



Circles of Light

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Review by Curtis McCosco

The Shamanic Wisdom of the Huichol
By Tom Soloway Pinkson

Author Tom Soloway Pinkson, Ph.D., and publisher Destiny Books released a new title that offers deep insights into the world through the eyes of shamanic wisdom. The medicine teachings shared throughout *The Shamanic Wisdom of the Huichol: Medicine Teachings for Modern Times* reach into topics of our contemporary times while reading like a spiritual suspense tale. Tom Pinkson, Ph.D., was guided to create Wakan (“sacred” in the Lakota language and “heart of the sky” in the Mayan language) as a non-profit, spiritual organization that offers products and services for healing and creative expression based on indigenous wisdom teachings. To learn more about this non-fiction book’s message and what secrets it may unlock within you, read an in-depth review.

A Life Well Lived

A surprising volume this, by Tom Pinkson, Ph. D., in that it slowly grows into a part of one’s inner life, the way a daily walk in a new-found meadow can become familiar because of its timeless beauty and tranquility.

We learn of Pinkson’s mis-spent youth (is there any other kind?) and wayward ways gradually transforming into a life well lived—more than well lived: a life guided by service and fully charged compassion. In a unique way this is a religious tract, a testament to faith, not in the order of A’ Kempis, but perhaps nearer to yet another Thomas, Merton.



Religious Activism

However, this is no cloistered monk.

Pinkson is part of a remarkable wave of cross-cultural transmission of religious thought and activism from indigenous teachers of the Americas to spiritually oriented individuals seeking a deeper connection than they have been finding in the faith of their birth. Pinkson finds it in the peyote-infused world of the Huichol tribes of the Sierra Madre, Mexico.

The Sacred Path

What sets Tom Pinkson apart from other psychedelic explorers, adventurers, and neo-shamans is the work: his counseling and shamanic voyaging with terminally ill adults and children.



During the sessions he documents, we can see the training, insight, and deep spiritual courage gained from years “on the path” in Wiricuta—the Huichol Holy Land—on Mt. Shasta the sacred mountain, and on journeys he has organized for clients, patients, and recovering substance abusers. Never do we get a sense these experiences are “recreational,” but that they are always informed by purpose and profound love.

Shamanism and Taoism

Shamanic practice is compared to t'ai chi, the ancient Chinese Taoist practice of gathering chi, power, in the lower dan t'ien, the solar plexus.

“Daily prayer practice with the seven powers, communion work with power animals and spirit guides, and regular quests and pilgrimages to sacred places all offer to take in power and increase its potency. Concurrent with acquiring power is the process of eliminating, or at least reducing, the patterns by which power is lost or given away unconsciously.

He calls these Energy Leaks

“from heart-closing judgements, from fear, from not being in the present, from reactivity to button pushers, from identification of self with ego, from not being in alignment with one’s heart path and in integrity with all your relationships, including those with the natural world—all weaken personal power. Stopping the leaks is a must.

The Nature of Reality

“The Huichol shamans say we are perdido, lost.” The purpose of bringing these wise teachings out into the wider world is “to get a more accurate reading of the nature of reality.”

To do this, Pinkson gazes into the sacred fire, Tatewari, follows the tracks of Kauyumari—the Deer Spirit whose footprints are the green disc-shaped Hicouri plants peyote—and prays to travel safely with courage through Nierica, the Cosmic Doorway.



According to the Huichol Creation Story, it was the sun who first “began dreaming of a great swirling tunnel of brilliant color, a nierica, leading to a new world that was much more stable.”

Love and Death

Shamanic training has prepared him well for the all important, yet mostly shunned, service to the dying. With utmost humility he recounts the great learning he has received from these terminally ill “teachers.” The great lessons are ineffable: the pervasive and ultimate power of love, and the ubiquitous presence of the ultimate mystery of death.

Love and death both await us through that swirling tunnel of nierica, yet neither technique nor initiation ceremony have survived the rise of the modern world view in the west. The biosphere may not survive that dominant world view either.

Tom Pinkson’s life of service using these ancient tools in the modern world is bridged by way of example between the richness of indigenous tradition and our natural hopes for the future. His gem of a book is a literary nierica into that future, or perhaps it is just a glimpse of it.