

Age of Illumination



Twylah Nitsch

Two Native American women share the ancient wisdom of a sacred stone, a story of the four ages of Earth that have passed, and the three worlds that are still to come. The Fifth World, the Age of Illumination, is beginning now as the Fourth Age of Separation passes away.

By Rosanne Bane

"My life has been so wonderful. Anyone who does not enjoy every moment in the day is not living to their fullest," says Twylah Nitsch, a Clan Mother of the Seneca Wolf Clan Teaching Lodge. Those are remarkable words for a woman who has been at times deaf, blind, and crippled.

When Twylah was in high school, she became deaf as a result of streptococcus poisoning. Nearly a year later, when she had learned to hear other rhythms, she regained her hearing. When she was a young adult, she lost her sight to Krukenberg's Spindle, a condition where the color pigment in the eye detaches from the iris. After Twylah recognized that it was a gift to know what it was to be blind, her vision slowly returned. While giving birth to her fourth child, a spinal block went awry and she was

crippled. After months of struggle, she learned to walk again, and the paralysis left her.

These life experiences become even more remarkable when the rest of the story is told. In 1908, Twylah's grandfather, Moses Shongo, was introduced to Geeh Yuk, a Stone Person. The man who presented the stone to Shongo told him, "This stone is telling me some very interesting things, but I'm not going to be able to carry all of the messages out, so it's telling me to bring it over here. Your daughter is going to have a little girl this stone will speak to." Shongo had no granddaughter at the time, but he took Geeh Yuk and listened. The stone prophesied Twylah's birth and name, that she would become deaf and hear again, go blind and see again, be crippled and walk again, and that she would forget everything she knew and later remember.

Twylah never knew about these prophecies until much later in her life — after they had all been fulfilled. Her mother told her she didn't want to reveal the prophecies for fear they would come true! Twylah had forgotten about the stone that had been such a comfort to her as a child until her mother told her the prophecies and reminded her of her early childhood experiences with Geeh Yuk, a name meaning Seven Talents.

Another person who has listened to Geeh Yuk is Jamie Sams, Twylah's Cherokee, Choctaw, and Seneca granddaughter. Six months after she was born, Jamie was taken before the Cherokee elders who said she was "one of the grandmothers returned." She reveals that when she was three years old, she "mentally lifted a seven-foot sofa about six feet off the ground and ended up being a guinea pig in parapsychology departments all over the United States." She was a professional psychic at fifteen, trained with two Kiowa grandmothers in her early twenties, and was interviewed about her psychic insights into a murder case on the CBS news program *Hard Copy*. Despite all this, Jamie Sams claims she's just a regular person.

"I believe," Sams says, "that everyone has the same abilities. I just came in with fewer veils. Why I came in with the ability to remember, I don't know."

Whether they admit to being exceptional or not, these two women have given us a story of remarkable beauty. They have listened to the Stone Person Geeh Yuk and translated his experiences in their book, *Other Council Fires Were Here Before Ours*, so that we can all share his wisdom, insight and hope. Although the history of the world has been passed down from Seneca medicine teachers and storytellers to the next generation for hundreds of years, this is not a traditional Seneca story. It is a new interpretation of the Seven Worlds of time from the perspective of Geeh Yuk. And he ought to know — he was there!

Reading a book written in first person from the point of view of a rock can be a stretch for nonnative people who tend to see stones as objects rather than beings, and all nonhuman beings as subordinates. But Twylah reminds us: "Everything is alive, everything is of the Earth. Nothing is inanimate. Humankind has a certain arrogance that is so funny. When we were children, we knew. We'd walk along the beach and pick up stones because they were talking to us."

Twylah was concerned that few people would be interested in listening to a stone, but she knew the time was right to share the story. And she has found the response "amazing — everyone who comes here is so delighted that they can learn about stones."

It is in keeping with Seneca tradition that a stone should bring this knowledge. In Jeremiah Curtin's collection *Seneca Indian Myths*, there is a record of how the storytelling tradition came to the Seneca from a stone:

Early in the morning (of the second day), the people of the village gathered around the stone and, when all was quiet, the stone began to tell stories and it told till late in the afternoon, then it said: "I have finished! You must keep these stories as long as the world lasts: tell them to your children and grandchildren generation after generation. One person will remember them better than another. When you go to a man or a woman to ask for one of these stories, carry something to pay for it, bread or meat, or whatever you have. I know all that happened in the world before this; I have told it to you. When you visit one another, you must tell these things and keep them up always. I have finished."

And so it has been. From the Stone came all the knowledge

the Senecas have of the world before this.

It is also fitting that Nitsch and Sams should translate and share Geeh Yuk's knowledge with us since they are both members of the Wolf Clan Teaching Lodge, whose duty it is to teach the Earth Law which is based on the history of the Earth.

What they are sharing may sound "New Age" to some people, but Twylah points out, "Our people always honored this constant knowing that everything is here. Nothing is new. Once we as humankind recognize that we are of wholeness and that we as individuals are parts of this wholeness, then we can begin to learn what it's all about. But to put these names on, like 'New Age' is a trick."

Sams sees nothing new in the New Age. To her the current trend is one of renewal. "Many people are interested in not only Native American traditions, but many traditions that are not power-based in greed or hierarchy. Anything that has to do with ecology; anything that has to do with preserving our resources

"Everything is alive, everything is of this Earth."

and with honoring the sacred space of every planet, every stone, every human being, every creature being; the changes in our socioeconomic systems with many people refusing products that hurt animals or hurt the environment; these are major signposts of illumination, that clarity is coming. We've had a time of confusion and separation, and now is the beginning of the Fifth World of Illumination and Peace."

In *Other Council Fires Were Here Before Ours*, Geeh Yuk narrates his experiences in the four worlds that have followed Creation He remembers, "I decided that life on Earth would surely be an adventure in discovery. I was expectant and happy about the possibilities of seeing these beautiful lights in the Spirit World manifest in their various forms. I never worried that their differences would create any problems. No one in the Spirit World had ever heard of jealousy or greed, so in our innocence, we set out to discover the joys and pleasures of the coming manifestation."

But there was jealousy and greed, and it brought changes. The jealousy of the yellow race of the Two-Leggeds (humans) brought an end to the First World of Love. Carelessness and forgetfulness of all the five races — but especially the brown race — ended the Second World of Ice, and the greed of the white race of Two-leggeds caused the end of the Third World of Water, and ushered in the Fourth World of Separation, which is what is ending now.

Geeh Yuk recalls the words of Great Mystery before the end of the First World. "Children of the Earth, the time has come for each of you to learn through opposites. Your strength and growth depend upon your ability to remember and follow the Path of Beauty, which is founded in truth and love. Those who have chosen the crooked trail will have the opportunity to learn what it is like living in a world of scarcity, greed, mistrust, resentment, hatred, and bitterness. Each of you must hold the essence of love in your hearts, honoring the Eternal Flame. Your strength will come from this flaming life force, which is part of Me that dwells within each of you. This lesson will be repeated time and again as new spirits come to walk the Earth Mother and partake of her goodness. The road will be difficult and will last throughout the seven worlds of time, but life abundant will flourish again."

Change is promised throughout the seven ages, but so is

continuation. Geeh Yuk relates the promise of the Earth Mother: "You who are faithful to the ideas of unconditional love, you who give gratitude and praise for the blessings of abundant life, know that I will honor your faithfulness and find a way to protect your lives when the time of cleansing comes." As promised, Geeh Yuk and The Faithful from every kind of being — Animal People, Stone People, seed from the Plant People carried by the Little People, and Two-leggeds of all five races — were lead to safety before the end of the First, Second, and Third Worlds.

The end of the Fourth World of Separation has been less dramatic. Geeh Yuk explained to Twylah Nitsch that the current shift between ages doesn't have to manifest in the physical world if "enough of The Faithful come into alignment and harmony." According to Jamie Sams, we're in a wobble period between the

the Sixth World of Prophecy and Revelation, and the Seventh World of Completion will hold for us. He exposes the plans of the Little People for the Sixth World by reporting what their representative said at the Council Fire: "When any of you (Stone People) find a Two-legged who can be taught by a Stone Person, we will carry you to a place where you will be easily found by that human... We Little People have found that sometimes we have to trick the Two-leggeds into thinking that an idea was all of their own making in order for their sense of self-importance to allow them to proceed."

It's a nice echo of Twylah's comment that humankind is amusing in its arrogance. In fact, *Other Council Fires Were Here Before Ours* is a history filled with cultural echoes — of Creation out of the Void, of an age of love in paradise, of an age of ice, of a single continent that has since drifted apart, of the Great Flood, of the Little People themselves, beings other cultures have noticed and called elves, gnomes, leprechauns, kupua and eepa (in Hawaii) or various other names. The echoes are fitting since Twylah's Seneca name Yehwehnode literally means She Whose Voice Rides the Four Winds, or Echo.

The echoes found in other cultures reinforce Sams's faith. "Every culture has legends about being able to see and feel the presence of Little People. They're the same all over the planet; they're real. I believe the reason we've shut down to that is because we took on so many fears in the separation that occurred in the Fourth World, and that has stopped the openness. But talk to any child and they'll say, 'I saw such and so.' The standard answer is 'Don't lie. You know that doesn't exist. Aren't you telling a story?' And they're not."

Or maybe they *are* telling a story; a story of deep truth. Sams and Nitsch write: "In ancient times, the main purpose of nightly Council Fires was to learn how to listen. The truths of how to live in harmony were kept alive by wise Storytellers who would relate Tribal wisdom through Medicine Stories to those who would gather to listen around the nightly fires. Tribal Tradition, history,



Jamie Sams

Fourth World of Separation and the Fifth World of Illumination.

Sams advises: "It's up to each person. If they don't have a connection to the Earth Mother and can't hear her voice, it is up to them to find that connection. Get out of the cities, go walk and sit in silence on the Earth and ask. Everyone has their own knowing system — that isn't a belief system, but a knowing. You know what is a crooked trail for you and doesn't work, and what is a Path of Beauty that will work. If there is fear present, it's always because that person has lost connection."

Twylah Nitsch and Jamie Sams are, overall, hopeful. They write: "We trust that the story of Seven Talents (Geeh Yuk) will touch your hearts and that the Medicine freely offered by the Stone Tribe will assist us all in fulfilling the prophecy of life abundant for the next seven generations." Nitsch offers the current maxim of the Wolf Clan Teaching Lodge, "Life abundant quickens us now; love unconditional tells us how."

Sams observes: "It happens at the end of every world — all the doom-and-gloomers and soothsayers come forward and try to tell the people that there is no hope. Our message is that as long as you maintain a connection to the Earth, to all your Relations and to the Great Mystery, there is a beautiful world here to experience now, and it is a beautiful world which is coming."

Geeh Yuk prophesies what the Fifth World of Illumination,

"The road will be difficult and will last throughout the seven worlds of time, but life abundant will flourish again."

acts of courage, and lessons on how to discover the true Self came to life through the events related in the legends of the Ancestors. It was the responsibility of the listeners to relate and apply truths to their personal lives in a manner that would make them grow."

Jamie Sams and Twylah Nitsch have discharged their responsibility as storytellers with beauty, openness, and hope.

Rosanne Bane is a freelance writer and editor of The Phoenix in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Other Council Fires Were Here Before Ours by Jamie Sams and Twylah Nitsch is published by HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd St., New York, NY 10022.

The Seneca Wolf Clan

The Wolf Clan is one of eight traditional clans that made up the Seneca Nation of the Iroquois Peace Confederacy. It is, unfortunately, the only clan still fulfilling its traditional teaching role.

Twylah Nitsch, a member of the Wolf Clan, says, "The Wolf Clan taught the Earth Law and how all the different clans fit into the Earth Law. We don't take on the responsibility of the other clans, but we will say what each clan taught. The Turtle Clan taught the moral code. The Bear taught family structure and some of the ceremonies, they were the medicine clan in the spiritual sense. The Beaver taught organization and cooperation. The Hawk Clan taught preservation. The Deer Clan taught physical fitness. The Heron taught everything about food, both spiritual and physical. The Snipe Clan taught discipline."

Membership in a clan is determined by what clan a person's mother belonged to. Being a Clan Mother, Twylah explains, is not a position of elevation. "Every woman with children becomes a clan mother; there isn't just one. I'm very proud to be a member of the Wolf Clan, but it's an honor to belong to any one of the clans."

Traditional Seneca teaching methods were effective and kind. "The teachers were always elders," Twylah says. "The students asked the questions and the elders answered. That way everyone knew the right answers."

Historically, when Seneca children had developed enough to be willing to learn about something other than themselves, they went to each of the eight clans to learn its lessons and philosophy. Twylah Nitsch explains, "Native people are 'we people,' meaning that everything is a 'we' and an 'us.' Though children say 'I want,' we know that they will eventually be moving into that 'we.' After a while they recognize that they are part of the whole and then they say 'we,' not 'I.'"

Awareness of an individual's membership and role in society is one of the Wolf Clan's teachings. Twylah elaborates, "In the Second World of Ice, the Wolf taught all people a social nature and that each one had a particular position to insure that everything would work harmoniously within that social structure. There were hunters, and there were babysitters, and there were people who stored food; everything that would make the entire clan function as a whole."

This reflects the way a wolf pack is naturally organized with all members of the pack supporting the cubs, some by hunting, some by caring for the cubs while the mother gets a break. Wolves have elaborate facial and body expressions that communicate their respect for each other's position in the pack. "And," Twylah points out, "they know that their position is important to the other positions."

Twylah adds, "There are many things that the wolf teaches and helps with. The wolf helps a person gain self-understanding and develop self-esteem."

Today the Teaching Lodge of the Wolf Clan helps people become aware of and develop their personal gifts. "Some people have no idea what their gifts are," Twylah says. "We have an

intuitive way of helping them that we've brought into today's culture. We can place these various gifts on the medicine wheel and in that way they can tell us just what they're capable of doing."

A person is placed on the medicine wheel by their birth month. A person born in January learns to love, since "learn" is on the wheel in the place where January falls, and "love" is directly across the wheel. Learning to love would be this person's Truth-line. The Earth-path runs at a ninety-degree angle to the Truth-line because, Twylah explains, "We walk on the Earth at a ninety-degree angle to our truth line. When we stand up, the truth line is the center of our being, what we call the Vibrant Core."



That is the center of truth."

In our interview, Twylah asked what month I was born in and told me that as a September person my Truth-line is to express my will through what I know and my Earth-path is to speak in gratitude. When I told her that fit remarkably well with the lessons I was learning, she said, "It always does."

Twylah explains what teachers at the Wolf Clan Teaching Lodge can do for people who visit them. "We have many medicine wheels that we use. We sit down and we put these wonderful gifts on the wheel using thirteen colors that help us determine what the gifts are. There is a boundary color, an entering color, a centering color, and so on. People from all over the world want to know this. We're in the Fifth World now and people need to know who they are, how to be grounded."

People interested in working with teachers at the Wolf Clan Teaching Lodge of the Seneca Indian Historical Society in Irving, New York, may call 716-549-3889 for more information.