



Pachamama: Creating and Living in a Shamanic Community

By Jaes Seis

As I write about our community here in Richland Center, Wisconsin, I do it as I do so many things in my life now. I draw upon the network of living, vibrant energy that so many individuals have created by joining together. There is a web and spirit of the people and the land that has become a reference point and resource to each of us individually. Whether we do things together, with a few of us, or one on one, the resonance of the community is a hum that feeds and supports the land and the people.

I am convinced that there was a plan in place long before I was present and involved with this area and community. The earth seems to speak in a gentle voice here. Like a Great Grandmother, the Ocooch Mountains roll softly, dipping down through craggy bluffs to touch the green valleys and blue rivers and streams where melting glaciers once flowed. They call this area of southwest Wisconsin the Driftless Region. The glaciers of the last ice age flattened most of the midwest, yet did not cover this area. For that reason, the mountains and streams here are some of the oldest in the world.

It feels as though the land is calling people to come, offering a comfort and simplicity that at the same time is creatively stimulating. It has been especially noticeable lately with people arriving who are interested in healing—themselves, the earth, and each other. Young families with children, whose souls shine brightly through our current veil of concerns for the world, offer some hope for the future they carry as destiny. Something is happening here. We each play our part in a bigger picture we are only beginning to glimpse and understand.

Pachamama means Mother Earth. It is a Qechua

word from the descendants of the Incas, the Q'ero, who live high in the Andes mountains of Peru. They know and live the power of the sacredness of earth and the interconnectedness of community. They brought their message out of their mountain tops and into the modern world of North America in 1996. Having been personally involved with them and their ceremonies of transmission of sacred wisdom, it seemed appropriate to join the purpose of our formation of community on the land in this new way to the ancestors of old.

The roots of this community extend in many directions. My beginnings with Richland Center began in 1974, when my mother was inspired by a piece of land in Richland County. She had begun searching for land with my father, in hopes of finding a refuge from the storm of changes that had taken hold of their lives since they moved to the midwest in 1967. Originally from the east, our family was deeply spiritual and community focused. Many generations had lived in the area and our extended family life was strong. The move for the sake of my father's work had a disruptive effect on the family and seemed to scatter us across the U.S. One sister stayed in the east to finish high school. Another brother and sister moved out west to attend college. I was suddenly the oldest at home with three younger siblings, and two parents who became completely involved with trying to create a new space and life for us.

Whatever differences existed between my parents and I before that move had remained beneath the surface. We were held together by the strength of the larger extended family and spiritual community. After the move, those differences became glaring. As I grew through my teen years, a battle was waged that eventually estranged my

parents and I completely. It was the purchase of the land in Wisconsin that began to draw us back together again. It didn't happen immediately, but rather bit by bit, in small incremental ways.

I had moved away from my parents. When my mother told me about the land they bought, she described it as a healing place. It reminded her of the family land we had all loved in the east. I was captivated by her description, and despite my personal resistance, began to visit them there. The land began to work her magic, softening sharp edges, smoothing and soothing torn feelings, awakening a deeper bond and connection that was stronger than the recent hurts and disappointments between us. It helped them remember who they were as individuals and what they loved to do. My father began fixing the buildings and tending the land, my mother immersed herself in her organic gardens and love of food preparation and preservation. They began to see each other and love each other again. It became easier for all of us to remember love.

I mention this history because it is the formation of a circle of love and healing that began for me with my family. Beginning with each individual and then extending out to the healing of the group, the healing spirit of the land has spiraled to many others in a sequence similar to that initiated in my life. The cycle of healing has accelerated and the circle has expanded. What began as a family healing has continued on as a community, connecting to other communities that are seeking and establishing healing circles.

In April of 1993, after 19 years of visiting the family land in Richland County, I moved here to stay. My parents had moved back to the ancestral home of the east and were thinking about selling the property in Wisconsin. Although they still visited and loved the land deeply, they were getting older and too busy to take care of it. This was a particularly significant turning point in my life, when challenges had converged in such a way as to heighten my awareness of the importance of family and community.

I didn't know anyone except a handful of my parents' friends living in the area. People were friendly in Richland Center—so friendly it was surprising. Even the land seemed to welcome me, with baby foxes, wild birds, and lush vegetation. I felt at home. Eventually I learned that there was a community of spiritual people here. There is a spiritual presence in Richland Center that has taken the form of a proliferation of churches, far more than would seem possible in a town of 5,000.

It seems the spirit of the earth is speaking to people's hearts and they are hearing and responding in the delightfully diverse ways of many spiritual paths.

I later learned that two women in the community, Debra Schwarze and Marie Smith, were praying for and calling a spiritual teacher to come to this area. They told me the story of how they were meeting and reading books, trying to put together information they longed to be a part of, but were struggling with. Mary Fowler said she had put a call out to the universe to bring a teacher into this community. She was too busy raising her children and helping her husband with their family-owned business to run off to workshops in other areas of the state and the country. Mary believed that someone was coming to Richland Center. John Fergus had always been a community builder. Although he had the ability to design and create homes that balanced both the needs of the people residing in them and the land that the home was on, his real love was community. Nearly all of his free time went towards creating and supporting community activities and events, along with his partner, Debra Schwarze.

When I decided to hold a free workshop on Shamanism in my home in January 1995, many individual parts were about to come together to fertilize the seed from which Pachamama would emerge. After informing my teacher Sandra Ingerman that I intended to do this, I hung a poster up in the local food coop. Ten people came to the weekend workshop. The interest and enthusiasm was remarkable. I began to hold more gatherings in my home. We met in my living room and shared food in the kitchen. It was all very simple and comfortable, but we soon outgrew my small apartment. Debra and John offered their larger home as a gathering space. It was a beautiful home they had restored from an old cheese factory. With large open spaces, we were able to invite and accommodate more people. Debra and John, who were accustomed to holding community events, organized wonderful meals and provided a warm friendly environment. I continued to offer workshops on a variety of spiritual themes and topics and began holding a monthly drumming circle out of my home. The core of our community was creating a foundation.

There is something about being swept away by a dream that is so delightful that it dulls the grating sound of mundane practicalities. We were lulled into such a state of dreaming and creating together—everything seemed possible. John and Debra had been

searching for land for eight years and had not found the place they hoped for. I felt in my heart the connection of family and community extending out and so invited them to walk the family land I believed was a healing place, perhaps for them as well. The spirit of the land spoke to them, but not in the way I imagined it might. They were drawn to a piece of land behind my parent's land, that wasn't even for sale. Talking with the owner who happened to be there that day, gave them hope. In an effort to understand how John and Debra could purchase the land, Debra asked me to walk that property and tell her my impressions. I did walk with her and as I had learned to do in my past, I stopped and asked the trees for their wisdom. There was one tree in particular who began speaking to me with a definite and specific message. There was a timing and way that correlated to a full moon cycle. I gave the information to Debra and John and just as the tree had instructed, the land was purchased in that way and time. The land knew what needed to happen. We learned to listen. With two other land partners, Debra and John purchased the adjoining land. Shortly after that, John, Debra and I bought my parent's land with the dream of creating community gathering space.

My mother was happy to see the land that had meant so much to her begin to open up to community gatherings and healing space. My father, being quite practical, had many questions and concerns, but was soon completely supportive. They continue to visit and even attend some of the spiritual gatherings. John and Debra have become like family to them.

When John and Debra sold their beautiful house, we were in a flurry of high hopes and expectations. We were excitedly making building plans for a group living and gathering space on the land. Building began, a new road was put in, transformation was in process when everything came to a terrible screeching halt. High hopes turned sour when we learned that a large European corporation was planning to buy land on a ridgetop next to our land and create an enormous factory pig farm. We would be downwind of it. All the pristine streams and quiet countryside was threatened. The environmental devastation caused by such industry, experienced by many southern states like North Carolina, was moving north.

We all learned a lot more about pigs and industrial farming during that time. Debra is a lawyer and her experience and skills were called into action as the whole community mobilized to meet the challenge

facing us. Petitions were circulated, articles were written and TV stations came out to televise the controversy. A group of neighbors bought adjoining land next to the property in question, to limit road access. Many people attended the hearings at the courthouse. House-to-house conversations, door-to-door outreach brought many people together who would not ordinarily be involved. The corporation felt confident that they could crush our efforts, but did not realize the power or persistence of the people involved. It was a passionate political activism that caused the giant corporation to pause and reconsider its plans.

It was not only political and legal strategies that were called into action. There was a strong spiritual component to the movement. Many circles of prayer were organized. Myron Eshowsky, who lived in Madison at the time, was especially supportive of our community efforts and concerns. He had experienced a vision many years earlier of a spiritual community forming in Richland Center. He came to lead a conflict resolution ritual. Thirty or so people from the local and adjoining communities gathered to participate. Some of those attending were not previously involved in Shamanism, yet contributed wholeheartedly. A powerful ceremony helped move and shift the energy of the struggling people and allow more answers and possible resolutions to emerge.

I organized a small group of people to go out to the land that was in dispute. It was heavily-abused land, stripped of its resources, ravaged for its timber, left in a battered state of being. As the four of us entered, we felt a shift in energy from the wild woodlands, into an area that felt as though it was in shock. We did a connection of our energies and prayed to the spirits of the land, then separated and went to various spots that we were drawn to. There we each journeyed to the spirit of the land, asked what it needed and how we could serve it. As I did my shamanic journey that day, I was aware of the similarity of the land's energy to the energy of victimization I had encountered when I worked with human clients. I could see that the victim energy was continuing to attract perpetrator energy to it, in the form of larger and more aggressive agricultural industry. At that point it became clear that what was needed was a Soul Retrieval for the land.

Each of the people present was personally connected to other land in the area. With our combined love and connection with each other as community, we journeyed to the surrounding lands we knew to be in

wholeness and drew that energy to encircle the wounded and vulnerable property. The spirit of the trees joined through the roots as we joined our hearts in singing the spirit of the land back home. We literally blew with our breath the spirit back into the soil and the shattered and downed trees. We remembered the land in her magnificence and called in the power of love. We were able to see and imagine the beauty and connection all the earth has and direct it to this part. Our inspiration was that if we could help this part of the earth come out of separation caused by victimization, she would return to power and attract a more healthy interaction with people and animals in the future.

It was a zoning technicality that finally drove the industrial pig farm elsewhere. The challenge had required all of our attention and effort for many months. We were relieved, but exhausted and distracted from our earlier plans. The interruption had brought us closer to our community. More people became interested and involved in the creation of Pachamama. In June of 1998, Pachamama became a non-profit corporation dedicated to the creation of spiritual community gatherings and educational resources.

As I began inviting my friends, colleagues, and teachers into the area to do workshops, they and others increased the interest in what our community was creating. Luzclara came from Chile for two summers of healing gatherings. Myron Eshowsky came to do several benefit gatherings on the land, as well as teaching some workshops in Richland Center. Sandra Ingerman taught a Soul Retrieval Intensive.

Our ways continue to be humble and simple as a family or community of families, who work together towards common goals and interests. Many of the community members have studied with a number of excellent teachers and learned to develop their own healing style. A community of healers has emerged after participating in a series of shamanic apprenticeship programs. Meeting on a regular basis to provide services to those who seek shamanic healing, we have learned to collaborate and support each other. With a melding of diverse backgrounds and abilities that are harmonized through a common spiritual devotion and interest, we have learned to journey and interact with clients together. A monthly Circle of Healers group is held that works specifically with followup care of people who have had a Soul Retrieval, and are seeking more support and growth with their personal healing

path. There are several circles that meet regularly, including a men's circle lead by John Fergus.

As an organization, we have a core group of seven board members and an extended supportive council of seven. We continue to invite a variety of teachers and healers to give workshops in our community. Our community continues to grow and extend throughout Wisconsin, as well as regularly drawing people from the surrounding five midwestern states. We provide open events and gatherings to the public such as our annual Summer Solstice and Fall Fire Ceremonies, as well as monthly Drumming Circle and Healers Circle. Most of our sponsored workshops provide an open evening for the public to attend on a donation basis. Pachamama also provides scholarships to some workshops.

Some of what we have learned about community building is the importance of good leadership, shared responsibility, commitment, and sacrifice. These have been the cornerstones of our foundation. Through love, respect, humble devotion to Spirit and service, we are forming the bonds of trust and confidence that allow us to grow and flex with creative change. We are healing ourselves, each other and the land in joyful celebration, ceremony, and sacred circles.

For more information, you can contact Pachamama at P.O. Box 347, Richland Center, WI 53581

PACHAMAMA IS COMMUNITY BUILDING

As a group we look to heal the individual in order to strengthen the community. Another element we use to facilitate our community building is the idea of balance. This is where we bring in our use of the circle both physically and symbolically. We use the circle to create a balance among the entire community. We gather to think, work, and play in circles. In this way we are never without a certain community strength. Within the circle a community can grow, change, and move, and always be strong.

Pachamama is the land. We find that by anchoring our energy to the land, we connect to the universe. It is again the circle that contains the love and caring that is the ultimate sense of freedom for a community.

Pachamama connects individuals on their seeking and spiritual paths into a circle to form a community based in love and caring.

John Fergus