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Charles Lawrence: Carrying the voice of the natives

Friday, 27 February 2009 07:43



Charles H. Lawrence

SixDegrees met Charles Lawrence, world traveller, former psychologist and businessman whose life took a new course when he experienced a paranormal event. He was adopted and baptized by the Hopi Indians some 20 years ago. The spokesman of the native thought came to Finland for the celebration of the Finnish association "Four Winds".

Your life changed instantly when you were 40 years old, and you started to lead your life the native way. What you pass on in the ceremonies, has it been given to you by other teachers?

Basically they are all given to me, there is no book about this. The people live this way, connected to the nature, every single day. I focus on emotional well-being; clearing out the old stories and their emotions in the safe way. I am known as a cultural bridge builder, I have an ability to go into many places and make swift connections, the elders saw this. I have this open alignment with the cosmos, and it guides my pattern of movement across the earth. Years ago I was hit by lightning three times, those unexpected, initiatory strikes are part of what altered the course of my life. I just 'show up', I never know what is going to happen next. My personal journey is to freedom. I am leading people out of the confines of domestication into more authentic lives.

So you are a psychologist?

My first degree is in theatre and psychology, but I also have a business background. I was a partner in a large New York consulting company - we arranged special events, big charity balls and weddings and so forth. I still work as consultant for a corporation in New Jersey.

Do you feel the need for a liberating spirituality growing?

Absolutely. Western religion has controlled the mind set of all people for more than 2,000 years. We have all been categorised, especially by the Western church, and put in boxes, which I call prisons. I am far more focused on being spirited, not spiritual. Radical aliveness is not vacuous spirituality. There is a considerable difference when one fully considers the implications.

So a belief is individual and should be more tailor-made to people's needs. Exactly! Native Americans have a saying: "each one of us is a medicine bundle". Within each one of us, there are unique abilities and talents. Within the first six months of a baby's birth, the grandparents were always watching out for the first signs of 'reaching for'. When there is that level of encouragement and watching over, the baby grows up with a really deep sense of belonging. The world today is very alienated, people don't have a sense of belonging anymore. Because when people are not respected as little ones, it reflects in how they are when old.

Do you believe in one God?

I believe in the cosmos. Everything that begins with "uni" refers to one, it means scarcity, mono-theism, mono-chronism. I believe there is a vast intelligence with many faces and many voices. I call that a Creator-Being. All indigenous cultures have their own way of identifying nature's intelligence. There are the directions: the wind, the air, the earth, the fire, the water. They are in divine, dynamic participation. Every indigenous culture has this, only this nightmare came along called the western way and disrupted their whole understanding of unity, cohesion and energy all working together.

You talk about spirits, but how do you describe spirits?

The spirit is in everything. There is a spirit of place, a spirit of nature. When you really connect with Nature, it gives feedback and things happen; Nature has its own way of affirming our state of alignment.

You sense their presence, but could they become visible?

This to me is a very important question. In the Four Winds Circle the other day I asked of those who 'see' things. Many people see auras, see other things, but they have been taught to think they are crazy, so nobody talks about it. The church does not like individuals having their own way of being in alignment with creation. Some people are very auditory and sometimes they hear voices. When it happened to me for the first time I thought I was going mad.

But it was such clear communication?

So clear that it was frightening to me, but it was also new. Fortunately I have a background in psychology, so I could understand at least something of these new doors opening. Then, when the lightning struck I was sent on a direct pathway to the 'medicine' I was to carry.

Are your ceremonies about healing?

To me there is a difference between so-called "healing" and "creating", they are contrasting. I worked for many years as a co-healer. I now prefer to stimulate creativity in people. You may call it healing but to me it is helping to inspire, guide that person to go on and live their life in a new way. The Navajo don't call it healing, because there is nothing to heal. They just put that person back into the original alignment where everything is always positive and healthy.

What is the importance of the ceremonies and rituals?

It lines us up with something much bigger. Today the poverty of spirit is infecting people, because people don't have a perspective big enough. Life is a pathway of initiation as Joseph Campbell has said. A ritual is a process of aligning

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4/2013	15.4.2013	24
5/2013	15.5.2013	24
6/2013	15.6.2013	24
7/2013	15.7.2013	24
8/2013	15.8.2013	24
9/2013	15.9.2013	24
10/2013	15.10.2013	24
11/2013	15.11.2013	24
12/2013	15.12.2013	24

with the cosmos! The cosmos already knows how everything happens, so in aligning the process of manifesting, adjusting is quite simple. Through ceremony the sight opens from an ancient place, the road of the Shaman or the road of the ancient transformation or the Egyptian mystery school or the Tibetan school, they all have ways of perceiving it.

Ancient schools and rituals are thus related to each other?

There is relation and similarity through all. When the Maoris came from New Zealand for the big expo in Vancouver, the Maoris and Musqueams got together; they found similarities in their myths and ceremonial practices.

In ceremonies objects and symbols are very important, why?

The Sacred Pipe that I use in my circle is a representation of the cosmos, the great mystery. The sacred feminine, the bowl; the sacred masculine, the stem; when they are joined together and I tie on the eagle feather, it becomes the unifying principle of life: masculine, feminine and spirit. There are special medicinal herbs in the Pipe, both Hopi and Navajo. The idea is not to smoke with your lungs, it is too powerful. Big misunderstanding for many!

Are these herbs known to modern medicine?

Modern pharmaceutical companies have raped and ravaged indigenous people and they have given nothing back. In the Amazon it is horrific what these multi-national companies have done.. If they would use the medicine like it comes from nature, it would be balanced, without side effects. These pharmaceutical companies have caused more problems than they have done good.

I sensed in the circle the importance of gratitude, which is important almost in every old culture. Why do you think it is so important to be grateful?

We really have a strong sense of connection with the cosmos. It is a very alive presence. The cosmos notices what I am fascinated by, what I focus on. So when I start concentrating on gratitude, I get more to be grateful for. This 'delivery' is like a spiral and everything is connected. The indigenous way knows that when one seeds and raises vegetables, they are fed by the vital energy of the Mother Earth's body. The finned ones who swim in water are food for you, but you use them in a good way. Whatever that is going to feed people, take that life in a respectful way, because everything is sacred. The Christian man and his splintered mentality, he forgot that.

Besides the gratitude, the other thing that I saw was important in the circle was the idea of breathing out, letting out the past, and taking a new breath in. Like letting the past go and concentrating on the new. Have you been successful in making people grasp these two issues: the gratitude and letting go of the past?
I can't make people do things, but I can show them doors.

Are your teachings a religion?

It is simply a way of life. The Hopi have this saying: when someone drops their robe and walks back to the spirit world, they go to what they call the 'before place'. That is the place of return and departure. The individual spirit sits there and reviews his life. We come to this world, we touch many lives, and one of the big problems, which either Jesus or his followers messed up, is not about treating your neighbour, but to treat yourself the way you want to be treated. Be kind to yourself and love yourself, and others will do the same to you. Everyone has a very unique connection with the Cosmos. In my courses, I ask people to bring a list of the reputations they like to have in their lifetimes - the person is known by what they do.

What would you want your reputation to say?

That people really trust me and that they feel safe. Years ago, when on Hopi, I was told that people came to visit because I made them laugh. I wondered if they were laughing at me or with me. But it does not matter - they were laughing! So I like to have a reputation of being someone who brings gladness, there is just too much sorrow in the world.

Do you have family?

No. I came from a very brutal home, so as a little boy I knew that having children wasn't for me. My brother and sister passed on the violence to their children. I have adopted children and grandchildren, all over this world, literally people who have taken me on as their father, brother, uncle.. I am a good relative!

Do you watch TV or movies?

I watch some movies, but no TV. When 9/11 happened outside my office window I recalled the lessons of the Hopi. For years they had warned me of these things that would happen. The elders believed that such horrifying sights on television are poison. So I never paid attention to television. I listen to a lot of music instead. I love the theatre, I love good food, and I love opera.

Name Charles H. Lawrence

Born in San Bernardino, California in 1934 Lives in New York City.

As a child I wanted to be... A doctor, a singer, a dancer.

The person I admire is... Joseph Campbell, the mythologist.

Everyday I... intend to be more joyful than the day before, it might be my last day in this body.

I hope that... No hope, useless word for me.. What is, is what is. That is what I dance with.

In one year's time I... am seeing myself as more outrageously free.

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