

East Gate: Way of the Visionary

BUDDING OF THE TREES MOON (March 21 – April 19) Week 3: Questing for Vision

Invocation Blessing Song

Behold Great Mystery, Creative Force, Spirit That Moves Through All! We call to the Seven Directions of the Sacred Wheel!

We turn to the Keepers of the East, direction of the new beginnings, of inspirations, of illumination and creativity, of the dawn and spring, new births and childhood. Be with us, teach us, show us your ways!

We call to the Keepers of the South, direction of vitality, of high noon and hot sun, of summer and vigorous growth, of youth and passion. Be with us, teach us, show us your ways!

We invite the Keepers of the West, direction of introspection, of the evening, of autumn and maturity, deepening and ripening. Be with us, teach us, show us your ways!

We respectfully summon the Keepers of the North, direction of the night, of winter, of wisdom and transformation, of dropping inessentials to reveal the core. Be with us, teach us, show us your ways!

We look up to the sky and call to the beings of the sun, the moon, the clouds, the stars, and the endless blue, and we ask that you bring your spaciousness and mystery to this work. Be with us, teach us, show us your ways!

We put our hands on the ground and ask that the great substance of the Earth give grounding to the work, and that the Earth's beauties give us beauty and that the entire world—the animals and plants and rocks, mountains and rivers and seas, the elemental forces of Earth and Air and Fire and Water, and all the human beings, all the elders, children, teachers, all the red, yellow, black, and white—join in this blessing. Be with us, teach us, show us your ways!

We call to the Sweet Mystery that is the Sacred Center! Hold us and cradle us in your divine protection! Be with us, teach us, show us your ways!

We claim this work to serve, to bless, and to share knowledge for wisdom building and for bringing wholeness to our hearts and to our world. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

(Note: The beginning prayer and final blessing of this lesson appear at the beginning and end of each lesson. These prayers mark the cycle of energy within that lesson and create a circle of connection.)

LESSON PLAN

East Gate Introduction

Be sure to continue doing the daily practices you learned in the introductory lessons, smudging and meditating every day and journaling about your observations and experiences. Familiarize yourself with the correspondences of the East and the aspects of the East Gate, read the introduction to the East Gate, and read the section titled “The Path Through the East Gate.” A Note About Emotional Experience and Expression, Deeper Levels of Truth, Exploring Edges.

Month one: Budding of the Trees Moon

WEEK 1: Read the material for Week 1, the Budding of the Trees Moon, which begins with “Discovering Cycles and Relationships” and includes “Vernal Equinox”; “Spiritual Duty”; “Right Speech, Right Thought, Right Action, Right Relationship”; and “Birth Scripts.” Do Exercise 1 from the study guide and answer the questions for the week. If you are studying for certification, remember to send your answers to the weekly questions, along with your entries in your growth journal, to the Institute via email or your private account. Hand-written journal pages can be scanned and sent as a PDF, and unless you have given your permission in advance, only Gent or Linda will read them. Also, if you are on a monthly contribution, be sure to submit contribution for the next Moon, Frogs Return Moon.

WEEK 2: Continue your daily devotions, and re-read the sections on the correspondences and aspects of the East Gate to make sure you know them well. Read “Discovering the Living Tree,” which includes “Regeneration and Creativity” and the section titled “Change and Choice: The Bowl of Your Creation.” Do Exercises 2 and 3 from the study guide, and answer the questions for the week.

WEEK 3: Continue your daily devotions, which includes daily journaling, and re-read the sections on the correspondences and aspects of the East Gate to make sure you know them. Also, if you have a tradition you follow, or something speaks to your own knowing, feel free to add your own aspects. Read “Quest for Vision,” do Exercise 4 from the study guide, and answer the questions for the week. Please make a note of any glossary terms you would like to see added, and send these to the Institute for review.

WEEK 4: Read “Questing Further into the Trees,” and do Exercise 5. Also, answer the questions for Week 4 of the Budding of the Trees Moon.

THE VISION QUEST

For many people, the Vision Quest is a rite of passage. Some fast to become a worthy offering and to leave behind their individual identity so that their spiritual essence can be received into union with the Divine and they can bring back a gift for “all their relations.” Others Quest to fulfill a promise for a healing or some other received support, and some people Quest to be sure that they are truly doing the work they have come here to do. Whatever the reason, fasting and Questing is a spiritual transitional experience with transformation as its goal. Since the modern culture has abandoned, ignored, diminished, and misunderstood the power of such ancient wisdom ways, it is important that you understand the process, examine your motives, and know your responsibilities before you participate in any rites as powerful as a Vision Quest. With the current popularity of anything Indian, many people are seeking to do a Quest. Some have even gone out for prolonged periods alone, fasting and Questing without support, and some have not returned. (To us, such reckless acts are a true dishonoring of ancient wisdom traditions.)

Ideally, a Vision Quest renews and revitalizes our spirits. We set out to be alone with our own nature in to experience transformation. In *the Trail to the Sacred Mountain: A Vision Fast Handbook for Adults*, Steven Foster and Meredith Little explain:

On the mythical plane, a vision quest is a heroic journey, a symbolic ordeal of seemingly insurmountable trials that occurs in a sacramental region of natural power so that we can know that we are more than our limited beliefs have here-to-for led us to believe.... On the physical plane, the vision quest is an exercise in survival, (where) the individual lives in a sensitized state of bodily awareness and feels the connection he/she shares with the elements and living things of the natural world. Bodily states of emptiness and weakness... give rise to emotions and fears... (and) the body responds to the challenge and furnishes the individual with unexpected sources of strength and vitality. On the transpersonal level, we vision quest to seek Self-knowledge. This knowledge is enriched by the wisdom of the collective unconscious and is the basis for the recognition of our physical/spiritual place on Grandmother Earth. Perception of our rightful place in nature, however, is not possible without taking the first hesitant steps across the margin of our experience. The vision quest provides an ancient, time-tested way of taking those first steps.

Thus, if done in a good way, a Quest is done to seek knowledge to bring back to the world healing and direction “for all our relations.”

The Importance of Clarity of Intention

A central thread of the story we weave throughout this year of Wheel Walking is intentionality, and it is no less important here. You must be certain of the reason why you would want to participate in a Quest. If you are unclear about what you are looking for, you will not recognize what you are seeking when you encounter your intention. Your reasons do not have to be significant to anyone except you. In fact, even if others were to belittle your reason (remember the Trickster energy is very powerful in these situations), it is imperative that your desire alone is enough to keep you true to your choice to go on a Quest. If you doubt, or if others' assessments of you are enough to dissuade you, you are not ready to go alone to a sacred site.

There are many reasons to Quest. In this process, as in all true spiritual endeavors, Questers must examine their motives. The question must be asked: Why do I want to do this? Look very carefully at your expectations. You may Quest for personal good, and that personal good must also serve the greater whole of which you are a part; self-service must be part of a continuum that flows out into the world and returns to nourish again. If “quickie” self-transformation is your only goal, without having to go through the process and work of such experiences, you would likely return from a Quest feeling cheated and puzzled. If you seek some “high” to feed your emotional body only, you may receive one, although it probably won’t be pleasant or wonderful.

What kind of Quest you might go on can be determined by the lineage of the Medicine helper who is keeping watch for your Quest (e.g., the Vision Quest of the Apsa’alooka [Crow] people, usually termed a *Fast*, is undertaken to be a personal sacrifice in hopes of acquiring a good blessing; for the Apsa’alooka, this form ensures completion of the Great Round—being a gift to receive one). Most Medicine Helpers recognize that there are many reasons to Quest, and they can facilitate your individual Questing desires.

True Spiritual Service: Service That Completes the Circle

If you decide that a Vision Quest is part of your spiritual process, you must remember that spiritual service is at the core of Vision Questing and that self-service must be part of a continuum; such service must flow out into the world to nourish, and it then returns to nourish so that great good is brought back to the world.

Crying for a Vision

The expression “crying for a vision” is much used and can be misunderstood by people who have not grown up in a Questing tradition. The words *cry for* mean to “seek” or “beseech.” Confusion enters when we mistakenly think that this means that the Quester is begging, which is not at all what is meant. Lamenting or crying is about the quality of desire and devotion given to the process; both terms simply mean that sincere and fervent devotion is being given. This is a way of praying with the only stipulation being that the cry comes from the heart.

People lament for many reasons, and the most important is to support them to realize their oneness with all things. In prayer as a lament or beseechment, we seek for even just a few minutes of the experience of being outside of time and completely a part of the Universe and not just outside the boundaries of our personal self.

A Man’s Warrior Quest and a Woman’s Healing Quest

The process of Vision Questing can be, and does not have to be, different for men and women. Questing is a time of retreat when we leave behind our normal everyday life and open ourselves to the mystery of Spirit. By setting the intention of the Vision Quest, we open ourselves to integrate the left side of our brain to intuition and dreams. By Questing, we clear space and time for Great Mystery to inform us.

In *the Thirteen Original Clan Mothers*, Jamie Sams speaks about the difference between a man’s Warrior Quest and a woman’s Healing Quest. In her lineage, women traditionally went on Healing Quests that were part of their lodge practices. In this type of Quest, the woman had visions inside her in the womb space. Because of the intention of the seeker, these visions were healing stories for the people. In that tradition, the women did not necessarily fast, and similar to

most other familiar traditions, the men sought their visions by stopping all activity, food, and anything else that would keep the intellect in the way. The active male principle is thereby forced into stillness to get beyond limitations, and these distinctions are not clear cut. Women in many traditions Quest by fasting, going naked, and being alone.

A Special Note About Moon Times

Women sometimes find that this sacred time of the month will fall during a time scheduled for a Vision Quest. The experience of Questing has also been known to bring on menstruation ahead of schedule. Because there are many different beliefs and traditions about women and their moon times, this is a good place to explore this aspect more fully.

Menstruation is a time of power, heightened intuition, and attunement to the spiritual heart of the Earth. Some people feel that the power of a woman in her moon can overwhelm others, especially men. In many traditions around the world, women separated themselves by going out to be alone or to be with other sisters in special moon lodges; they did not do this because they were unclean, rather they did this because it was an honoring of themselves. These women rested, cared for themselves, and Quested in these lodges. Because of the belief or knowing of the great power of womanhood during the moon time, they also did not touch Medicine objects, especially those of other people and especially not those of men. The touch did not render the object useless or ruined. What happened, according to these people, was that the power of the woman in her moon was so attractive to the Medicine object that the object would choose to belong to the woman and would no longer “work” for its original owner. If such an act inadvertently happened, the owner would simply cleanse, reclaim, and rededicate the object. (This is covered under the lessons for the Renewal Moon [January 20 – February 18], where we discuss sacred tools and Medicine objects and their blessing, dedication, and infusion [charging] and the feeding of spirit objects.) The key point here is again intention.

Women should always be aware of their intention with men, especially when they are in their moon. This can be used to truly appreciate the relationship between the feminine and masculine. We want to also realize that men also have their “moons”—their own relationship to the tides and rhythms of Grandmother Earth.

There are many other teachings about moons and women’s mysteries that are covered during the intensives, and we want to offer one other Quest teaching here. Some women use a Quest during a moon time to make a special ceremony with their blood by offering it back to the Earth in an act of sacred dedication. Some women have sat directly on the Earth while in their moon and let their flow join with the Earth, and others have performed a ceremony of burying a tissue with some of their flow on it. In *the Trail to the Sacred Mountain: A Vision Fast Handbook for Adults*, Foster and Little also address this:

A woman in her moon enacts the cycles of the Earth and sky, sun and water, as the tides of ocean wash through her. She is purified by the blood of birthing as it returns the seed to the Earth. This is her opportunity to offer her blood to the Grandmother with thanksgiving in a ceremony celebrating the capacity of the woman to be fertile, to generate life, to suckle and nurture. She is one with the Earth and with women throughout time.

Even if women are not in their moon during the Quest, they can save some of their sacred blood on a tissue and perform the giving-back ceremony during the Quest. Women who no

longer have moons can still take part in such a ceremony by symbolically offering their sacred blood as an act of renewal and thanksgiving.

Being Naked

The aspect of whether to be naked during a Quest is also one that needs to be explored. Once again, the different meanings for this traditional Vision Quest act depend on whether we are speaking about the mythical, physical, or transpersonal level. Physically, the tradition is to go without clothing, although a loincloth is often worn. This physical act serves several purposes. Symbolically, Questers come before the Maker in the same manner that the Maker created them—naked and without covering. This to give the message, “I come open and ready to receive, and there are no barriers to my receiving.” Being naked also symbolizes that after the Quest is over, the Quester is newly born. And this time, the person is not innocent or less; rather the person is born into a greater Self. Many pagan and Wiccan practitioners perform their ceremonies and acts of devoted prayer naked for this reason.

In modern times, it is almost impossible to find any spot to do a Vision Quest in complete solitude. Questers must make provisions for being “happened upon.” An Apsa’alooka Quester builds a stone or brush enclosure to support with privacy. And in these days of public nudity laws, one must be very careful when Questing in the nude. Again, the matter of intent applies here. With intention, you can be as “bare” and as “new” as the day you were born.

We gratefully acknowledge the elders who have contributed to this material, especially Steven Foster and Meredith Little, from The Trail to the Sacred Mountain: A Vision Fast Handbook for Adults; and Jamie Sams, from The Thirteen Original Clan Mothers: Your Sacred Path to Discovering the Gifts, Talents, and Abilities of the Feminine Through the Ancient Teachings of the Sisterhood.

Sweet Mystery that is at the Sacred Center, and all Divine Energies, thank you for holding us and cradling us in your protection as we bring wholeness to our hearts and to our world! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! It is good.



STUDY GUIDE: BUDDING OF THE TREES MOON

Week 3: Exercise 4 A Medicine Walk

What you will need: A water bottle or canteen; your journal and a pen; any drawing or painting supplies you might want to use; cornmeal, tobacco, or seeds to be used as a Give-away for anything you may take; smudge materials, such as sage, matches, a bowl, and a feather wand; and a small pack or sack to carry your materials in as you walk

It is important to note that this, like all such processes presented in these materials, may be completed entirely in the imaginal or mythic realm. The richness of your imagination is used to provide you with another level of learning. You can simply sit or be still for a comfortable period and complete the ceremony (ritual, exercise) entirely in your mind. Your mind is a very private and sacred space that is every bit as holy as manifesting a ritual practice in the material world.

A Medicine Walk is an actual journey that is a ceremony of preparation for a formal Vision Quest, and it can also be used as a preparation for any powerful event. It is a mirror experience in that the signs and symbols of your inward journey are reflected to you through the outer journey. The spirits, powers, or aspects of Nature that you encounter on a Medicine Walk typify the nature of your own Medicine Power, and such a journey can give you important allegorical or symbolic insights. Like a Quest, a Medicine Walk is an exercise of balance and attunement. It is not a challenge of the elements or an endurance contest. Its purpose is to maintain connection with the beauty of life and the mystery of death as they are reflected by the world of Nature.

A Medicine Walk can be taken up to a week or more before an actual Vision Quest, or it may be taken at the time a person is preparing to Quest. A Medicine Walk may be taken to prepare for some other spiritual event, and it is prepared for with the same deep reverence. For the purposes of this exercise, you will make your Walk the next time you have a full day to be alone. Pay special attention to your Dreamtime, for an important dream may arise on the night before a Walk. It is best to begin a Medicine Walk at sunrise, although other times can also serve you. A place is chosen in Nature that particularly calls to your Spirit. Although you must take water with you, no food is taken on this day until after the sun has set. If you have health concerns, especially diabetes, please consult with your doctor and Linda Stone before setting out on any physically demanding journey alone.

The beginning and end of the Walk (the “thresholds”) should be acknowledged by ceremony. That is, you begin with smudging and then you offer an honoring prayer and dedicate the Walk to the four Directions, the Cosmos, the Earth, and Great Mystery. You can then follow with any other ceremony you choose, either elaborate or simple. The point is to focus your attention and then start out on a wandering, intuitive course. You are not consciously attempting to reach any goal. As you wander, keep your physical, mental, and spiritual eyes open. Sense where you are drawn to go, and head in that direction. Pay special attention to loved ones and friends, both living and dead, who call strongly to your Spirit as you walk. They are important

teachers and Helpers who watch as you grow and are supportive, and this also strengthens the circle of your purpose.

At some point during your Walk, you will find one thing—a symbol that has meaning for you. This *one thing* returns with you to become a symbol for your Vision Quest or the event you are making the Walk for. Make sure you place some cornmeal, tobacco, seeds, a hair from your head, or some other item in the symbol's place as a Give-away.

When you have completed your Walk, perform a ceremony of thanksgiving, and make a journal entry of the experience to become familiar with its basic plot; this plot is a kind of “life story” that can be shared afterward with a circle group if you are a member of one. Your group may be able to notice salient information from the story that you might have overlooked. Your journal entry may be made sometime afterward if time does not permit at the end of the Walk, and be sure to complete a journal entry. This is a very important aspect of honoring your spiritual journey.

QUESTIONS FOR BUDDING OF THE TREES MOON: WEEK 3

If you are seeking certification of any kind, you must submit your answers, along with your journal, to the Institute via your private account.

1. What is a Vision Quest, and what is its purpose?
2. What benefits can a person expect to get from the Vision Quest experience?
3. How can you tell if you are ready to go on a Vision Quest?
4. What does it mean to “cry for a vision,” and how is this done?
5. Explain how a Vision Quest might be different for men and women.
6. What are some reasons a woman might separate herself from others during her moon time?
7. What is the symbolism behind doing ceremony in the nude?
8. What sorts of inner work might a person perform to get the most from Vision Quest?
9. What must you be sure of prior to setting out on a Medicine Walk or Vision Quest? (Name at least three things.)
10. How does “spiritual service” factor in to a Vision Quest?