River of Ancient Wisdom

RETREAT. DISCOVER. HEAL. IN THE CATSKILLS.
program

Table of Contents

6  Ukilái: A Retreat for Men
   with David Wiley

8  Healing Camp: Five Days of Traditional
   Huichol Shamanic Healing
   with Eliot Cowan & Staff

10 Journey to the Heart of the Land
    with Scott Sheerin

10 Portals to the Center:
    The Medicine Wheel as Lifeway
    with Joan Henry & Jon Delson

11 Coming Together: Ten Fundamentals
    of a Brilliant Relationship
    with Karen Aberle & Cristián Valenzuela

12 Journey to Enlightenment:
    Retrieving the Ancient Wisdom of Ireland
    with Margaret Connolly

12 Introduction to Plant Spirit Medicine™: 
    Listening to the Wisdom of Plant Spirits in the Season of Spring
    with Safia Johnson & Carla Leftwich

13 Ukalái: A Retreat for Women
    with Deanna Jenné & Sherry Boatright

14 Fireball:
    Gather Around with the Elders

14 Ubuntu Ubunzulu, The Depth of Humanity: A Xhosa Sangoma
    Medicine Workshop with Ancestral Blessing & Purification
    with John Lockley

15 The Ocean Refuses No River
    with Tasnim Hermila Fernandez
“The teachings are for all, not just for Indians. … The white people never wanted to learn before. Now they have a different understanding, and they do want to learn. We are all children of God. The tradition is open to anyone who wants to learn. But who really wants to learn?”

—Don Jose Matsuwa, Huichol, 1989
It seems like every day brings some new awareness of the increasing challenge of living a life in harmony with our planet. While the earth is warming, life is getting colder. Many of us experience a sense of isolation and helplessness in the discouraging face of larger planetary issues. We’ve begun to recognize that the idea that technology will save us from impending disaster is a fantasy that we can hardly afford to cling to.

To heal ourselves and our planet, it is time for us to listen to different voices than those provided by cable TV, our android phones, and the bombardment of emails. Our indigenous elders have told us that if we can find a center of silence, we can begin to hear the river of ancient wisdom speaking to us and guiding us to a place of peace and balance, a place of healing.

A unique and remarkable community gathering place in the beautiful Catskill Mountains, the Blue Deer Center nurtures our connectedness to ourselves, each other, and the natural world through a steadfast dedication to healing and learning. The land itself is an ancient healing ground where the Mohawk and Oneida peoples resolved conflict. Since 2005, the Blue Deer Center has offered programs of healing and welcomed ancestral teachers to guide us in new yet ancient ways of living.

To step onto the land is to enter a natural sanctuary where the waters, the air, and the people warm our hearts and connect us to one another and the Divine. Many generations ago, the river of ancient wisdom, called Saskawhihiwine, confirmed the land’s healing energy to a traveling shaman by forming perfect circles in the water. When these sacred circles appeared once again in 2006, we knew that we had rediscovered a land that was calling for the ancient ways to come home.

2011 promises to be our most exciting year yet! Our favorite familiar voices will be here. And we welcome new voices to our land.

I am profoundly grateful to serve as a Board member, to work with so many others in bringing forth a vision of health, connectedness, and sustainability. If you’ve been to the land, you already know the gift of this place. If you’ve never been, I hope one of this year’s programs calls you home, as it once did for the peoples of this land those many years ago.

In peace,

Karen Aberle, On Behalf of the Blue Deer Center Board of Directors
the history of the

Blue Deer Center Land

Many years ago in what we now know as the Catskill Mountains of New York, several Mohawk and Oneida families made camp for summer hunting and gathering. A dispute over territory broke out between the two groups and a warrior was found dead. Who was responsible? There were accusations and counter accusations. Tempers flared. The people were on the verge of war.

Tesakwanachee, a shaman from the neighboring Onondaga nation, agreed to come help resolve the conflict, but the two groups couldn’t agree to sit down and talk to each other.

The shaman consulted with the forest, mountains, and streams. He was shown that balance could be restored with the support of a particular sacred place. He walked up a nearby valley, looking in the stream for a sign, and when he saw a perfect circle in the waters he knew he had found the right spot. He summoned the people from the camp and when they arrived they sat around a council fire and made peace. A lodge was built there and it was respected as a sacred place.

In 2005, a group of European Americans were once again looking for a special place to promote balance and healing. They were convinced this could best be found by searching in the same way as the Onondaga shaman, working in partnership with the spirits of the natural world. When the circle reappeared, they too knew they had arrived at the right place. It was waiting to help people as it had done in the past.

That place is now known as the Blue Deer Center. Onondaga teachings and practices guided Tesakwanachee. The teachings and practices of the Huichols, another indigenous nation, guided the founders to the same place at a time when war among peoples and the natural world remain a reality.

The center has the mission of providing a home for ancestral indigenous traditions whose teachings and practices promote healthy individuals, functional communities, and a sustainable way of life.

The different traditional healing practices offered at the center share a common perspective: that the natural world is the source of human life. We live from the earth, from the plants and animals, from the fire, the rain, and wind, the rocks and sea, the sacred places, and the voices of the ancestors. The world is alive with feeling, awareness, and wisdom. It has deep medicine. To be on good terms with the natural world is to be on good terms with your own life.
MARCH 3 – 7

Ukilái: A Retreat for Men

with David Wiley

Ukilái (uh-key-lá-ee) is a word in the Huichol indigenous language that means “a man who has reached a level of maturity and has taken on the responsibilities of spirit, community, and family.” It indicates that he has found his role and place within himself, the community, and in the world and therefore is a support for himself and others. In our culture, this role has been greatly diminished by the demands of a misdirected modern world. Participation in the Ukilái retreat represents a pilgrimage to one’s soul and masculine kinship and will provide support on an ongoing basis for one’s vision, direction, and relationship to others and the world.

$800 ($840 after February 25)

David Wiley is a Tsauririkame (elder shaman) in the Huichol Indian tradition of the northwestern Sierra Madre Mountains of Mexico and is a Granicero (weather shaman) and healer in the Nahuatl Indian tradition of the central Mexican highlands. In these roles he serves his community as a counselor, community, and ceremonial leader.
The Sacred Fire Community’s Lifeways programs offer a way to navigate Western culture as we restore ourselves and our communities to balance. These programs teach connection to the divine and are rooted in ancestral wisdom that also works in today’s changing times. We have offerings that support people from birth through the dying process. For more information, please visit SacredFireCommunity.org.

Today many people are struggling to find their way, beleaguered by the incessant demands of our materialistic culture. Women struggle to be successful in a man’s world, only to find deep sadness surfacing when accomplishment of goals conflicts with the creation of healthy families. Men are indoctrinated to place consumerism, change for change’s sake, and mind over the power of heart at the center of life. Young people yearn for something more than the culture offers, but engage in rejecting their parent’s values when better options are not available. Families are floundering. Relationships are breaking down. Our ancient ancestors lived in profound connection with all life. People were born into communities that provided rituals and ceremonies to help them move through the natural cycles of life from birth to death. Communities supported birthing families and welcomed newborns, sustaining balance and harmony. Men and women were supported in reaching a level of maturity that could take on the responsibilities of spirit, community, and family. Wise elders nurtured our children, guiding these young people through sacred rites of passage that initiated them into adulthood. People were able to find their roles and places within themselves, the community, and the world. Our ancestors also taught that life moves in great cycles and that, following times of great connection, there comes disconnection.

The wisdom of Lifeways is the seed of the future. Participants discover the wisdom of their hearts, refresh their direction in life, and deepen connections to community and the divine.

This year’s Lifeways offerings at the center include a men’s retreat (see page 6), a couples’ retreat (see page 11), a women’s retreat (see page 13), and a grief retreat (see page 23).
APRIL 12 – 17

Healing Camp:
Five Days of Traditional Huichol Shamanic Healing
with Eliot Cowan & Staff

Communities once worked and played together around the fire. People felt connected to each other and to the natural world around them. Healers helped with individual maladies and also maintained the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the entire village. The medicine of the old cultures was deep and effective. It was more holistic than anything we dream of today. Despite all that modernity has undone, the Huichol people of central Mexico have kept alive their humor, their communities, and their profound medicine. At the Blue Deer Center, Healing Camp provides a rare opportunity to experience a temporary village created for the express purpose of bringing Huichol healing to you.

$1,850 ($1,950 AFTER MARCH 22)
[Also offered July 23 – 28* and October 2 – 7]

*The July 23 – 28 Healing Camp will include traditional Mayan massage, provided by Marakame and body worker Jaime Velez. The adjusted cost for this particular program will be $1,890.

Eliot Cowan, author of Plant Spirit Medicine and a fully initiated Tsaurirrikame (shaman) in the Huichol Indian tradition, began his study and practice of herbalism in the 1960s and completed a Master of Acupuncture degree with J.R. Worsley in England in the 1970s. Eliot subsequently apprenticed with Don Guadalupe Gonzalez Rios, an eminent Huichol Indian shaman. On the occasion of Don Guadalupe’s retirement in 2000, he ritually recognized Eliot as a guide to shamanic apprentices in the Huichol tradition. This was an unprecedented honor for a person of our culture.

Scott Sheerin is a Marakame (shaman) in the Huichol tradition and has been part of the Healing Camp staff for eleven years. He practices shamanic healing in Victoria, B.C. A gifted musician offering healing and ritual music, Scott leads group sessions in The Song of the World and his recordings are played around the world, helping to spread the energy of heart and fire wherever they are heard.

Justin Starting is an apprentice in the Huichol tradition. For many years he has taught the art of building relationships with the natural world through the practical skills of our ancestors. At camp he will offer his program entitled Touch the Earth.

Linda Felch is an apprentice in the Huichol tradition and a Plant Spirit Medicine™ practitioner. As our Healing Camp coordinator she makes sure that everything runs smoothly in preparing for camp and while we are at the BDC.
The Huichols and other indigenous peoples remember something modern Western culture has forgotten, something that gives them a sustainable, meaningful way of life. What is it they remember? What have we forgotten? I say it is love.

How can I say we have forgotten love? We are always singing about it, talking about it, searching for new love, grieving lost love. All this is personal. It’s all about me feeling a certain way about someone else and that someone is almost always a human being. What indigenous people remember about love is also personal, yet more than personal. It includes not just me, not just people, but everything.

In the indigenous world everything is alive and aware. This is what is being expressed when a Native American speaks of “the stone people” or “the thunder beings” or “Grandfather Fire.” Indigenous peoples see that everything in the world is sourced in Mystery. Everything is legitimate and divine, and everything is constantly exchanging with everything else. A plant, for example, takes nourishment from the soil and in turn it nourishes the soil when it dies. It breathes in the gases we animals breathe out; it breathes out what we breathe in. It stores in its flesh the heat of the sun and releases the heat again when it decays or burns.

It takes up water that falls as rain and transpires water through its leaves back to the air. Each of these cycles feeds into yet other cycles. The moisture that arrives as rain, for instance, is seawater evaporated by the sun, transported by the wind and carried by the streams and rivers back to the sea to be evaporated again. If even one of these cycles of exchange were to be broken, all plants would quickly perish.

But plant life persists because all participate in exchange. No one holds back. No one has personal preferences. The plant doesn’t say “I’m not going to provide oxygen to the rabbits today because I don’t like how they’ve been behaving lately.” No, everything gives of itself what is needed for others. Everything receives from others what it needs for itself. In this way a web of being is generated and regenerated in the dynamo of exchange. Everything is included. Everything is honored. Everything is a sacred offering to everything else. Participating in exchange — this is what indigenous people remember as love.

For a Western person like me, to hear a mountain sing this love can make the eyes widen with astonishment and flow with tears of joy. For a seasoned Huichol shaman it’s no big deal, just the way the world is.

Indigenous wisdom notices that humans are the only holdouts, the ones who see ourselves as separate. We seek personal advantage, forgetting our place. This forgetting is dangerous, for everything depends on everything else. When we withhold our love, the fabric of existence is damaged: it may even be destroyed. For this reason indigenous people see themselves as caretakers of the world. It is not that the natural world is fragile or faulty; humans need to protect it only against the force that could cause the rain to stop falling or the sun to stop shining: the force of our own forgetfulness.

This is how indigenous peoples preserve the world: their traditions remind them of love and show them how the world corrects imbalances caused by forgetting.
Deeply immerse yourself in the sacred land and waters of the Blue Deer Center. We will kindle a sacred fire and with its heart-connecting blessings begin to slow down and open to the song of the land, as the stream and winds guide us to an experience of deep listening, the conversation of prayer, and the healing power of music. Within the sacred song of this place we will begin to hear the song of our own heart, as it leads us to walk and explore these special lands that surround us.

$295 ($325 after April 2)
[Also offered July 29 – 31]

APRIL 29 – MAY 1
Portals to the Center: The Medicine Wheel as Lifeway
with Joan Henry & Jon Delson

Beginning with a Friday evening concert, To Sing Our World New Every Morning, we welcome back Noyeh-Ongeh, Mother Earth as dekanogisgi Joan Henry, who will share stories and songs of daily life with the help of her halfside, Jon Delson, and others. On Saturday, Joan and Jon will reveal the medicine wheel as more than an image, concept, or beautiful structure, but as a worldview core to Native American cultures across the Americas, with parallels in indigenous cultures worldwide.

The Friday evening concert is open to the public. Concert begins at 7 PM. $10 admission; children 12 and under free.

$240 ($265 AFTER APRIL 8)
[Also offered September 2 – 4]

* Price includes Friday concert.

Joan Henry is a traditional song-carrier and hahesh’kah (lead drummer) for elders among the Nde’, Coast Salish, Shoshone, Tsalagi, Chippewa/Cree and Dakota nations, who identified her as a youth and guided her training, picking up where her grandmothers began when they “opened her hands” and sang with her as a child.

Jon Delson comes from a family of teachers, counselors, nurses, and firemen and was taught the ways and forms of the fire and its power in our lives by his elders since boyhood. Few know that he is also a talented musician.
MAY 5 – 8
Coming Together:
Ten Fundamentals of a Brilliant Relationship
with Karen Aberle & Cristián Valenzuela

Many relationships fail because of the inability to bring forth the fire of our connectedness and deal with the struggles, breakdowns, and conflicts inherent in all relationships. Karen Aberle and Cristián Valenzuela, shamans initiated in the Huichol tradition and a couple for over twenty years, share their hearts and their wisdom in an intimate, fire-filled space, perfect for opening to the divine, dancing with the gods, healing the wounds and withholds that create separation, and gaining practice in expanding satisfaction for yourself as well as your partner.

$790 PER COUPLE ($870 AFTER APRIL 14)

For over twenty years, now supported by her initiation in the Huichol tradition, Karen Aberle has helped people in organizations create partnerships of trust, effectiveness, and satisfaction, backed by a deep understanding of human relationships.

Cristián Valenzuela has worked as a coach and business consultant in the banking industry for the last twenty years. A civil industrial engineer with postgraduate studies in management and economics, he now finds his true calling as a shaman in the Huichol tradition, an artist, and a painter (www.cristian-valenzuela.cl).
MAY 11 – 15
Journey to Enlightenment: Retriving the Ancient Wisdom of Ireland
with Margaret Connolly

Amidst our present state of disconnection from an original indigenous way of life and worldwide ecological and financial crises, Celtic wisdom can help us find direction toward rebuilding a wholeness on the earth and in all of her beings. Engaging with traditional Celtic ways of living in harmony and balance, this immersion program will help those of Celtic descent, as well as those inexplicably drawn to the ancient Celtic world, to rediscover a lost part of themselves in the complex weavings of their ancestral heritage.

$800 ($840 AFTER APRIL 20)

MAY 20 – 22
Introduction to Plant Spirit Medicine™:
Listening to the Wisdom of Plant Spirits in the Season of Spring
with Safia Johnson & Carla Leftwich

This sacred world is alive and constantly communicating with us to show us the way of natural balance. In this weekend workshop we will reclaim our innate ability to listen and speak to the spirits of plants by dream journeying to the plant spirits and gathering wisdom from the source. Having lived in a balanced and sustainable way from the beginning of time, the plants with their profound healing wisdom have never been more important to humankind than they are now. In this season of spring we look for guidance about our creativity and clarity around our decision-making processes. We will examine what we want to give birth to and tune in to our personal visions.

$295 ($325 AFTER APRIL 29)

Margaret Connolly is a Celtic spiritual leader from Ireland. Known as the Bean Feasa nah Eireann or “wise woman of Ireland,” she is the ninth generation of the ancient Celtic clan known as the “Women of the Nine Fold,” and for years has worked to retrieve and restore the ancient traditions from her Celtic homeland.

Safia Johnson, currently a Plant Spirit Medicine™ clinical supervisor, has been a Plant Spirit Medicine™ practitioner for over ten years. She currently serves as a trustee on the Board of the Plant Spirit Medicine™ Association and has gone on spiritual pilgrimages in the Huichol tradition with Eliot Cowan.

Carla Leftwich, ACA(La.), Dipl.AC (NCCAOM), practices classical five element acupuncture and Plant Spirit Medicine™ in New Orleans. She has gone on spiritual pilgrimages with Eliot Cowan and David Wiley for the last five years and is a Granicera—a weather shaman—in the Nahua tradition indigenous to Central Mexico.
June 1 – 5
Ukalái: A Retreat for Women
with Deanna Jenné & Sherry Boatright

Women in Western culture today are bombarded with information about what they should look like, what they should buy, what they should and should not eat, how they should and should not give birth and raise their children, how they should relate to their partners, how they should divide their time between work and home, and what they should believe in order to fit some standard or another. Not a workshop, but a way of life, this retreat provides the modern woman with a way to navigate Western culture and live in today’s world fully and authentically, moving women to experience a deep level of feminine wisdom which informs one’s everyday life.

$800 ($840 after May 11)

Deanna Jenné is an initiated Marakame (shaman) in the Huichol tradition and weather worker in the Nahua tradition, both rooted in Mexico. She co-facilitates the Sacred Fire Community’s Initiation Into Womanhood program and along with her husband, Gary, maintains her fire community in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Sherry Boatright is a licensed psychotherapist as well as a Granicera (weather shaman) in the Nahua tradition of central Mexico. She is manager of the Sacred Fire Community Lifeways programs and, as a firekeeper, shares the fire with her community in the hill country of west Georgia, near Carrollton.
JUNE 11

Fireball: Gather Around with the Elders

Sit with the elders by the fire in a beautiful mountain setting. At our annual Fireball, we invite the community to come celebrate and recognize our accomplishments as we bring ancestral traditions to this land from around the world. Join us as we dance to the music of Blue Paradox and share delicious home-cooked food. A consecrated fire will burn at the center of this celebration to connect with the elders, offering us a rare chance to take part in a ceremony for the land and river and enjoy the bounty of our lives.

$50 FOR ADULTS; $25 FOR 24 & UNDER; $5 FOR 12 & UNDER

*Limited overnight lodging is available for an additional fee. Registration Deadline: May 28.

JUNE 17 – 19

Ubuntu Ubunzulu, The Depth of Humanity: A Xhosa Sangoma Medicine Workshop with Ancestral Blessing & Purification

with John Lockley

Ubuntu means humanity. John uses sacred ceremony, rituals with herbs, Xhosa songs, and trance rhythms to encourage a profound remembering and a feeling of the full spectrum of what it means to be human. In this workshop, you will honor your own ancestors and connect with ancestral wisdom and guidance through nature and the dream world. John’s work has been known to help with both mild and severe depression, insomnia, dream interpretation, spiritual growth, and nervous disorders.

$395 ($435 AFTER MAY 27)

John Lockley is a shaman in the Xhosa lineage of South Africa—the tribe that gave us Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. He is based in South Africa, though his work takes him around Europe and the U.K. Visit www.african-shaman.com for more information.
The Ocean Refuses No River with Tasnim Hermila Fernandez

We believe the apparent to be real. We’ve taken on identities tied to our family history, to our limitations, to our achievements, to our social status, to our religion, to our concepts and judgments about what we experience, and even to what we have not personally experienced but only heard about. The one river—the one reality—is our source of origin and the home to which we all return. Through a fluid group process, we will explore the path of return used by many Sufi travelers with the help of practices that will include Dances of Universal Peace, chanting of divine names, silence and meditation, walking attunements, spiritual discourse, poetry, and more.

$395 ($435 after June 3)

Murshida Rev. Tasnim Hermila Fernandez has forty years of experience walking the Sufi path as a disciple and as a guide for others. She presents in many countries and has students in Australia, Canada, the U.S., Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Colombia.

There Is No Sufi Here

Interview with Murshida Rev. Tasnim Fernandez by Jonathan Merritt

“One way to look at it is to think of a drop of water as an individuated being. I am that drop. So if I surrender into the ocean, I completely disappear. I, as an individual, die. There is nothing identifiable as me. That’s the fear people confront when they face annihilation. Yet, at the same time that drop becomes immersed and dispersed into the whole ocean. It becomes, in a sense, the ocean itself.”

“This begins to approach what a Sufi is. It is a station, a way of being, so that those who have the capacity to know will recognize it and say, ‘There is a Sufi. There is the Khalif Allah, the representative of Allah.’ The Sufi is so empty because they don’t exist as an individual ego, a self-identified person. At the same time they become so expanded, an ocean of love, the ocean of mercy. They reflect God’s names; God’s qualities and attributes perfectly, and they reflect everyone. Can you imagine a world where sufficient human beings were immersed in that depth? Let’s envision, that, please.”

“The Sufis have the most developed science and art of personal transformation of taking the self from those totally animalistic instinctual desire-based actions and reactions, to the most exalted state of human being. Sufism is a path of heart. I know that is an easy catch phrase. But since people don’t know what we mean when we say heart, they think that it excludes the mind. But the mind and the heart, in a manner of speaking, are the same thing. Hazrat Inayat Khan, who brought Sufism to the west, has an aphorism. ‘Mind is the surface of the heart, and heart is the depth of the mind.’ And in Sufism, when we speak about heart, there are seven different degrees or levels or subtleties that we call heart in various forms. Yes, it is a path of the heart, and in one system it involves seven levels of purification. It allows a transformation that returns us to our birthright.”

[Reprinted with permission, from Sacred Fire Magazine, Issue 5, Spring 2007. For the complete text, visit www.sacredfiremagazine.com]
"My training and years of clinical work have convinced me that the overwhelming majority of our health problems, of all kinds—our physical health problems and our mental and emotional health problems—are caused by pain in our hearts, our spirit, and our soul.”
— Eliot Cowan

JULY 2 – 9

Plant Spirit Medicine™ Training Course: Session I
with Eliot Cowan & Alison Gayek

It is easy to recognize that plants offer us food, oxygen, and medicines, but less known today is that plants have spirits with wisdom to nurture and heal us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Ancient cultures and shamans have known for millennia that the medicine of plant spirits can bring us into balance and harmony, but much of this tradition has been lost in the West.

This course brings together shamanic techniques with the ancient Chinese medical philosophies of the five elements. As the course progresses, you will:

• Learn the Chinese five element worldview
• Study the practice of taking pulses
• Practice household shamanism
• Make direct relationship with plants through shamanic journeying
• Engage in intensive clinical work to hone assessment and treatment skills

$1,700 (PER WEEKLONG SESSION) | REGISTRATION DEADLINE: JUNE 18
SESSION II: DECEMBER 12 – 18
SESSIONS III – VIII: TO BE ANNOUNCED

No Prerequisites

Presented by the Plant Spirit Medicine™ Seminary of the Temple of Sacred Fire Healing. Graduates will be eligible for membership in the PSM Association and for induction as Plant Spirit Medicine™ Lay Spiritual Healers in the Temple of Sacred Fire Healing.

For more information, contact Adrilia Pedersen at (630) 708–6370 or email her at psminfo@bluedeer.org.
JULY 6 – 10
Living with Totem: Sacred Partnership with the World
with Eliot Cowan
Whether you know it or not, you have animal spirit helpers. Some have been helping you since before you were born. Others are nearby, politely waiting to be asked for help. When living with totem you don't feel alone, for life has given you allies. You don't feel like a victim; you have been given what you need to learn and grow in your circumstances, finding yourself in sacred partnership with the natural world. The way opens to live in gratitude. With this course you will discover which animals are totems for you. You will be able to receive their help and be in good relationship with them for the rest of your life.
$950  ($995 AFTER JUNE 14)

JULY 11 – 14
Advanced Plant Spirit Medicine™ Class
with Eliot Cowan & Alison Gayek
Whether you are an old-timer or a newcomer, this three-day course is designed to inspire you in your work. It is an immersion into the timelessness of the world, where no two seasons are the same, yet the wheel of the seasons turns as it always has. Those who return to this class again and again discover new resonance with something old.
$710  ($775 AFTER JUNE 1)
Prerequisite: Plant Spirit Medicine Practitioner Training Course

Eliot Cowan, author of Plant Spirit Medicine and a fully initiated Tsaurririkame (shaman) in the Huichol Indian tradition, began his study and practice of herbalism in the 1960s and completed a Master of Acupuncture degree with J.R. Worsley in England in the 1970s. Eliot subsequently apprenticed with Don Guadalupe Gonzalez Rios, an eminent Huichol Indian shaman. On the occasion of Don Guadalupe’s retirement in 2000, he ritually recognized Eliot as a guide to shamanic apprentices in the Huichol tradition. This was an unprecedented honor for a person of our culture.

Alison Gayek has been teaching Plant Spirit Medicine™ with Eliot Cowan for eight years. She teaches the PSM Practitioner Training Course, graduate clinicals and skills courses, and mentors and supports new graduates. Alison has continued her healing work through various pilgrimages and is a Granicera (weather shaman) in the Nahua tradition indigenous to Central Mexico.
JULY 15 – 18
The 7th Annual PSM™ Conference
Plant Spirit Plentiful: Make Your Calling Your Career
Successful healers and practitioners offer their expertise and guidance in reaching out to our local communities to share our knowledge and experiences in this medicine. Learn effective ways to build your client base and allow the medicine to thrive, whether your relationship to it is old or new. Of course we will spend time around the fire to gather inspiration and celebrate the splendor of being together as colleagues and friends. Come join us and make the medicine you love your livelihood.

Find out more at psmconf2011@gmail.com or call conference co-chairs Carla Leftwich at (985) 789–8685 or Amy Haynes at (828) 230–7761.

$625 ($675 AFTER JUNE 24).

*PSMA professional members receive an additional $50 discount. PSMA lay members receive a $25 discount.

JULY 23 – 28
Healing Camp:
Five Days of Traditional Huichol Shamanic Healing
with Eliot Cowan & Staff (for presenters’ bios, see page 8)
For program description, see page 8. This Healing Camp will also include traditional Mayan massage provided by Marakame and body worker Jaime Velez.

$1,890 ($1,990 AFTER JULY 2)

JULY 29 – 31
Journey to the Heart of the Land
with Scott Sheerin (for Scott’s bio, see page 8)
For program description, see page 10.

$295 ($325 AFTER JULY 8)

AUGUST 19 – 21
Introduction to Plant Spirit Medicine™: Listening to the Wisdom of Plant Spirits in the Season of Late Summer
with Safia Johnson & Carla Leftwich
(for Safia & Carla’s bios, see page 12)
Through reclaiming our innate ability to listen and speak to the plant spirits, we will be exploring the harvest time, the time of Earth. In this season of late summer we will tune into the energy of abundance. This is a time for nurturing ourselves and giving thanks for the many gifts of our plant allies and the endless bounty provided to each of us by our mother earth. It is also a time for exploring our relationships with those who have nurtured us in countless ways and those whom we in turn nurture.

$295 ($325 AFTER JULY 29)
AUGUST 26 – 28

Replenish Your Heart: Reconnecting to Divine Rhythm
with Annie Eagan, Safia Johnson & Dan Sprinkles (for Safia’s bio, see page 12)

Come to the sacred place of the singing river, the valley wind, and the land’s resonant ancestral wisdom. Quiet your mind and open your heart as we gather together to give gratitude for the generosity of the divine presences around and within us. In our time together, we will explore appropriate relationship with the mind so we can listen to our heart’s knowing voice. We will give offerings to the sacred river here, open ourselves to the animals and plants that share this place, connect with the ancestors who have walked before us, and gather around the fire in ritual space, reconnecting to the steady divine rhythm of all life.

$295 ($325 after August 5)

Annie Eagan is an initiated Marakame (shaman) in the ancestral tradition of the Huichol Indians, a Granicera (weather shaman) and healer in the Nahua Indian tradition. She has practiced healing work with humans and animals for more than twelve years. A shaman-in-residence, firekeeper and ceremonial leader, she resides at the Blue Deer Center with her husband, Dan Sprinkles.

Dan Sprinkles offers deep shamanic healing work through two lineages: as an initiated shaman in the Huichol tradition and as a weather shaman in the Nahua Indian tradition. He is a shaman-in-residence and ceremonial leader at the Blue Deer Center with his wife, Annie Eagan.
Why I Sing

I Sing Because I Have To

Not from a place of “needing to;” more like that’s my nature. My family tells me that from really young I sang everything, that you knew my thoughts and feelings by what you could hear if you sneaked up on me from behind. I don’t remember doing that, particularly … because I think it was that integral to me. I remember that my Auntie Ali in BC was like that too—my auntie, my mum, both my grandmothers, they sang and talked to everything. “If you can’t say it, my darling, sing it,” my Grandma Kathleen would say.

And it didn’t just go one way—everything sang and talked to them, too. Responded. They were listening all the time, listening to the Earth, to the Ocean, to plants, pebbles, animals and everything around us as they went through their day. They weren’t just sitting still doing nothing, either; there was a part of their awareness that was accessible to the song in all things, to the beauty of all things, to the power and the movement of all things.

That was natural to them, so it was natural to me, to have an innate understanding that song moves things, makes things happen.

And that’s the way we’re taught.

For me it is best expressed in the northwest Way of Cia:w'en, that everything has a song, and from the moment you become aware of that song, from the moment that song begins to emerge from within you, you are worked with until it comes out. Clearly. Then it is your responsibility to carry that song and to sing it wherever it is called for, because it is our understanding of the world that if the songs stop being sung, the world falls apart.

You could say that because of my nature, the way I’m tuned, that it’s my responsibility from the Creator to sing, to move with that gift, to hold up my part of the Earth. And there are layers and layers to that, how we sing to help Mother Earth into balance and how the songs help us return to beauty and to balance…

That truth, that reality that was kept awake in me I pass on not only to my son, but to the kids I work with every day, anywhere I go—the generations who will hold our Mother Earth safe when we are gone.

Hiyadidasdi. Hear me…

— Joan Henry
SEPTEMBER 2 – 4

Portals to the Center:
The Medicine Wheel as Lifeway

with Joan Henry & Jon Delson

Once again, we welcome back Joan Henry with a public concert on Friday evening in which she will teach participants how to “sing our world new every morning.” On Saturday, drawing on the beautiful land of the Blue Deer Center, in this second in a series of seasonal workshops, Joan Henry and Jon Delson will guide participants in developing a grounded relationship with the powers and directions. Using song, deep personal exploration, and earth-based skills, folks will explore how we ourselves are medicine wheels, and begin instruction in the use of the wheel as a tool for living in a sacred manner.

The Friday evening concert will be open to the public. Concert begins at 7 PM. $10 admission; children 12 and under free.

$240 ($265 AFTER AUGUST 12)

[Also offered April 29 – May 1]

* Price includes Friday concert.

Joan Henry is a traditional song-carrier and haheš’kah (lead drummer) for elders among the Nde’, Coast Salish, Shoshone, Tsalagi, Chippewa/Cree and Dakota nations, who identified her as a youth and guided her training, picking up where her grandmothers began when they “opened her hands” and sang with her as a child.

Jon Delson comes from a family of teachers, counselors, nurses, and firemen and was taught the ways and forms of the fire and its power in our lives by his elders since boyhood. Few know that he is also a talented musician.
How do we find balance and healing in today’s world? The teachings of the Sufis remind us that there are spiritual resources available to everyone, if we will only take the time to enter into a peaceful state. This weekend we come together as a group to enter into a deeper awareness of healing in our lives. Meditation practices will be interwoven with music, stories, and teachings about healing.

Two public programs (see website for details), a Friday evening introduction to healing in the Sufi tradition and a special healing concert with prayer circle on Sunday are included in the registration for this program.

$375 ($415 AFTER SEPTEMBER 2)

Melissa Clare grew up in a village in the south of England. After meeting her Sufi teacher (Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan) in 1971, she emigrated to the U.S. to live in a Sufi community in upstate New York, where for seventeen years she immersed herself in the teachings and practices, becoming a retreat guide, minister, and senior teacher.

Ustad Ghulam Farid Nizami, a Chishti Sufi and seventeenth generation musician, is one of the foremost musicians and music instructors of Pakistan. He masterfully presents a vast array of styles including classical Indian, ghazal, geet, qawwali, bhajan, Pakistani folk and Sufi music. His principal instruments are sitar, vocals, tabla, and harmonium.
OCTOBER 2 – 7

Healing Camp:
Five Days of Traditional Huichol Shamanic Healing

with Eliot Cowan & Staff (for presenters’ bios, see page 8)
For program description, see page 8.
$1,850 ($1,950 AFTER SEPTEMBER 12)

OCTOBER 14 – 16

Grief Camp

with Scott & Prema Sheerin (for Scott’s bio, see page 8)
Grief is a divine emotional force. It is the necessary and healthy response to deep loss. This natural and healing experience moves us to let go, to empty, and to cleanse. Grief allows us to release what must pass, reconnecting us to the flow of life. Calling on the spirits of the sacred land and waters of the Blue Deer Center, husband and wife shamans Prema and Scott Sheerin will open a ritual container, creating safety and support for heartful exploration and sharing. Within this sacred space they will work with participants individually and as a group to create relationship with grief as an essential and mysterious expression of divine movement.

$430 ($470 AFTER SEPTEMBER 24)

Prema Sheerin is an initiated Marakame (shaman) in the indigenous Huichol tradition of Mexico. She offers workshops internationally on emotional wisdom and transition and has a shamanic healing and life coaching practice.
OCTOBER 21 – 23
Fire Ritual: Healing Relationship with Ancestors
with Malidoma Somé

How do we repair, heal, and honor the undying tie with our forebears? How can this reflect on our relationship with this world and with each other in family and in community? These are some of the questions that this weekend will attempt to address. We will engage our ancestors, the good and the bad, the appealing and the less-than-appealing, in an attempt to tackle unfinished business together.

$400 ($440 AFTER OCTOBER 1)

Malidoma Somé is the author of several books including Ritual: Power, Healing and Community; Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman; and The Healing Wisdom of Africa. Dr. Somé is also an initiated elder in his village in Dano, Burkina Faso, West Africa. He travels throughout the world bringing a message of hope, healing, and reconciliation.

The Importance of Ancestral Connection: An Interview with Malidoma Somé

27 August 2010
by Rosette Royale

Rosette Royale: How would you define the word “ancestor”?

Malidoma Somé: Well, the very simple definition of ancestor is “our forebears,” the ones who have preceded us in this dimension. Now some of them and the most obvious of them are the biological ones but as far as ancestors go, it could be much broader than that: basically, all of humankind. So, ancestors, defined in that way, brings the whole concept a lot closer to home, allowing the relationship to be worked on from within. Ancestors suggest those who have influenced us, assisted us as teachers, as role models, who have crossed over, but who are continuing to be there in our mind.

RR: And so in the Dagara tradition, how do people engage or interact with their ancestors?

MS: Well, in my tradition, the fundamental idea is that the community is not formed only by the living: community extends to the realm of the dead. Therefore, the whole notion of relationship with ancestors is inspired by a desire to be able to have an ongoing relationship with this world and the other.

So, ancestors are something that are seen as advisors, the ones who provide clear direction. Being a community doesn’t mean that there is no tension. It is more about, “Who would take this tension? Who would take these various problems?” because [the ancestors’] wisdom is quite unusual, partly because they’re no longer trapped in this dimension.

RR: How do you see Western society interact with ancestors?

MS: Crises pertaining to families and communities are issues [that are] rather unsolvable because of the problematic relationships with ancestors. I have thought a rekindling of a connection with the dead would be a very good idea because not everything is solvable through pure imagination. Sometimes we have to recognize that we are at the end of our rope and that line of demarcation is the beginning of the possibility of ancestral intervention.

RR: How would you make an altar at your home?

MS: Well, an altar is something that could be as simple as a little table somewhere with a cloth on it, one or two pictures of loved ones on the
other side, with candles, with incense. You could also include something as simple as a glass of water there. In my cosmology, water represents flow, healing, and reconciliation. And so, therefore, having some elemental stuff like this on a special surface will begin to take the shape of specializing an area of one’s own dwelling, as if it already gives the shape of a space that borders the sacred. By sacred, I mean something that is special because the otherworld is involved with it.

RR: What sort of challenges do you see Western society dealing with because many of us don’t have very strong connections with our ancestors?

MS: The challenge of not having found relationships with our ancestors is primarily a challenge of community, people suffering from a crisis of simple belonging and wondering what it is they are here to do. There is also the longing for connection into something greater than simple material pursuit and working hard just to pay the one bill. All of these little things, they add up to some crisis, existential crisis, and at the core of that, is this missed connection with the ancestors. So the challenge of modernity is—we use the term—community. But in fact, the use of the word is more symptomatic of a longing.

In the end, what matters more than anything else is recognition that modern, individual crisis can be solved—can be resolved—with a reach out to ancestors, to the spirits of those who have preceded us here and who, from where they are, are much wiser and much more alert.

RR: I think one of the challenges for someone in the West might be: “Why should we listen to what people in Africa do? We are in Seattle, or Chicago, or New York City.”

MS: Well, wouldn’t the African also say the same thing a long time ago, when Europeans came there, [saying] that they were the ones to solve all the problems of Africa, only to find out that none of that happened?

The issue, for someone thinking like that is that we live in what people tend to call a global village. Africa is not in a different planet. And increasingly, people are buying into the belief that humanity started there. And for the person living in the heart of Seattle or any city to think that they are self-sufficient enough to not need any wisdom from anywhere, it is possible that maybe this particular message is not for them. But I’ll be concerned for a person like this, even be willing to pray to my ancestors for them.

The issue that we’re facing is more global than local. It is very important in these days of rampant crisis in the world that we begin to think in terms of what indigenous wisdom have we forgotten. In fact, a show of wisdom will direct us to sources as unlikely as Africa, that can help in bringing a lasting solution to the crisis of isolation, the crisis of individuality, the crisis of modernity.

So therefore, it is common sense to imagine that the part of the world where mankind began can perhaps have an instrument for resolving current crises faced by modernity. And I have personally seen in my work, in this part of the world, that indeed, wisdom of Africa does produce tremendous change and confirmation in the heart of people.

RR: Is it too late for people to connect to their ancestors?

MS: Oh, not really. Too late is a very desperate word. It is better to replace it with something a lot more promising: it’s better late than never. At any given time, ancestors are always going to stand by for engagement. The sooner one gets started, the better. Young people are certainly a lot more open to that than older people who might have been calcified into stagnation, who have been welded into their identity. This is simply because their psyches are open, their souls are wide open, and as a result, they see things that need attention that the rest of the world doesn’t seem to pay attention to sufficiently, or maybe doesn’t look at it as the priority.

So again, this is to say that picking up on ancestors is never too late. Maybe it will be too late when one is dead, but even then, it is not too late because you join with the ancestors. As soon as we abandon our bodies on this side of reality, we join with the very folks we are trying to reach.
or are you really connected?

What’s it like when people once again connect with the sacred element of Fire?

With five monthly community fires in upstate New York and over fifty in the US and beyond, the Sacred Fire Community is igniting our world.

Visit www.sacredfirecommunity.org for Lifeways programs, fiery events, community fires near you, and other hot stuff. 

It’s time to warm up!
in these crucial times of change, discover a fresh outlook on modern culture.

Sacred Fire magazine calls people to connect with each other and the sacredness alive in the world.

to request your free sample, send an email to:
offer@sacredfiremagazine.com

new customers only, please
Many visitors who experience the powerful presence of the land at the Blue Deer Center come to see it as a “home away from home.” Others simply hear of our mission and immediately feel they want to contribute their time and skills to our work. Our volunteers bring the fullness of their experiences of the land and their newly formed relationships back into their everyday lives, expanding the healing web beyond our doorstep.

We are always seeking individuals who have experience or interest in everything from distributing flyers, helping with grant research, assisting in coordinating volunteer programs, volunteering on the land to support programs and annual fundraisers, or taking part in specific landscaping and gardening projects or maintenance and repair projects throughout the season.

Several times throughout the year, we schedule work parties on the land that help bring people together to share food and stories around the fire and to focus energy toward a selection of projects that will help improve and maintain the land and its facilities. These special opportunities grow the heart of our community while building a strong foundation for the future of the Blue Deer Center.

For more information about our volunteer program, please visit “Volunteer Opportunities” on our website.

**Work Parties for 2011 – Mark Your Calendars**

- **WORK WEEKEND: MARCH 31 – APRIL 3**
- **WORK WEEK: SEPTEMBER 7 – 11**
- **WORK WEEKEND: OCTOBER 27 – 31**
We are moving forward towards establishing a home for traditions with our next fundraising campaign, Planting the Seeds. This is the next step after last year’s campaign, Preparing the Ground. We intend to plant the seeds on this land in anticipation of the people returning to help us carry on the ancestral traditions. This year, the center staff and volunteers will be reaching out to the people of the region and the world to bring forth their dreams for the center.

In Planting the Seeds, we join together for a common future, in search of a shared understanding of where we are going and how. Our people have a need for sustenance that we can only get from the land. The center is on the verge of making a very large step into the world. We are preparing ourselves, the land, facilities, and you—our donors, supporters, volunteers, program participants, and elders—to be part of this undertaking.

To learn more about our activities, please go to our website and click on “Support the BDC.”

In gratitude, we would like to thank all of our financial contributors over the years for their unwavering support for this work providing a home for ancestral traditions.

Making a one-time donation, a monthly pledge, or a planned gift is an easy and simple way to demonstrate support for what the center offers.

To add your support, please go to www.bluedeer.org/donate.html.

Thank you,

Peter Brown, Fundraising Director

supporting the Blue Deer Center
Program Registration

Please register for your program on our website or give us a call at (845) 586–3225.

The programs listed in this catalog may not reflect recently scheduled events. We reserve the right to cancel any program.

For the most up-to-date program calendar, registration information and deadlines, please visit our website. For specific questions and inquiries, please email Linda Felch at info@bluedeer.org or call (845) 586–3225, ext. 4.

Commuter Participation

Many programs offer participants the option of commuter participation. Please visit our website to see if commuter participation is available for your program. Should you choose this option, please be aware that you are expected to participate fully in the program and that you are responsible for your own transportation to and from the center. Pricing for commuters includes both lunch and dinner.

Cancellation Policy

Certain programs have their own cancellation policies that supersede our general policy. These can be found under individual program descriptions on our website. In the absence of any mention of cancellation, the following policy applies:

Cancellation of your reservation more than 14 days prior to arrival entitles you to a full refund less a $50 processing fee. If you cancel 2 to 14 days prior to arrival, your program fee, less a $50 processing fee, will be held for you to use in another future program for up to one year. No refunds or credits will be issued for cancellations received less than 48 hours before a program's start date.
Lodging & Meals

The program fees noted in the catalog and website are all-inclusive and include tuition, accommodations, and meals during your stay.

Accommodations in either our Main House or Guest House are shared, with two to four people per room in comfortable beds and shared bathrooms. Please bring sheets and a pillowcase for a twin bed and a towel. Please note that linen service fees are $25 for sheets and a pillow case and $15 for towel and washcloth.

You will dine on fabulous gourmet fare each day, lovingly prepared by our chef extraordinaire and, with advanced notice, our staff will do its best to accommodate any special dietary needs. Coffee and tea service will be available. Feel free to bring your own snack foods, though with our chef’s great cooking you probably won’t find yourself at all hungry. Dinner is usually served at 7pm on the first night of each program, although mealtimes may vary for each individual program.

Visiting Us

Would you like to make a special personal visit to the center? Please call to make arrangements before your trip or plan to visit during one of our monthly open houses.

Getting to the Blue Deer Center

We are located in the beautiful Catskills of New York. Please let us know about your travel plans so that we know your arrival and departure times.

Driving Directions: See our website for best driving directions from the Albany International Airport, New York City, and Oneonta.

Air Travel: The closest major airport is in Albany. Albany International Airport is two hours by car or 3 ½ hours by bus. LaGuardia and Kennedy in New York City are two other options but require a longer commute. For programs ending before 2pm, we advise taking flights after 6pm. For programs ending after 2pm, we recommend flying the following day. You can reserve a room for an extra night and take the bus to the airport in the morning.

Public Transportation: Available from Albany International Airport and New York City Port Authority. We provide free shuttle service to and from the Trailways bus stop in Margaretville, NY.

- Albany International Airport: Take the Trailways bus (leaves daily at 12:25pm) to Kingston, NY for transfer to Margaretville, NY.
- New York City Airports: Take Airport Shuttle to the Port Authority and then the Trailways bus directly to Margaretville.

There is an online “Ride Board” if you would like to carpool or have a ride to offer. See our website for more details.

Blue Deer Center: 1155 County Route 6 (also known as County Hwy 6 and New Kingston Rd.), Margaretville, NY 12455.
Grounded in the wisdom held by the elders, programs offered at the Blue Deer Center enable you to connect more deeply with emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing.

The ancestral traditions provide a timeless pathway to nature, community, and the heart. For the most current program information and to receive our monthly e-newsletter, including articles and interviews, please visit our website — www.BlueDeer.org.