

Order of Service  
***Spirit Warrior***  
April 18, 2010

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**Reading** from *Journey to Ixtlan*, by Carlos Castaneda

*Don Juan is talking with Carlos, challenging him to adopt the mood of a spirit warrior in his life:*

“...You can spur yourself beyond your limits if you are in the proper mood. A warrior makes his own mood. You didn’t know that. Fear got you into the mood of a warrior, but now that you know about it, anything can serve to get you into it....

“It’s convenient to always act in such a mood,” he continued. “It cuts through the crap and leaves one purified.

“One needs the mood of a warrior for every single act,” he said. “Otherwise one becomes distorted and ugly. There is no power in a life that lacks this mood. Look at yourself. Everything offends and upsets you. You whine and complain and feel that everyone is making you dance to their tune. You are a leaf at the mercy of the wind. There is no power in your life. What an ugly feeling that must be!

“A warrior, on the other hand, is a hunter. He calculates everything.... But once his calculations are over, he acts. He lets go. That’s abandon. A warrior is not a leaf at the mercy of the wind. No one can push him; no one can make him do things against himself or against his better judgment. A warrior is tuned to survive, and he survives in the best of all possible fashions....

“The mood of a warrior is not so far-fetched for yours or anybody’s world. You need it in order to cut through all the guff....

“To achieve the mood of a warrior is not a simple matter. It is a revolution. To regard the lion and the water rats and our fellow men as equals is a magnificent act of the warrior’s spirit. It takes power to do that.”

**Sermon** Spirit Warrior

Rev. Bruce Davis

Well into my seventh decade, I am aware of a process of distillation, where the experiences that have meant the most in my life become sorted and refined into a pattern of spiritual qualities that I call my truth. God willing, this clarity of meaning will continue to my dying day, and I will leave this world carrying wisdom that might be summarized in only a few words.

This is the Unitarian Universalist quest for truth and meaning. We rarely accept creed or dogma defined by others, however well-intended they may be. We begin with the truth of our own experiences, and from those experiences we distill the essence of meaning. What we articulate as our beliefs, finally, are those qualities and values that show up time and again in our lives as we live them. This is the process of that time-honored UU workshop, Build Your Own Theology. Not out of your head. Not with borrowed concepts. But out of your heart. Out of the moments of truth that have been the grace of your life experience.

The first church where I knew I belonged, because I knew I was surrounded by truth, was the Northwest wilderness. I know I'm not alone in this. For many of you, and for many of us in the Northwest, our spirituality is in direct relationship to our encounters with the mountains and the waters, the trees and the beasts, the wind and the clouds, the stars and the endless recesses of space. To live aware of the reality of hard rock, the freshness of flowing air, and the magic of morning light is to invite a transformation into the fundamental and elemental reality of who we are.

Each of us re-invents this wilderness spirituality whenever we go outside with awareness. But we were not the first to invent it. We need only look at the indigenous peoples of this earth to know that humankind has sought and found profound truth in Nature from its beginning. Nor do we need to look far to find such people, with the wisdom elders of the First Nations communities so near at hand.

Through the millennia layer upon layer of knowledge has been laid down, like the silts of ancient seas that are now our mountain tops. Ten thousand philosophies. Ten thousand religions. Ten thousand sciences. Ten thousand cultures. How much there is to know! And, sorting through it all, how long it takes to find the truth that matters to my life. And so we peel back the petals of

the rose. What is there within? What truth lies beneath it all? What is the perennial wisdom that remains true?

The spirit warrior is a symbol. Having embraced simple truth, she or he stands in stillness as a being of power in cultures as far from each other as Massai in Kenya and the Haida in the Queen Charlotte Islands. I may find this warrior symbol illuminating. It may inform my own search for truth and meaning. I may ask myself, “How might I simplify my own complex understandings of this world to live a purposeful life like the indigenous warrior?”

But the spirit warrior may be more than a symbol, more than an icon held at arms length. As that woman or man faced the challenges and joys of life experience, even those ten thousand years ago, so also do we stand, now, in that same elemental reality. Our calling may not be simply to admire or be inspired by the spirit warrior; for some of us, certainly, the call we hear is to *be* that spirit warrior.

My understanding about how the spirit warrior archetype is part of me began many years ago with the early works of Carlos Casteneda, who presents to us a wise Yaqui sorcerer named Don Juan. The first two books were about Carlos, a naive anthropologist, who thought he was learning how to identify and use psychotropic plants. A hippie academic, if you will. It was only in the third book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, that Carlos realized he had engaged the much deeper spiritual tradition of the Yaqui Indians.

This book has always had great resonance for me. I have read it many times. I’ve brought it as a companion on vision quests. Perhaps I had some of the same foolishness that Carlos brought to his teacher, which made me particularly open to Don Juan’s wisdom. I keep having to get more copies of this book because I keep giving them away to people.

Over the years I’ve been influenced on this path in many ways: Facilitating men’s groups. Working with my own Don-Juan-like teachers. Taking vision quests. Reading the poetry of Robinson Jeffers and the books of Tom Brown, who wrote *The Tracker*. A few years ago I participated in an intensive training weekend offered by the Mankind project that further

strengthened my awareness as a spirit warrior. But my own greatest teacher has been that hard and beautiful edge of the wild world.

I am full of stories about this journey as I become that spirit warrior, but I don't want to take the time for that now. The value here is not so much in the stories but in the life qualities that this path encourages. Here are eight that have become central to my own path.

### **Responsibility**

Taking responsibility is not easy. Don Juan tells Carlos that he can't keep whining if he hopes to find the freedom and the power of a spirit warrior. Being utterly responsible means always acting in accordance with what is true in your heart of hearts. It means that your word is good. It means you will be accountable to the promises you've made. For the fully realized spirit warrior, responsibility becomes their reality. For those of us on the path, we know that we don't always get it right. This is not about judging our limitations or beating ourselves up when we fail. It is about knowing we are on a path with the intention of living out the fullness of responsibility in our lives.

### **Integrity**

For the spirit warrior there a consonance or harmony of his or her different parts, integrated into a whole. What they present to the world is this integrated self. What is promised is delivered. The word "authenticity" is often used when we meet someone who has great integrity. When their word is given, we can rely on it. When a meaningful task is begun, great effort may be expended to complete it. Again, this is a practice. Do you and I fall out of integrity? Yes, probably many times a day. By noticing that loss of integrity, by feeling its impact on our selves and others, we learn—naturally and at a deep level. We may even invite others to remind us gently when we are slipping out of integrity. So much of both Integrity and Responsibility have to do with our awareness, specifically our ability to take honest notice ourselves in action.

### **Truth**

Both Responsibility and Integrity require that we have a sense of truth. Not just empirical sense truth, where scientifically we can say what is probably true. Rather, a deep and personal sense of truth, a clear sense of purpose and

direction, is an essential quality of the spirit warrior. This is like the word “Dharma” in the Eastern traditions, which is that quality of truth that guides one’s life toward the good. Being unique persons, we all have different Dharma, and so the spirit warrior’s allegiance to truth is very personal. Ultimately truth in this sense is your best answer to the questions, “Who am I?” and “What do I want?”

### **Connection and Communion**

The first experience of a seeker on the path to become a spirit warrior is the ineffable beauty that frequently emerges during encounters with the natural world. We’ve all found sacred places and have been filled by moments of sacred experience. Beauty itself gives way to a deep connectedness at a soul level with the natural world, and a quality of *communion*, oneness with all that is, emerges. This profound experience, once felt, is powerfully transforming and draws the seeker into more and deeper experiences. The great Native American seer, Black Elk, is profound in his vision of communion:

Then I was standing  
On the highest mountain of them all,  
And round beneath me  
Was the whole hoop of the world.  
And while I stood there  
I saw more than I can tell  
And I understood  
More than I saw.  
For I was seeing in the sacred manner  
The shape of all things of the spirit.  
And the shapes as they must live together  
Like one being.  
And I saw that the sacred hoop  
Of my people

Was one of many hoops  
That make one circle,  
Wide as daylight and starlight,  
And in the center grew  
One mighty flowering tree.

### **Life is Purposeful**

The spirit warrior carries the perception that things do not happen by chance. In Castenada's work, Don Juan is frequently pointing out natural occurrences that Carlos doesn't notice or simply ignores. A crow flies overhead. A cloud passes in front of the sun. Each action of the world, to the spirit warrior, is a message or a gesture of significance. This awareness takes responsibility to a new level, where the spirit warrior must pay attention to what is happening and *respond* to it in the most life-supporting way possible.

### **Death as an Advisor**

The spirit warrior knows that she or he will die. Though all of us know this fact, we are not often aware of it. Death for the spirit warrior is always there, looking over our shoulder, even in the midst of action. The value of this moment of life is infinitely heightened in the consciousness of death's inevitability. The devotion and the commitment of the spirit warrior to right action can ultimately be in the context of death—if I must die to do what I must do, so be it. Like the realized Buddhist, it is almost as if death, or at least the *sturm und drang* about death, has already been completed, while still living and serving in this world.

### **Stopping the World**

There is for the spirit warrior a moment in the midst of the flow of the life around them, in which everything stops. Even in the flow of doing, the spirit warrior may be aware of a profound non-doing. One of the greatest spirit warriors in all of the world's wisdom traditions is Arjuna from the ancient *Bhagvad Gita* of India. His question to his teacher, Lord Krishna, who is an avatar of God, is how to live, how to act. Krishna's reply, in Sanskrit, is, "Yogastah Kuru Karmani," which translates as: "Grounded in the still oneness of

Being, perform action.” This is the practice of meditation. Settling into the stillness and silence within, there are moments when the world stops: no thought, no action, no emotion, just Being. The further practice is to bring this stillness into action, so that in the midst of the doing, the realization of being is never lost.

### **Acceptance of Mystery**

No matter how much I know, the unknown expands beyond me in all directions. Firm, kind, clear, and powerful, the spirit warrior nonetheless acknowledges how small a part he or she plays in the dance of the cosmos. The spirit warrior can only see to the edge of his or her experience. Beyond that edge is mystery. Only with glimpses, as with dreaming, does the mystery reveal itself, in images, feelings and words that cannot be fully understood rationally. And yet it is not with fear but with love that the spirit warrior bows to the mystery. There is no place for arrogance here. I am not the author of the world. I am humbled by the greatness of earth, of cosmos, and of Spirit. It is you, divine mystery, whom I know, and love, and serve.

May it be so.