

# Lynn Andrews, 21st Century Shaman

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**Best selling author, modern-age mystic and spiritual leader, Lynn Andrews began a new genre of metaphysical biography with her first book, *Medicine Woman*.** Seventeen years and fifteen books later, she continues to share her spiritual quest with thousands of people eager to find their magical selves.

The unknown is a frightening thing, whether it's a new job, a new lover, a new place, or a new future. It is even more disturbing to explore the hidden parts of our selves and our psyches. Overcoming this fear of the mysterious, the unexplored is perhaps a lifelong pursuit, one of courage and risk that many of us choose to ignore, bogged down by the monotony of daily life and the safety of routine. Yet there are a few brave souls who rise above the fear and take the journey into the darkness, returning with the light of knowledge.

Lynn Andrews is one of these bold warriors. Exploring the mysteries of self and the universe in more than fifteen books, published in twelve languages, including the groundbreaking *Medicine Woman*, now in its 39th printing, Andrews is a contemporary mystic, feminist, best-selling author,

shamanic seer and teacher, who is not only a legend in metaphysical circles, but also a leader in the personal empowerment movement.

Once the business partner of Buckminster Fuller and a Beverly Hills art maven, Andrews left a full life of parties and projects to pursue the study of shamanism, guided only by a strange dream and the vague directions to a remote area given to her by a native man she met at a cocktail party. Friends and family thought she was a little crazy, possibly going through a mid-life crisis, but following her heart led to an entirely new life, one that, according to her, is a closer expression of her true self.

Risk is something Andrews knows well. As an outspoken metaphysical instructor and, more particularly, a non-Indian, she frequently comes up against audiences who not only question the

validity of shamanism but also express surprise at her ultra-Caucasian features-blond hair, blue eyes and pale skin. “It is risky sticking one’s neck out, poking one’s head above the crowd, to express new ideas and infinite possibilities. It is even risky to listen with an open heart and mind to new ideas,” she writes. “We risk all that we know for the great adventure of the unknown, the sacred mystery. But always remember, life is worth the risk. Living your truth is worth the risk. It is your heritage, your birthright.”

The day I visit Andrews in her Cave Creek home, I too am looking for the unknown, the hidden truth behind the woman who would be shamaness. Half expecting a face-painted sorceress complete with headdress and peace pipe to answer the door, I am relieved to see the welcoming face of a woman dressed in a simple white top and denim skirt, a woman who could be the lady next door. There is a light around her, a cool confidence that feels almost serene, as well as an urgency to teach, to heal and to tell her story. This is a powerful woman. Her strength radiates as we talk in the comfort of her living room, surrounded by an enormous collection of ethnographic artifacts and the largest display of Fritz Scholder’s work I’ve seen outside a museum. Despite all her accomplishments and her fame, Andrews is amazingly down to earth, instantly easing any apprehensions I might have had on the ride up.

So what exactly is shamanism? The word itself, according to Andrews, is an anthropological term meaning a person who is raised in a native tradition somewhere in the world. Rather than being specifically tied to a particular cultural worldview or tribal religion, shamanism is more of a universal consciousness, linking aboriginal cultures through respective beliefs and practices concerning the earth.

***“Shamanism is something very much related to the harmonies of the earth, something that is not based on fear but based on the healing of the earth from a place of love,” says Andrews. “Shamanism teaches how to choreograph the energies of the universe. What I mean by this is that all things are alive; they all have energy and a purpose and a meaning, a deeper meaning in this life than what we see on the surface. And a shaman is someone who is related to those meanings, who has learned tools with which to use those energies for healing purposes, to bring light into somebody’s heart. The ability to heal the mind and the heart is what Shamanism is all about.”***

Andrews began her study of shamanic truths as an apprentice to Agnes Whistling Elk, an American Indian from Manitoba, Canada, who along with Ruby Plenty Chiefs served as her mentor in embracing the ancient teachings and global cosmologies. Andrews’ work, which includes books, lectures and more recently, a home-study school, continues to explore the practices of the Sisterhood of the Shields, a group of forty-four women, each from a different indigenous culture, whose unified purpose is to preserve the laws of magic, codes and traditions of shamanism. The beliefs of the sisterhood, as Andrews explains it, find their roots in female understanding and wisdom and in the need to restore balance to mother earth. “When we talk about restoring balance back to earth, we are speaking about the missing element of female consciousness,” Andrews explains.

Andrews goes on to say that in order to do this, to achieve a state of wholeness in nature, it is imperative that we go within ourselves to find strengths and weaknesses, and to learn our life’s

purpose, as well as the ways we fit into the matrix of the universe. “People ask me all the time about healing on a global scale. I think that world healing must begin with the individual. You have to start at home first,” she says, tapping her chest.

Not only is Andrews’ work based on personal experience, but also because she is a woman, much of it relates to women’s issues-love, power, motherhood, menopause, etc.-and the lessons are delivered in much more than a simple how-to manner. With a sense of adventure and a flair for drama, Andrews takes readers into the eye of the hurricane, so to speak. In a sense, the author is not just a teacher but a heroine battling forces of good and evil, of self and the other, of right and wrong, learning the depth of her own power along with the reader-a real-life Xena.

In essence, what Andrews teaches through her shamanism are empowerment tools and techniques, given to students in ceremonial or symbolic forms. Grief is dealt with by constructing a doll that represents whatever the loss might be, and in this way, the pain inside is objectified and removed from the psyche to an outside place where it can be managed effectively. Self-identity and life path are discovered through maskmaking, a process where students look at the faces they wear for the world in an effort to begin stripping these masks away to reveal the true self, the power self, the shaman inside. These and other more involved exercises prepare students for healing work on themselves, others and the natural world at large. Like Andrews, students eventually become seers with the ability to see the illnesses and problems that contribute to an individual’s imbalance, to pinpoint the issues that need to be worked on, eventually aiding in the restoration of balance and wholeness in that person.

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The essential of shamanism is the power of prayer, the ability to focus one’s spiritual intentions and energy on a specified purpose. As Andrews explains it, each individual is made up of energy, and is, in turn, part of a “giant matrix of energy lines that run throughout the world, throughout the universe.” If one is fully aware, prayer and thought become components in this dynamic and can dramatically create real change.

“We have very few words in the English language to define spiritual progress and spiritual involvement. We have “spiritual,” and we have “prayer,” all of which mean something vastly different to each and every person. So, I think that in a sense you have to come up with your own terminology,” she says. “To me, shamanism is about light, and when I say light, I mean making

the world a better place. It is an understanding that there really is a power in prayer, truly. And no matter who it is that you pray to, if you pray with your heart, you can change your own life, choose what happens in your life and how it turns out. I think we have the power to do that.”

Does Andrews practice magic? Yes, in a sense, as she works with energy and transformation, but the real power, according to her, comes from somewhere else. Rather than calling herself a healer, she explains that she is merely the instrument to assist people in healing themselves, yet there remains an outside force, a hidden element at work.

“I don’t think we heal people in the sense of shamanism. I think what really happens in that regard is that the Holy Spirit, the Great Spirit, comes down and fills that person with life,” she says. “I’ve experienced it myself, and I can only talk about what I’ve experienced. I would never ask someone to believe something that they have not experienced themselves, but I would ask people to explore. There is much more to life than what you see.”

As a 21st century shaman, Andrews transforms ordinary life into something extraordinary, challenging her students to rise to their own level of importance. As she asks hypothetical questions like “Who are you?” and “What is it that you love?” in the course of our interview, I begin to search for my own answers, quietly in my head. We talk about dreams and their importance in personal development, the clues delivered from the unconscious mind to the conscious self, and I can’t help but think that I dreamt this moment into life. She gives me a big hug and sends me back to reality, curious about what’s inside and eager to rip off my own masks.