



TRANSFORMATION


by
fire

Now is the season to know
That everything you do
Is sacred.

—Hafiz

In the indigenous or shamanic view, the world around us is a manifestation of the Divine. From the smallest pebble to the trees, rivers, mountain, all the way to the great elemental forces that make up this world, the different manifestations of the Divine can be seen before our eyes. Intact indigenous cultures refer to these manifestations as gods and they maintain close relationships with them. One of the primary elemental forces, Fire, is present as a Divine Energy in all traditions. Fire has been our benefactor, warming us, cooking our food, giving us light for many millennia. We also know it as the energy of our hearts. It holds our pure spiritual knowing and wisdom. It connects us to each other and to the Divine, providing the medium for transformation. Fire is present in all spiritual pathways and, in many traditions, it is a living presence, which provides guidance and help. In the tradition of the Huichols of northwest Mexico, they call the God of Fire, Tatewarí.

On this planet today there are said to be six people who can be put into a deep trance that allows this great elemental energy of fire to speak through them so that this elemental force can help the peoples of this world re-connect to their purpose and open their hearts. There is one each in India, Tibet and Indonesia, and two in the Amazon. There is also one in North America. David Wiley lends his body so that Tatewarí, affectionately known as Grandfather, can appear and offer guidance. Formerly a businessman, David has experienced the fires of transformation and embraced the role of shaman, healer and counselor in the small village of Tepoztlan in the central highlands of Mexico. This interview is his story.



An Interview with David Wiley

ANNIE KING



Question *What was your life like before you met Tatewari?*

David Up until that time I'd been a business consultant living in Atlanta. I worked with clients in the Southeast U.S. and helped them reorganize their businesses. I was, as Grandfather likes to kid me, a yuppie. I'd grown

up in a place called Oak Ridge, Tennessee. It was a scientific community and the major employer was a national laboratory. Science was God. So I was educated in a public school system that placed a great deal of emphasis on science. Religion and spirituality were seen as matters of social activity. God and the Divine were not taken very seriously—at least that was my feeling growing up. If someone had asked me, "Do you believe in God?" I would have said, "I don't understand what is important or interesting about that question!" In other words, "Who cares?"

I moved to Mexico as my marriage of sixteen years was ending. I was going to be with someone who was very important to me. In order to support my children, who were living with their mother in the U.S., I started a job as a trade consultant for companies who wanted to do business in Mexico. Almost immediately a series of disasters occurred. First, the government, which was the source of a lot of trade contracts and economic stimulation, became unstable with a change of presidents and almost went bankrupt. Also, the small trade-consultant company that I had contracted with was unable to pay me because of unrevealed debt problems.

On top of that I had an angry ex-wife with an aggressive lawyer who wanted to make her displeasure known. And so, when the company I contracted to work for failed to pay me, I ran out of money and I began to get behind in my child support payments. My ex-wife then had a warrant placed on me for non-payment of child support. This meant that if I showed up in Georgia, I'd be arrested until I could meet the payment conditions and clear the mounting arrearage in support payments.

So my new adventure quickly became an enormous disaster. I found myself marooned in Mexico, unable to come back to the States to seek new employment because of the warrant. I wasn't able to see my children and I was faced with a new culture that felt quite overwhelming. And so there I was! This process went on for two years. I was unable to close any contract no matter how hard I worked or how many meetings I attended. Nothing seemed to work.

Question *So at this point your life was in turmoil. How did the meeting with whom we now know as Tatewari, the God of Fire, come about?*

David My new Mexican partner, Diana, who was gracious enough to support me through this time, is involved in various spiritual pursuits, as many Mexicans are. Diana is quite eclectic. Whenever she was interested in going off to some workshop or some spiritual meeting, I would dismiss those types of activities as superfluous. I continued trying to find trade contracts, which was what I thought was important. Whenever she would see or explain something in a spiritual context, I took it as a challenge to explain the phenomenon in a rational scientific context as a way of dismissing its possible spiritual nature.

But one day she invited me to go to a three-day Shambhala Buddhist meditation retreat in Cuernavaca, and I agreed to go. Quite frankly, I don't know why I accepted her invitation, except that maybe I was so depressed about my situation that, finally, I was open to anything.

So I attended the meditation and I felt very relaxed and very open. I was surprised to find that I meditated very easily. On the third day, during an afternoon break, I was walking in the garden of the retreat center, feeling relaxed and expansive, and I found myself talking to myself about some deep philosophical questions. As I began to ask myself those questions, what I identified as "a voice" began to answer them. I was surprised at the depth of the knowledge of the voice and how profound the answers were. At the same time an image, more like an apparition, of a very old Indian man, small and very weathered, wearing a red headband, began to appear. I felt that I was in some kind of daydream until I realized that the voice was not my imagination speaking to me and that the apparition was real.

I immediately panicked and rushed out of the garden to find Diana, who is a psychotherapist. I rushed to her saying "Diana, there is an old Indian man talking to me," thinking that I needed either therapy or drugs, or both! Diana's response was, "Well, find out what he wants!"

I felt stunned and disappointed because that was not the kind of help that I was expecting. I wanted her to dispel this experience. But after she said that, I thought for a short while and realized that this was too incredible of a situation to run away from. So I got up my nerve and I walked back out to the garden, which was filled with bushes and plants so that it was quite secluded. And there He reappeared!

At first I tried to make some kind of social conversation like, "Isn't this garden beautiful?"

"You're afraid, aren't you?" He said in a deep-voiced, gruff and direct manner.

It stopped me dead in my tracks and I admitted, "Yes, I am!"

“Do you want me to go away?” He asked.

“Wait just one moment—this is too incredible, too unbelievable,” I said. “Let’s take this one step at a time and see where it goes.”

“You’re really torn up about this thing with your kids, aren’t you?” He said, somehow knowing that my separation from them had been my overriding preoccupation for two years.

It felt like He had just pressed a button. I was filled with grief and answered, “Yes.”

“You know, I could use someone like you. I’ll make a deal with you,” He said, as though He was mirroring some business lingo. “I’ll fix this thing with your kids, if you become a shaman.”

At that moment I felt very inspired, knowing that whatever He said would come to pass. I enthusiastically said, “Yes, I agree.” I paused for a moment and asked, “What’s a shaman?”

“You don’t need to get hung up on labels,” He said. “You’ve got a lot of time to figure that out.” And then He disappeared.

I ran back into the retreat center where Diana was talking to some of the participants, and I said, “Diana, He said He’s going to fix this thing with my kids, and that all I have to do is become a shaman. What is a shaman?” She looked at me with a disconcerted expression, and began to fumble an attempt at a definition. I said, “Don’t worry about it. I’ll look it up in the dictionary!” What I found was something to the effect of:

Shaman: A member of certain tribal societies practicing a magico-animistic religious belief system who acts as a medium between the visible and invisible spirit world for the purpose of healing, divination and influence over natural events.

“What in the hell is that?” I shouted. Then I calmed down, telling myself that I shouldn’t be worried. It was going to be just fine because He was going to take care of this thing with my kids.

Question *I imagine your relationship with Tatewarí and developing trust in this guidance was a process just like any relationship?*

David Yes. At the first there was the momentum of wonder, fascination and enthusiasm. He appeared the next day and woke me up in the morning before sunrise. I was very startled, and asked, “What is going on?”

He said, “It is time to get up. We have to go to work. We have a deal!” As I pulled myself out of bed, He continued, “The first thing you need to learn is how to pray; you can’t do this sort of work unless you know how to pray!” And that was the last time He appeared to me in apparition form.

During the first part of the process I felt a great deal of elation. But He continued to add on activities that became more challenging for my mind so, even with the fascination, my mind began to grouse. It was very confronting. I wondered if I was crazy. I would actually have moments of longing for the way things used to be.

Even after He brought me a business deal two months later that resolved my financial problems, allowing me to satisfy my debts and begin to see my children again, my mind’s capacity to generate doubt persisted. My mind wanted a continuous flow of these types of experiences to reassure it. This is one of the ways the mind wants to stay in control. Dealing with the mind was where my real training began.

At the beginning when I asked who He was, He would say, “Don’t worry about labels, you have plenty of time. Let’s just stick with what we’re doing.” Then, a few months later, He dramatically stepped up the heat. He said, “Now you need physical teachers. And you’ll also learn more about me and who I am.”

He instructed me to go to an area where we received mail and to locate a brochure advertising Eliot Cowan’s Plant Spirit Medicine course. He then said, “He is going to take you to a Huichol shaman who is going to know that you are coming. I also want you to take this course to learn something about the spirits of plants, not just their pharmacological value.”

I was thinking to myself, “This is going to be difficult. I don’t have the resources to look for someone in the States!” But I discovered that the course was being given in Tepoztlan, a village forty-five minutes from the city where I lived.

There I met Eliot and he seemed to understand what I was going through. He also knew a Huichol shaman, named Don Lupe González Rios, with whom he was apprenticing. A month later he took me to meet the shaman near Nayarit, Mexico. Don Lupe, who anticipated my arrival, finally diagnosed the being talking to me as Tatewarí, the God of Fire, also called Grandfather Fire, who is in charge of teaching all the shamans their work. Don Lupe said that I needed to become his apprentice in order to keep my agreement with Tatewarí.

As the dust was settling on this arrangement, Tatewarí had me go to an old Nahuatl (central Mexican highlands Indian group) weather shaman named Don Lucio Campos Elizade. Don Lucio also identified the being that was talking to me as Grandfather Fire, in the Nahuatl language known as *Huehuetotl*. And there I began my apprenticeship with him as a *trabajador del tiempo*, working as an emissary for the weather beings to help bring beneficial weather.

Meeting these old guys and getting their solid corroboration did a great deal to improve my trust. Tatewarí pointed out that He didn’t give me my doubt. My mind generated this perspective—which is a particularly prevalent problem in my home culture. I had to learn that Divine isn’t something that I, as an individual, can manipulate for my own desires. I am simply a small part of the big picture. As I learned to let go of the desire for Him to satisfy all of my insecurities, I began to

embrace the phenomena of life as a living intelligent being. My trust issues began to resolve. And, therefore, I could participate in life rather than being fearful or suspicious or dismissive of it as a way to protect myself from it.

Question *Could you talk about when Grandfather first began to speak through you to others?*

David Diana and I had a habit of sometimes taking our evening meal at a restaurant named “Sanborn’s” in Cuernavaca, Mexico. One day, about five months after all this began, we were having a meal and I suddenly felt a strong urge to drink some hot chocolate and to smoke a cigar. Now this was very strange because I didn’t and don’t smoke. Diana looked at me in a funny way as I got up and went to the tobacco shop and purchased a few cigars.

After fumbling and figuring out how to cut the end off and get it going, I discovered that smoking the cigar and drinking the hot chocolate seemed to amplify my ability to hear Him talking to me. I said to Diana, “Hey, it really helps me hear him. Go ahead and ask me some questions.” I felt my heart racing, which I thought was the effect of the tobacco, and then I felt a surge like an acceleration similar to taking off in an airplane.

I found myself waking up in a great deal of confusion, not remembering what had happened. At first, I felt there had been some kind of accident like an earthquake, which is common in this area. However, Diana informed me that my expression and presence changed dramatically and Tatewarí had suddenly started talking with her. She found it wonderful.

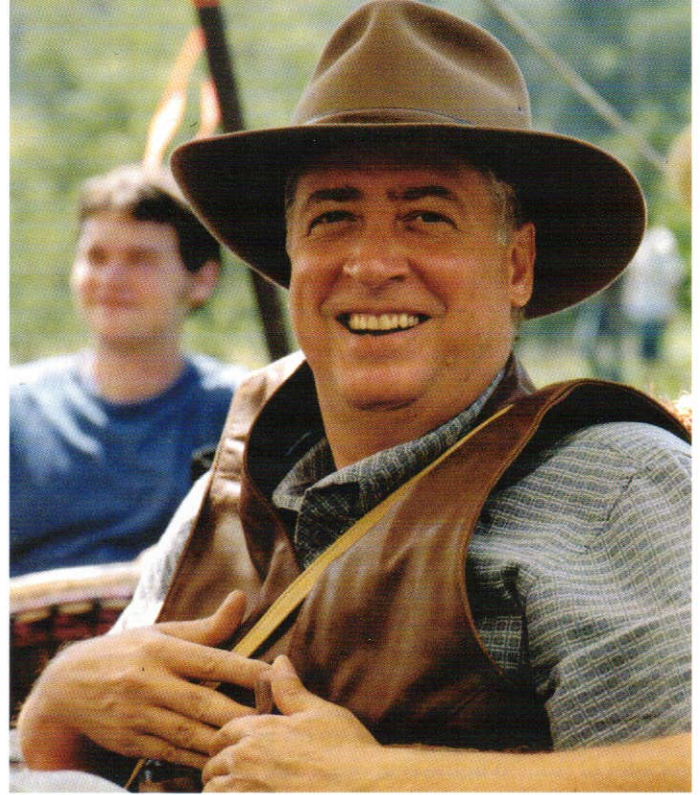
Question *Do you hear or remember what is going on?*

David No, I don’t remember anything. I’ve never been anesthetized, but I can imagine that this is what it must be like—a blank space in experience where time isn’t accounted for.

Question *Since then Grandfather has had you make appearances at specially organized fires where people have experienced Grandfather speaking through you, where you appear to be in a trance. Is that channeling?*

David Since I don’t have much experience with people who channel or consciousness of what’s happening when Grandfather is speaking through me, it’s hard for me to comment on this. However, when I’ve asked Tatewarí, He doesn’t call it channeling. He says that channeling is where a spirit, being or energy invades your body and speaks through you. Sometimes it can be from opening a door and connecting through your mind.

But Fire is a natural elemental presence in nature. It makes the heat of our bodies. He says that He only has to slightly amplify His presence which is already in us. When this occurs, my body temperature increases to 104 degrees and I’m in a coma-like state. This, He says, puts my mind to the side. Therefore He uses my “suit,” as He calls my body, and He generates an audible form. Although the form looks like an individual speaking, He says He’s not speaking as an individual, but as a presence in the world.



Question *Can you do this at any time?*

David No. I don’t call Him; He calls me!

Question *How do you feel about this “lending of the suit” as Grandfather calls it?*

David Well, at first it was very disconcerting, because the mind, by its nature, still likes to be in control. It’s still a little like this. As I said, it’s what I imagine it’s like to be anesthetized. Something happens, and, because he sets the mind to the side, it feels like a gap. For me it is like a blind spot. This is different from going to sleep where you close your eyes and you wake up and you don’t feel that you’ve missed something. I don’t even know if I have been asleep or not.

I evidently have to undergo a difficult recovery process in which my memory seems to be temporarily affected and I have some impressions of being very cold. Evidently, after the heat leaves, there’s a temperature crash. I also have a really bad taste in my mouth as He has been noted to blaze through 12 to 14 big cigars and a large quantity of hot chocolate in an evening.

Question *Can you say anything to help people who don’t understand this process and are skeptical?*

David I’m not sure. I can certainly appreciate the skepticism given that I have been there myself. As I’ve said before, it takes time. The mind can be shown clear evidence and it will try to find a way around it. That’s when you discover it isn’t about evidence; it’s about control. The mind doesn’t want to admit the obvious and therefore relinquish territory.

So it took work through His guidance—such as successful apprenticeships with Don Lupe, Don Lucio and Eliot Cowan—to create a process that helped me build trust and begin to learn how to deal with my mind and its desire to dismiss what you could call the phenomena of spirit. But that is very tough work and some people aren’t ready for it.

At times, Tatewari can be painfully direct in pointing out what your mind doesn't want to face. He also absolutely loves to taunt the mind or individual ego with hidden or direct humor. He can leave a piece of bait to purposefully generate doubt and then pull the rug out in order to confront the ego's assumptions. The ego takes itself very seriously and wants to have its own kingdom. Therefore, it can hide from what confronts it. The ego sees the energy of fire as an unreasonable and potentially destructive dose of humor or clarity in the face of this confrontation.

If you're open, you begin to laugh at yourself for the mind's absurdities. Tatewari generates this laughter as transformation.

In our modern materialistic society there is a great deal of pandering to the mind. You're supposed to always get what you want. You're not supposed to believe anyone that contradicts you because you have the right to be right. Isn't that what all the advertisements tell you?

In the spiritual-learning area I find people who prefer to read books rather than deal with a teacher because they can keep whatever perspective they like. They don't have to face a teacher who may point out something that might make them feel uncomfortable. Therefore, there's an ego/mind benefit to remaining a lone ranger.

In contrast, Tatewari, as fire and connection, deals with bringing perspectives together. That requires people who are willing to relate to each other.

In response to your question I can say this: "Try it, you'll like it." I find that if you're open to listening to what He's saying, then, even though the "suit thing" must be a little weird for people in a modern European-based culture, He makes very practical sense. He puts the world in the middle, with all of its beauty and warts, and gives a perspective on how to embrace and deal with it all. There's no simplistic "all the good guys are on this side and all the bad guys are on that side." I personally have come to

find it refreshing. But it requires openness because the world is a very complex place compared to the capacity of the mind to understand. As some famous author once said, "Truth is stranger than fiction."

Question *How has this changed your life?*

David There is no retirement plan, and there are no health insurance benefits!

Well, my life is completely different. As a *marakame* or shaman in the Huichol tradition, and a healer and weather worker in the Nahuatl tradition, I'm a village shaman in Tepoztlan. I have a healing and counseling practice. I am involved in the village life: welcoming new births through baptism, counseling people with a variety of spiritual or relationship problems, performing funerals and so on. So attending to the needs of daily human life, plus being involved in the Sacred Fire Community and traveling on their behalf keeps me busy.

Whenever He sends me on a trip or when I am doing a pilgrimage, which is one of the main ways to learn in the path of Huichol shamanism, I can't help thinking that this is quite a bit different than becoming captain of industry and making my first million dollars. Even though there is a lot of hard work involved, I consider it a blessed life, and wake up every morning looking forward to seeing what the Divine will bring.

Question *Why do you think Grandfather is coming at this time and in this way?*

David He's told me that what He's doing isn't unusual, although it may seem strange for people living in these times. But our current cultural perspective,

which is heavily shaped by European "Age of Reason" ideology built on a previous foundation of Judeo-Christian views, is only 500 year old. If you focus on the United States, which He calls "the great anti-royal, tenant-farmer and merchant-class revolution that took possession of what is now the country and disposed of the original inhabitants," this cultural perspective is less than 250 years old. In terms of the multi-thousand-year-old cultural history of the world, this is nothing.

In other parts of the world that have a very old cultural basis and traditions, He says that these types of interventions have happened, even though they weren't well recorded. He says that He shows up during various times in various ways to give a little "grease" as He calls it. He says that, despite all the material and technological things we seem to have going for us in this epoch, our lives are growing colder, more confused and separate. He says His interest is to awaken His voice as heart within people and therefore bring more warmth, connection and heart-guidance to their lives. And He's said that there has been a lot of drift between what the heart voice truly is and what the mind has co-opted and presents as heart. So He's presenting Himself in this fashion in order to help us gain a form of calibration. He presents it as one of those rare moments. Maybe we'll get a glimpse of where Divine is taking us. ♡

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