

Sahara Chaldean: Life is a Ceremony

From an early age, Sahara was immersed in the natural world and found refuge communing on her family's 1,000 acres in Sonoma County. She grew up greatly influenced by her relationship to her inner and outer landscapes. Her family was unable to provide the deep listening that she found in the wild lands surrounding her home.

As an adolescent, Sahara pursued Theatre Arts and performed in local musicals and theatre. She was awarded a scholarship for theatre arts. Theatre was a breakthrough for her. She found out that she was really good at it and she loved it. This was also a time of exploring her spirituality. During her teens, she had an existential awakening with the questioning of how she could believe in something without knowing the truth. That soul searching led her to find her own truth and to share this revelation with others.

Her senior year project in high school was to make an audio recording of "What is Truth?" Living into the layers of this existential question led her to include Buddhism, Christianity and Tai Chi as her primary spiritual influences. She feels her spirituality is a great mystery and is bigger than one path. She doesn't like naming it because she wants to keep the curiosity and openness alive. Not naming it keeps the mystery alive. She senses it could be more than all she can image.

In college, she earned degrees in Environmental Studies and Ecopsychology. She hungered for many experiences working in nature. Sahara asked herself, "What I am going to do with this degree?" Ecopsychology wasn't really formed yet and she needed to earn a living.

She became one of the area's first women forest fire fighters; cooked on an Alaskan fishing boat; became a water plant operator and taught environmental studies through gardening at the local schools. She started a white-water rafting company with her boyfriend from the late 1970's till 1985 and became the first woman to guide white water rafting trips. When they split, he kept the rafting company and she started white water kayaking in the Carson River Forest Service lands. (Sahara is still interested in offering this kind of trip through EarthWays.)

Sahara's degrees and experience in the outdoors paid off and she landed a 30-year career position at Santa Rosa Junior College, where she developed leadership events and programs for the college community and received awards for teaching excellence. She retired in 2015, having recreated and expanded her position to include being the Advisor to the Sustainability Student Group.

When Sara Harris and Susan Kistin, co-founders of EarthWays, invited her to become a member it was a natural fit! All of Sahara's previous experiences had prepared her to become a wilderness guide. And to her great delight, she found a niche for her many diverse gifts and a way to be of service in giving them away.

Sahara is interested in exploring all the ways relational presence with the natural world can be applied with Rites of Passage programs. She specializes in offering Circle Way and Council trainings, as she continues to immerse herself in the art of Storytelling and Deep Listening.

She keeps coming back to her own spirituality by staying open, being curious and immersing herself in the natural world. No naming is essential. Her wildflowers, bees and butterfly friendly garden are her teacher. Years ago, she developed the idea of teaching using the garden as a metaphor and a true teacher of living and dying. Her garden remains the place where she learns about herself and is the truest reflection of her.

Sahara's life is a ceremony. Being in relationship with who she is – is reflected back to her from her garden and the natural world. She wants people to remember to live their life in ceremony, much like tending to a plant in their home or returning from a full-on vision quest. Be who you are right now with what's available to you in your present-day conditions.

During her forties, through her writing, she developed a poetic voice for herself. Her internal landscape became the point of her exploration. Forties to fifties were devoted to Tai Chi which became a huge part of her life and the main focus of her spirituality.

At 48, Sahara undertook a year-long program with Sara of EarthWays exploring Women's Wisdom through the Four Seasons. Two years later at 50, Sahara quested with Anne Stine, Wilderness Rites and came back completely reborn. The gift that Sahara came back to incorporate was herself as a Storyteller. She was told, "You are a Storyteller." "How can I be a Storyteller if I am afraid to speak in front of people?" she asked herself.

Sahara's mission is to be in relational presence with the entire world. She homed in to this intention and things fell into place starting an eight-year run of offering Speaking Circles. It is very meaningful for her to be able to create a container for people to discover and share their truest selves.

Sahara brings a creative aspect to a quester's own true nature beyond the traditional vision quest guide. She listens to what transition needs to be witnessed. She brings to EarthWays a very creative mindset willing to dream programs into manifestation. These new programs, which have a main feature of incorporation, are successful and have many of the elements of traditional 10-day vision quest.

Finding your voice, speaking your truth, receiving people and the natural world are hallmarks of Sahara's philosophy. Listening to the natural world and living from the Coyote Way are her way. She believes the natural world beings are trying to tell us something. She asks, "How do you open people to help them listen to an insect, a tree

and the air? The wider world is the relational world...it is the very same relational presence that was opened to me in my young life," she answers.

She loves her wired haired dachshund, Charly Nibblesox and also loves poetry, art, music, writing, reading, cooking, gardening and enjoying a simple life.

Cynthia Morrow: May I See People Clearly and Deeply

In Cynthia's astrology, she is in the midst of a series of significant Saturn transits. Her conscious mind does not seem to be able to manifest what she thinks she wants. Recently, she has to cancel programs and other commitments and has had to go slower. Saturn is about completion and because Saturn wants completion, all new projects need to be set aside. She is being held in the chrysalis.

How often we are taken into the chrysalis to be transformed into our truest self, not necessarily the one that we thought we wanted. "What is the direction that I am supposed to go in?" she ponders. This is definitely a West shield journey and a story of humility. Her relationships: parents, family, partner, work are up for examination and attunement.

This is a time of living into a new edge of real intimacy and centering of herself with her life. The West shield requires the sacrifice of the ego. Her Capricorn Aries goal-oriented focus is being challenged. The world of I, me, mine, the world of forever and of youthful promises is giving over to the world of care for others close to her who are suffering. She is accepting that people suffer and that they need companionship in the midst of that suffering.

During a quest she learned that in her father's line was a Cherokee Chief in the 1800s. The ancestral teachings came directly to her in this vision during her time in 'dying practice' on a School of Lost Borders program in Death Valley. After the program, she called her parents who were synchronistically in Salt Lake City discovering information about their lineage. They told her of her connection to the Cherokee Chief who had already paid her a visit in her vision.

Cynthia's grandparents had lived in Bishop and she had been taken to the Eastern Sierras many times as a child. Grandfather was a major wilderness explorer who took her father and uncle into the mountains at every chance. She and her parents would go on 2-week backpacking trips every summer in Eastern Sierras. The Owens Valley land itself feels like family. Grandparents would drop them off at one point on the trail and 2 weeks later pick them up at the other end. They lived on Mustang Mesa, just north of Bishop, and Mt Tom was the view from their house. They like questers now would come into town for dinner out in Bishop and the story telling of the adventure would begin.

The awareness of Cynthia's mother's bloodline came to her through her work with School of Lost Borders. Her personal work in ceremony was to listen to the ancestral wisdom and to open to that wisdom coming directly to her. This work invited her to listen more deeply to her mother's lineage, which was, in some ways, ruptured by her Japanese mother's move to America after the traumatic effects of World War II. Cynthia is now known to herself through the reclamation of Japanese Tendai Buddhist chants, rituals and practices.

She's had a long drawn out journey of learning Japanese which is healing the rupture of the mother line. It feels very important to her. Studying a language opens her mind and soul to the essence of her own culture and her own ancestral self. The structure of Japanese is wholeness and in a very essential way it is a return for her to her source. Learning the ancient knowing of her mother culture is an act of intimacy. Learning the language is such a key.

Today, her father is ill. His condition includes a developing speech impediment which makes it hard for him to be heard and understood. Cynthia has become a translator listening deeply to his needs and relaying them to others. She is deepening into the reality of not knowing the other's experience which brings into view her own suffering.

Her training as a Tendai Japanese novice priest gives her the backdrop of the 3,000 realities that exist in a single moment of awareness as a reference: How to Yes to all of life. Psycho spiritual work is where the dharma and spirituality come through for her. Her commitment to her spiritual practice is to be a clear reflective mirror.

It is the nature of life and death and the threshold space to crack us open, allowing the ego to move out of dominance and the sense of self, which is loving, to take center place. Even when she doesn't speak of it, Cynthia's intention is to bring this unity of psyche and spirit together. She prays that she is able to receive the other just as they are and to accept the rightness of where they are in their lives. "May I see people clearly and deeply" is her prayer.

She has clocked a lot of hours in the chair of her psychotherapeutic clinical practice which is a witness to deep stories of people's lives. Bearing witness to peoples' stories and supporting them to be themselves is her work. She loves that interface of work in her office and earth-based rite of passage work, when people are committed to their own growing.

Being in the body has been a lifelong practice for Cynthia. Our body is our little piece of the earth that we carry around. It is a practice of intimacy with her body and with the earth. She uses Buddhist meditation on the body and the four elements of fire (passion), water, (fluid), wind, (breath), earth (structure) to remind us that these elements are not separate.

The identity of being a single woman is dissolving into the new body of partnership. It takes time to form it consciously. "They are good for each other in so many ways," Cynthia says. They both know how to slow down when they hit a bump. She is joining the psyche and the spirit with love and understanding. Her rich dance of being intimate with life continues.