

PEACE WALK 2010

by K. Seren

In April this year, I danced, chanted, prayed, and walked with people of diverse faiths in the cause of peace and nuclear disarmament. Together we engaged in ritual from our myriad religions with intentions focused on forging peace in humanity.

We walked from Las Vegas to the Nuclear Test Site in Nevada — in the wind, the sun, heat, and cold. We listened to the wind (howling at times), to the stillness of the desert, to each other. We shared meals, sunscreen, and duct tape (my blistered feet thank you!). We shared vision, desire, and dream.

My heart and mind are still raw with the memory of the pain of the land and the suffering of beings at the hands of war. On Friday, the Stations of the Cross were performed with a unique focus on the continued suffering of humanity in the violence of war, imploring us to find the peace that was offered by Christ. Meanwhile the drones of Creech Air Force Base flew overhead. By the fifth station, I could not repeat the sections of the performance that

were intended for all to read in unison. My voice caught in my throat and tears gathered as I opened myself to the pain of humanity — its fears, hatred, and grief.

As I walked on Saturday, I found a space of stillness, alone with my footsteps. With every step I took toward the Nuclear Test Site, I felt a weight on my chest increase, the burdened and belabored Earth Mother struggling to

I began to breathe more deeply, more evenly. I called upon the Light of the Divine, called it from within and without, in me and through me. I envisioned this vast desert being cleansed and healed with this Light, pouring out past me, past the Nuclear Test Site fence, and across the land. I envisioned Light pooling from my footsteps, Light resting gently from above on every cactus and shrub, Light

penetrating below the crust of soil and deep into the Earth. Light seeping into myself, then touching every human heart. Light bringing love and peace to all people.

For all the pain and suffering this Earth holds, mostly due to our own lack of mindfulness and our bowing down to fear, it holds much beauty too. When I had allowed the pain to wash over me, faced it, embraced it, and met it with courage... I began to feel a deep affection. Despite Her wounds, the Earth

cooperated with the rain to cause the desert to gift us with the most amazing array of flowers. Flowers so small they were dwarfed by my fingernails fought to the surface to meet the sun. A wary



heal a tremendous wound. I opened myself as wide as I could, breathed out space for this suffering, and grieved with the Land as I would for my family. I touched the plants lightly, hearing their voices. I cried. I apologized. And then I gave what Light I could offer this place.

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burro eyed me cautiously, trotting off to the horizon. A pair of ravens took to the sky ahead.

And in humanity, too, there is hope and the capacity for healing. Again and again this came to me — as we huddled together at lunch using a car as a windbreak, as we stood together in vigil at Creech Air Force Base... but mostly when we danced together. Thursday night, in the Temple of Goddess Spirituality (dedicated to Sekhmet), led by T. Thorn Coyle and Spinner McBride, we called upon the inner divine fire, the elements, and the Goddess Sekhmet. The rhythm of the drums, the warmth of the fire, the starry sky of the open dome of the temple... I could feel myself spiral into this Divine presence, this deep capacity for love and peace. Friday morning, remembering together Christ's sacrifice and the continued suffering of humanity at the hands of violence, I felt this same spiraling — this unity despite difference. And Friday night, led by T. Thorn Coyle and Joshua Levin, recitations of Thomas Merton backed by drumming turned into spontaneous chanting and dancing. As I moved and sung,

I felt my soul rise to meet the Divine presence, bringing the Light and Love of this Divine into me and my humanity.

Sunday morning we danced again — this time to the drumbeat of Johnny Bob, the Tribal Chief of the Western Shoshone.

Before dawn, we gathered around the fire, listening to prayers in the Shoshone

language and dancing together to the solid heartbeat of the drum. As we went round and round, holding hands, circling as the sun rose, I began to lose myself in the circular swirl of energy around the fire, the vortex created by just a few dozen human feet, stomping out the rhythm of love and peace. At breakfast, my mind wondered: what would it be like to have a world of



people dancing to that rhythm of awakening, holding hands in a never-ending spiral of life? What would happen if humanity as a whole, collective consciousness became mindful of how precious life really is? What if we knew our incredible potential to honor life in other beings and transform this world? What if we realized Earth is our

heaven or our hell — that we choose which reality to create?

Nearly a week later, I sit here at my computer in my little mountain cabin and I still can call up the pain of the Land and humanity in the shackles of war. Yet I can also still call up the hope of humanity moving in unison to the heartbeat of peace. Logic tells me that humans are a long way off from finding a collective consciousness of unity and friendship. Yet perhaps because it is a deep-seated desire, my heart and soul tell me this is possible. In

the meantime, whenever I can, I will hold hands with you and dance, and together, we can become filled with the joy and wonder of living. In those moments, we will create heaven on earth. We will become this future humanity, able to celebrate our differences and yet raise one voice for peace — so that no child is orphaned by violence, no mother buries her son in the name of war, and no land is poisoned and scarred by weapons.

K. Seren is a Druid and does independent study with T. Thorn Coyle. A cultural anthropologist specializing in religion and ecology, Seren also writes non-fiction and creates art.



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A DESERT EXPERIENCE

By T. Thorn Coyle

“Freedom is hard to bear. It can be objected that I am speaking of political freedom in spiritual terms, but the political institutions of any nation are always menaced and are ultimately controlled by the spiritual state of that nation... Privately, we cannot stand our lives and dare not examine them; domestically, we take no responsibility for (and no pride in) what goes on in our country; and internationally, for many millions of people, we are an unmitigated disaster.”

— James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Thursday night we sang and prayed to Sekhmet to give us the fire of courage to face the wars we carry inside ourselves, to connect with the fire in the Earth and the stars, and the fire in our own blood, in our hearts and minds, that would enable us to face the fires of war that have so ravaged this desert. The mighty black statue of Sekhmet faced the direction of the Nevada Test Site, and the temple itself is situated three miles from Creech Air Force Base and eight miles from two prisons. Prophet James Baldwin is right: as long as there is war inside me, there will be war on Earth. As long as I build prisons in my soul, humanity will imprison itself.

Friday morning we walked the three miles from the Sekhmet's Temple to the “Home of the Hunters.”

Planes glided silently overhead as we walked the Stations of the Cross outside the long fence. Soldiers patrolled in a big truck nearby, following our movements. The desert sun was hot, but thankfully for this hour or so, the

winds were still. As I looked up into the sky, I could not help but notice that the Predator looked remarkably like a wasp, reminding me of my sacred encounter the week before. But this was a wasp for which I did not want to find another home. This was a silent, unmanned, death-dealing wasp who — along with its larger cousin, the Reaper who also made test runs overhead — would not only do surveillance, but carry missiles and bombs over Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. Although designed to save US military personnel and to more accurately assess targets, 32% of those they kill are still civilians, and of course, sometimes mistakes are made.

Later that afternoon, we held vigil outside the base. Part of the time, I sat on the ground in meditation while anchoring a large banner that fought with the returned wind. As I opened my aura out to hold the desert, I could not help but feel that we all must hold each other, as best we can, whether UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, or “drone”) operators, the county Sheriff, the counter-protestors, or the yucca and cholla that dotted the landscape. As military personnel drove off the base

toward home, some ignored us, some few flashed peace signs, and one held up his book on Che Guevara.

UAV operators in Nevada and California are killing people across the world, as we speak. They watch the videos implanted in the gliders and watch, in graphic close-ups yet from great distance, as people are blasted into small components of humanity. This also shatters the enlisted men and women, as we can well imagine.

The Military Times reports:

“The Air National Guardsmen who operate Predator drones over Iraq via remote control, launching deadly missile attacks from the safety of Southern California 7000 miles away, are suffering some of the same psychological stresses as their comrades on the battlefield. Working in air-conditioned trailers, Predator pilots observe the field of battle through a bank of video screens and kill enemy fighters with a few computer keystrokes. Then, after their shifts are over, they get to drive home and sleep in their own beds. But that whiplash transition is taking a toll on some of them mentally, and so is the way the unmanned aircraft's cameras enable them to see people getting killed in high-resolution detail, some officers say.”

What are we doing here, with these wars? We are damaging ourselves, our souls, and the Earth. We no longer even have the satisfaction of grappling with another human, hand to hand. We are dealing out death at a distance, and slowly dying inside. Freedom is

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hard to bear. But so is war. So is our enslavement and inner blindness. How shall we waken to the light that dawns over the desert so beautifully? If life and death are sacred, what is our role in these wars being fought via real-time video games? We try to distance ourselves from the cycles of the Earth, but in the long run, this simply is not possible.

As General Stanley McChrystal wrote in his report to President Obama regarding the war in Afghanistan:

“Pre-occupied with protection of our own forces, we have operated in a manner that distances us – physically and psychologically – from the people we seek to protect... The insurgents cannot defeat us militarily; but we can defeat ourselves.”

And so we keep walking in the desert, beneath the unforgiving sun and scouring wind.

* * *

It is the religious belief of the Western Shoshone that the Earth is most sacred. This includes everything in it, upon it, and above it.

As soon as I stepped across the line onto the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, I began to weep...

Saturday, we walked 15 miles on asphalt, feet and knees screaming. By the final few miles, my muscles were beginning to seize up. I breathed deeply, realigned, and extended my spine to the sky. It helped. During each day of the walk, many flashed peace signs at us,

many ignored us, and some gave the one-fingered greeting. Truckers blew their horns and bikers raised arms in salutation. We battled banners in the winds when they came. During still times, I opened my blue parasol that read “Love, Not Fear”. We walked the



desert highway, next to glimmering rocks and cacti, whether we were 18 years old or 80. The desert gifted me with a black rock bisected by a ascending white stripe that looked like it was heading off into the distance. The road I walked gave me back a little drawing of a road to take in memento vivere.

Western Shoshone Chief Johnnie Bobb and his family greeted us with the Shoshone flag, burning sage, drumming, and singing as we limped on up to the peace camp where dinner cooked by local volunteers would soon be ready. I felt grateful to be there, to give some small witness to the Western Shoshone – whose land, despite the Ruby Valley Treaty, has been used to stoke the fires of war – and to the land itself, to the tiny red and purple flowers, to the yucca, cholla, and nopal.

We live in times of war and preparation for war. This has affected our minds. We live in times of torture and training for torture. This has affected our hearts. We live in times

when the assassination of those who feel threatening to us – whether US citizens or “foreigners” – is acceptable to the governing body of a nation, and to the president who promised hope and change. This has affected our souls. We are awash in the needless shedding of blood and the tears of mothers, fathers, lovers, and children. We are complicit with systems that tear us from each other, that distance us from breath and skin and love, that tell us we are not of the Earth, and can degrade the fertile body of this planet, and can degrade even the space between the stars.

We are crying from the wounding of this body, of our body. And it is not going to get better any time soon.

Sunday morning, I rose at 4:30 after another night spent at

the Goddess Temple. Others had camped out on Shoshone land, braving the harsh wind and cold. I awoke during the night and sent some energy of calming to the sky, thinking of small tents buffeted with little shelter from the land itself. The outdoor sleepers said the wind stilled itself after noon, giving rest and respite for awhile. We made our way back, to join the others around a small fire, while Johnnie Bobb sang for fire and water and for his father, the Sun. We danced and danced together, circling around those flames, feet stepping to the heartbeat of his drum. Later, mass was said, and reconnection made to the sacred in that way. We are of Earth. We are of community. We are in communion. But we have to remember. We have to keep drawing ourselves back.

Children of the Earth, it is time to heed the calling of your heart. It is time to listen to the roaring in your soul. It is time to take up the task of your desire.

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As visionary Deena Metzger once wrote: "There is no time not to love." Can we set aside our fear and hatred of each other? Can we dance the dance of heartbreak and the longing for deep peace?

After Easter Mass — the mass of resurrection in which Father Steve spoke of Jesus crawling, bruised and battered, from his tomb — we were led again by the Shoshone to the gates of the bomb beleaguered land. We carried our banners and our prayers. We carried our resolve and our longing. Some began to wail at the white line that marks the boundary between one world and another, between the place where we could stand and the place where we could not. People began wailing and crying. The drumbeat started and I had to cross. I had to stand upon that land and offer what healing I could muster. I had to walk upon the stones and sand of ancient seabed where I had not stood for a decade of years.

As soon as I stepped across that line, I began weeping. The land rose up and met my feet, surrounding me with

recognition: I had come. I had come. I had come.

Once I was arrested and inside the holding pen, I hung a string of paper cranes to fly in the harsh wind, and then walked as far as I could and looked out upon the desert, sending wings of energy and light up into sky and down to Earth.



Spreading these wings, I let healing roll out from me. The land drank. I could do little, but as we always do, I did my best with what I had. The wind held my body upright, I moved with it, as though riding on the ocean, or dancing with a firm and strong beloved wrapped around my back. I was home... for I was with

my Mother, who is everywhere and no place. I was standing on the Earth.

Brothers and sisters, these times, like many others, are times that test the resiliency of our souls. As have some of our ancestors before us, I hope we choose the patterns of joy and reconnection rather than stepping toward hatred and fear. Walking the pathways of joy, we have some chance.

T. Thorn Coyle is a respected teacher and author of "Kissing the Limitless" and "Evolutionary Witchcraft" and hosts the popular "Elemental Castings". Founder of Solar Cross Temple and Morningstar Mystery School, she has a spiritual direction practice that reaches people internationally.

UPDATE AND CONTACTS

Following the detentions and confiscation of property at the Nevada Test Site (NTS) on Easter at the culmination of this year's Sacred Peace Walk, the banners, flags and religious symbols were returned. As a result of our actions, authorities created clearer guidelines about how the government will deal with people that cross the line at the NTS and their belongings.

The trial for the Creech 14, arrested during the April 2009 Sacred Peace Walk and "Ground the Drones Lest We Reap the Whirlwind" actions, has been reset for September 14, 2010, in Las Vegas.

For information on actions and organizing around Nevada Test Site, and to learn about Sacred Peace Walk 2011, visit www.nevadadesertexperience.org

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