

One String of Beads

A newsletter for the spiritually aware

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Volume 1: Issue 2

Welcome!

A note from the editor

Welcome to the *One String of Beads* newsletter! Here you will find news on our books, including where to find them, when they can be purchased, and a schedule of speaking engagements presented by our authors. For the most up to date information, check our Facebook page or visit our website at www.OneStringOfBeads.com.

One Story of Faith

The "Freelance Worshipper"



Johona Saganey-Harel was born on the Ramah Navajo reservation just south of Gallup, NM. Hers was a family who followed traditional Navajo faith, which includes strong family ties and rich spirituality in everyday living. There are more than fifty ceremonies among the Navajo. Nine ceremonies are devoted

The newsletter will offer stories, additional interviews, and showcase stories and photos of our original interviewees. If you are interested in a particular story, please let us know!



to the treatment of illnesses, both physical and emotional. Special events are marked with ceremony, such as weddings, puberty, and adulthood. Babies are especially cherished, and there are ceremonies over the mother when she nears birthing, then when the baby laughs for the first time and takes their first steps. Some ceremonies are for cleansing a space or to bring prosperity, while others mark things in everyday life, from the building of homes (hogans) to the planting and harvest of crops. Ceremonies are generally accompanied by prayer, song, and dance, and many include "sand altars," or dry paintings depicting stories and characters of Navajo mythology. These sandpaintings are

Breaking News!

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The book, *One String of Beads*, is in the hands of the publisher, and should be released in around the end of January ... stay tuned, and be on the lookout for links and more information in your email box!

Look for the book on our website and in on-line outlets such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Both print and eReader versions will be available.

Those who sign up for our eNewsletter will receive additional material and access to more content on our website, as well as future updates, information, and valuable coupons. Head to www.onestringofbeads.com for more information and to sign up.



thought to draw negativity from the person being sung over, allowing good things to come through them. The beautiful sand altar is destroyed after the ceremony, and always before dawn. Some people use the designs contained in sandpaintings as inspiration for traditional Navajo rugs. It is clear that life for Johona was rich with ceremony.

While Navajos consider themselves to be Divine in a particular way, their tenets of belief are believed to only apply to them. Johona says that this means two things. First, it bestows great responsibility on Navajos to live “by the rules,” and to closely adhere to cultural rules. On the other hand, she says it left her feeling as if she was free to explore other faiths whenever she had the opportunity. She was an inquisitive child, and as she studied traditional cooking and weaving alongside her grandmother, Johona’s mind often wandered to the people outside of the reservation. Who were they? What did they do all day? What were their churches like?



When she left the reservation to attend college, Johona began to explore other paths of spirituality. She began taking yoga and Ta’i Chi classes, and studying Eastern religion, followed by some time in a Colorado ashram. She accompanied her friends to Sunday services, exploring Catholicism, Church of Christ, and Judaism. Johona went to revivals, Sunday School, and several types of fellowship meetings, always

asking questions, but never committing herself to any one of them. In the end, Johona says she settled on being a “freelance worshipper,” one that takes bits and pieces from each experience, weaving them into her own core Navajo belief system. She says that her Navajo roots are at her core, and she honors many of the same things to this day, but her faith has grown to encompass the modern world in which she now lives.

Johona’s faith is, she says, based on the idea that people should learn to live and work peacefully together, celebrating their differences and learning from each experience.

Navajo legend tells of a hide placed in the water, and it was believed that as long as the hide did not sink, no one would die. Someone was assigned to keep watch over the hide, day and night, until one day when the entire tribe forgot about it. A coyote came upon the abandoned hide, throwing some rocks on it and causing the life-sustaining hide to sink in the water. The coyote believed that if no humans ever died, the earth would eventually become overrun with them and there would be no room for coyotes. The Navajo people believe that death now exists in the world because of this.

When someone dies, the Navajo believe, they go to the underworld, so specific precautions must be taken by the living to ensure that they do not return. Visits from the dead are to be avoided at all costs, as they are seen as evil spirits. Navajos never look at or touch a dead body, and a person who may die at home is taken to a secluded place, accompanied by only the two people closest to them. If they do die at home, tradition mandates that the house be burned to the ground and rebuilt. In the 1900s, Navajos are said to have persuaded European settlers to buy corpses, thus avoiding any handling of the dead.

Johona says that her views on death have softened over the years. Though she is still somewhat afraid of coming in

contact with the body, she believes that the spirit goes to someplace happy, where they are reunited with loved ones.

Johona went on to work as an accountant, and has enjoyed the discipline of the job and the rationality that numbers offer. After graduating from college, she spent a year interning in Washington DC, where she met her husband. He was from Colorado,

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working as an intern in the House of Representatives, and had relatives living in Albuquerque. The couple married in CO, settling in the Sandia foothills that overlook Albuquerque to raise their family.

Johona’s husband is Jewish, and she marvels at the similarities between his faith and her own. This may be one reason that their paths have melded so easily, allowing them to teach both faiths to their children and honor the ceremonies of each one as a family.

Johona and her husband have three grown sons and are expecting their first grandchild in the spring. This child, a girl, will be named Ajei Mai. In the Navajo language, Ajei means “my heart” and Mai, after Johona’s grandmother, means “bright flower.”

The beautiful Navajo language is very special, both to the people and, in our history, to the US Government. There, men fluent in the language, called Code Talkers, were used to transmit coded messages during both world wars. One Navajo phrase commonly heard throughout NM is “Ya’at’eeh,” which means hello. Johona likes to end conversations with Hágooshjájá, Hózhóogo naasháa which means “goodbye, walk in beauty.”

A flight with God

By Patrick Wayne Mumford



This story is about flying. For the life of me, I cannot understand why everyone who possibly can doesn't learn to fly. I suppose the bottom line is that flying is, in addition to being challenging, also exhilarating and – at least for me – offers a constant reminder of the size and scope of humanity versus the size and scope of the heavens.

Since the dawn of time, men have dreamed of flying, and there are many, many stories throughout biblical and other sacred writings, folklore, and mythology about reaching the heavens through an ability to fly. In the *Bible*, there is a discussion of people looking upwards to heaven for guidance. There is also the story of Elijah and Elisha, where the chariots of fire came down and scooped Elijah off to heaven mid-sentence. This can all be found in the book of 2 Kings. From Greek mythology comes the story of Pegasus, a divine winged stallion that can fly across the heavens at will. The Chinese story of Aladdin and the flying carpet always intrigued me as a child, as did that of Icarus, who was trying to escape from the Isle of Crete. In watching the birds fly, Icarus decided that he too could take wing if he had enough feathers. He stuck feathers to his body with wax, and as the story goes, when he flew too close to the sun, the wax melted and poor Icarus fell into the sea and drowned.

New pilots are trained to navigate by geographical points, such as mountains and rivers, along with the pertinent mechanical details that come with flight. I find it fascinating to watch the terrain as the plane gains elevation, as first the people disappear, then the cars, and finally small structures. Takeoff is exhilarating; that feeling of leaving the earth behind. Though this is a busy time for any pilot, I always steal a glance at the surroundings, marveling at how free I feel as the plane becomes airborne, rising higher and higher above the earth toward the heavens. This is the spiritual aspect of flying, as I rise above all of life's problems. I feel that sense of peace, much like Zen Buddhism, that comes from putting aside all other thoughts as I maintain a pinpoint focus on flying and the environment.

Many commercial pilots fly to loud music to stave off boredom, but I find this as distracting as the shouting in some churches. Because, for me, quietly gazing over the rivers, meadows, fields, and barns allays any boredom as I am completely captivated by the sheer beauty of it all. Flying expands one's horizons, and when I land and turn off the plane's motor, I am left with a complete sense of satisfaction from the experience.

To me, it is the spiritual aspects that making flying so special. Flying is about physics on the physical plane, and to ignore physics comes with great peril, but there are so many metaphysical aspects to it as well, which carry with them certain laws. The laws of physics is what make a plane fly, where the lift, gravity, thrust, and drag must all be equal in order for the plane to remain aloft. But the metaphysical begs other questions. What lifts the plane as far as gravity? What pulls it down as far as thrust, or holds it back as far as drag? What pushes it forward? What, truly, is the energy source? Such is flying, and such is life. In order for a plane to fly, all of these things must be in perfect balance. In order for a life to work, all things must also be in balance, and many of the same questions arise in finding that balance.

Putting a plane into the air is another intriguing aspect of flying, and signifies a true commitment. Once the plane takes off, there will be no more opportunities to pull over and get out until the plane lands at its destination. Life is like this as well, for when one offers a true commitment, they must be willing to stay with the ship until the journey is complete. Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa said, "you should perform all of your worldly duties, fixing your hold firmly upon God, and you will be free from danger." In other words, accept responsibilities in life while remembering that it all belongs to God. I think flying is very much like that, an interrelationship of the physical and the spiritual, which is metaphysics. In flying, air traffic control is like that inner voice we all hear, which always strives to keep us safe. Trust is necessary, of course, but so is verification that one's own actions are the right ones to take at any given moment.

Too many people are afraid of flying, as they are of life. It is true that plane crashes make the news in spectacular ways, but the benefits are quite spectacular as well. The challenge is invigorating, being above the earth is magnificent, and the simple act of flying is exhilarating. Truly, flying can touch your soul.



One String of Beads offers nearly two dozen unique stories of faith and hope, is available at Amazon.com or through our website at www.OneStringOfBeads.com.

To regularly receive more unique approaches to life, love, and spirituality, sign up for our newsletter!

