceptional persons whose practices reflect the spirituality of today and this world. The few I have met seem to be wise and powerful mystics in The Tradition. Why should this not be? Do not the tribes of today's humanity still need the shaman? Why would there not be those among us, the multi-gendered, who would walk in these footsteps?

In as much as there are many individual beliefs among us, let us all look inside our individual selves for the answer. It would appear to be a path not destined for all to follow, but even in this age some will feel the call. Let us... grow strong by sharing the knowledge and assisting those who would make the attempt.

from Bear Dancing in Lavender Lace:

Shaman are not always picked by their tribe, but by Spirit. And being Mohawk-Irish, I know there are Medicine People from Europe as well as America. The "black robes" burned European Shaman at the stake causing them to go "underground". Some disciples of long lasting and hidden schools still practice their Earth-centered spirituality. Yes, my Mohawk people have been given the bad end of a conquer's stick. So were my Irish, and so am I sometimes as a Trans. I took this journey by the grace of Spirit, and hold it by faith and white knuckled determination.

Shamanism, Witchery, Medicine People: usually some trauma inflicts a visit to the "other worlds". Near death initiations are common. A heavy drug dose of Peyote or other psychedelic substances effects a change in perception. Michael Harner did just that in the Amazon. It also happens that drumming can affect the central nervous system to induce trance. Trance is where a Medicine person goes to find solutions for the tribe or individual in need. A Shaman does not follow a religious dogma, but more spiritual, following the voice and vision of trance. The concept of shape-shifting comes into play during trance.

If you are going to play the Shaman game, you need to cultivate your *intent*. Simply put, one either chooses to use the power for the betterment of all and to relieve suffering, or they become self-serving and bring harm.

Please keep in mind the three-fold law: everything you do comes back to you three times.



I have been in training since I was eighteen. I am fifty-two. I have been through a number of initiations for deeper levels. Sometimes I feel like I am being killed. I have had the wonderful experience of creating great good in people's lives. I understand the modern world and know that some feel they must advertise and earn a living off their Shamanism. Usually, a Shaman turns around and gives the wealth to others in need. But just because a person is a shaman, or a priest for that matter, doesn't mean they are super-people. They get drunk, thrown in jail, and sometimes have to go to twelve-step programs, too. Both are entertainers, but the shaman is likely to be more fun, and more taxing, to be around.

There is another word that you must contemplate if you seek to follow [this] path: *commitment*. If you say that on Saturday you are going to have a sweat lodge, and you wake up to find the rain pouring straight down and the temperature 35 degrees, you better be out there making the rocks hot and getting the lodge ready. Somebody might need some serious healing, and backing out on Spirit can be a dangerous move. After intent and commitment, I like to add *ominous*. Studying to be a shaman is like, WHOA GIRL!

from Marc Eden:

...our group is a collection of belief systems with a shamanic foundation of practice, so levels of attainment and expertise would therefore be somewhat unstructured. In the Wiccan tradition of solitary practice, there are three degrees: Initiate, Practitioner, and Teacher (depending on the tradition). In Druidry, there are three as well, but there are levels within those levels. Bards, Ovates, Drui. Third degree Wicca is frequently conferred by a group tradition. However, one who is solitary becomes Third pretty much on their own when they begin teaching. Ritual is simply for the sake of solidifying what has already transpired. So it is with shamanism.

Ritual recognition is missing from our group. But who would decide, and after how long? And by whose tradition? It takes an average of 20 years to become Drui. Those who feel they are shaman just because they are two-spirited are greatly mistaken. I believe they have the potential to be great teachers, but they have a lot of learning to do before that.

So what can we do? Might we someday call ourselves transgendered shamans? I think so.



Should we change our language? Maybe. I agree that in a culture where there is truly no language for us, we may have to borrow our terminology. This is America. We have no linguistic roots that are not co-opted from somewhere else. I pray that Native Americans and [others] worldwide can understand that we do not seek their traditions -- only our own.

from Cheryl Costa:

I have hated using the shaman word for years, because we're always piggy-backing on someone's culture, but I was one person seeking a definition... Perhaps we have grown to a point where we need to draw our own line in the sand. Society has always named us -- perhaps we need to name ourselves. It doesn't sound humble, but it would fix things out of respect to the indigenous folks we respect and honor.

Perhaps we just need to make up words that nobody has ever heard, and in a few years they'll be in the Oxford Dictionary and that will be that. New words for: Our own tribal Trans Clan persons; Something we call ourselves in general; Something we call our elders; Those who have been grounded in this stuff for years; Those of novice and intermediate skill and training; and the new ones who are exploring us.

The hijara of India have such terms! I'm not trying to build an empire here, just asking that we take responsibility for ourselves. We must define ourselves in a positive light, or society will certainly define us... and history has shown society's definitions tend to be less than kind.

from Annie Johnson:

...cross-gender behavior occurs in nearly every culture. To me, this simple fact says that it is archetypal -- it is part of what it is to be human. Joseph Campbell, in *Myths to Live By*, has written about his discovery that one of the two types of schizophrenic behaviors is essentially a shamanic journey.

...we need to derive our rituals from archetypes that are universal, and because of their universality they will in some ways overlap with the rituals of other cultures. In studying other cultures we should try to recognize the archetypal themes and use them to build rituals that speak to our own experiences, taking as little as possible from our Native brothers and sisters.

Part of what we suffer from is the lack of a TransSpirit

tradition. We find ourselves attempting to make a strong and beautiful whole cloth from many divergent strands when we barely know how to weave. The warp is built from the threads in tension. We could see these as the foundation upon which we try to build, the TwoSpirit/TranSpirit archetype that we are trying to understand, while the weft offers the threads that we pass through with the shuttle, the hopes, fears, desires, dreams and of course the love that we bring from our lives and experiences to create the patterns of the cloth.

The cloth we weave will establish the traditions that 10, 20, 50 and 100 years from now will define the Kindred Spirits/TranSpirits tradition. Let us weave our cloth with patience, respect, care and love.

from Drew Landis:

...it was in my World Religions class that I found a term that fits me. It is a term for one of the approaches to religion. It is a very simple term: "seeker". I don't profess to know a lot about shamanism, its meaning, or the use of the title. It is my general belief that we are a world full of students. In this world of students there are truly no masters. We should seek to gain knowledge from others, and not be afraid to extend ourselves and share our knowledge with them.

There are forces around us at work which cannot possibly be understood or controlled by us mere mortals. I am content to dwell amongst these forces in wonderment...

Vision Quest, cont'd.

culture. For the next 10-15 years, most folks will be passing into a much more heart-centered mode that is attuned to their spiritual needs. They will come to understand that they are spiritual beings having a human experience. In all likelihood, the vision quest will become a widely used rite of passage to accelerate and deepen this process of personal transformation.

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The Snow Man
by Wallace Stevens

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pinetrees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Absolute Nothingness
by Daniel Shea

Absolute Nothingness

empty even of emptiness

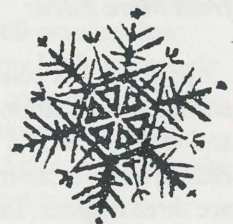
no light shines

on the cold ashes

left behind

by the fire

in my mind.



My Altars, cont'd.

As the seasons change, I periodically update my dinner prayer basket with bits of berries, flowers and leaves. During this winter season, Kuan Yin is graced with two sprigs of deep red berries of Heavenly Bamboo.

No, I don't verbally say a prayer each time I sit down at my table, but as I gaze at my altar under dinner candlelight, I am aware of a deep gratitude for the journey of my life — my travels, my friends, all of nature that surrounds us - is us - and for the merciful Energy that has given life to this form called Zantui.