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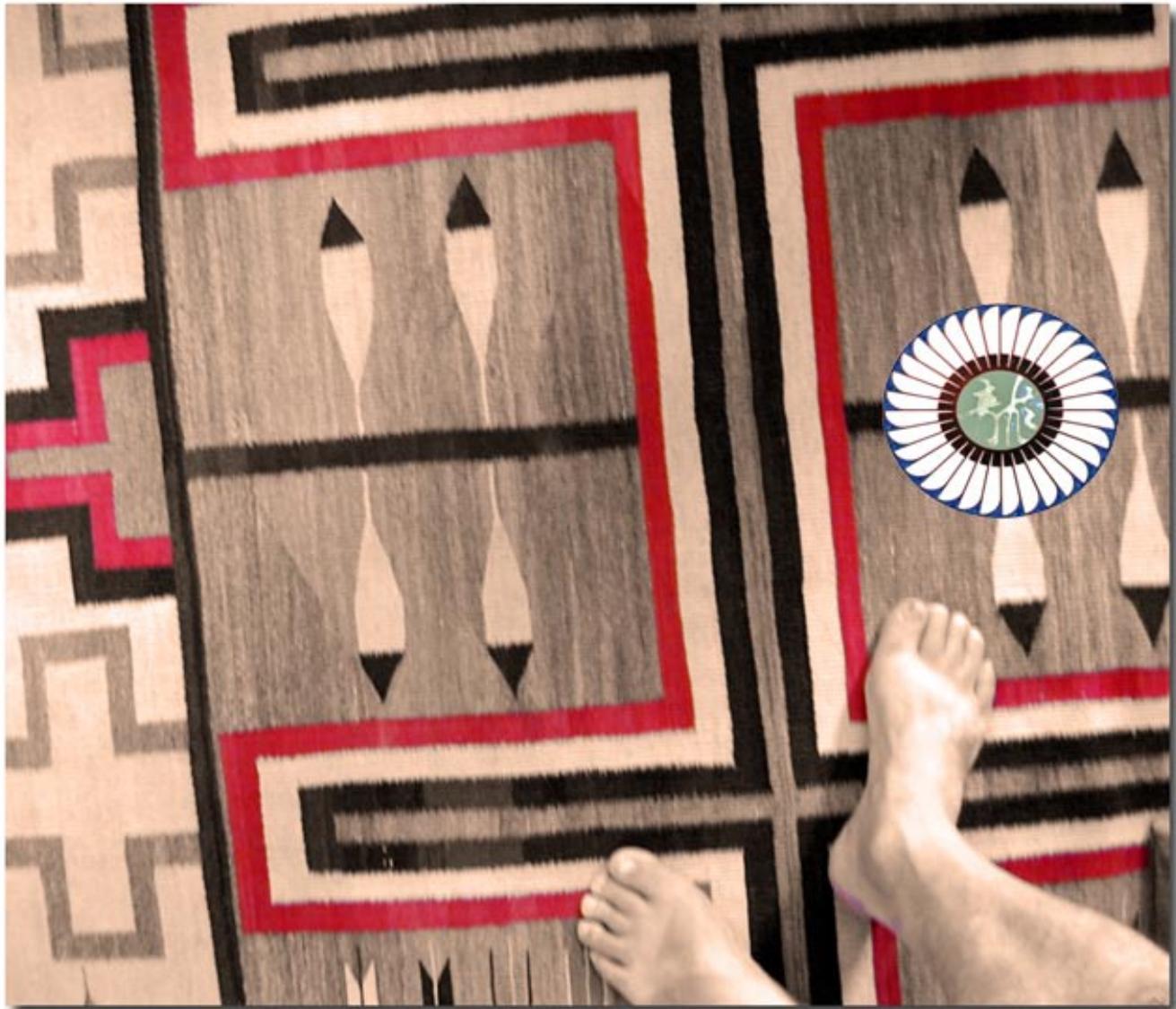
Volume 33 Spring 2004

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# *Ah-nbeek'*

## *Morning Fire (First Ceremony)*

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American Indian  
Computer Art Project



# Ah-nheek

the sacred morning fire

(briefly)

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Turtle Heart  
Ojibway Artist

Keeper of the River Otter Pack

Taos, New Mexico  
Spring Equinox 2004



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American Indian Computer Art Project



I could measure the time and the events of my life by how much money I made or lost. I could recall my sorrows and disappointments. because of the life I have chosen to lead, Instead, I can look back at the many ceremonial and sacred fires I have attended or hosted. Looking back, it is like a long string of shining beads. They almost look like stars that guided me in those sacred moments to find and follow this dream of my life.

The history of life.

The life unfolding, one hot coal at a time.

Anyone who has known me or worked with me has become involved in these little sacred fires.

This season's tribal arts quarterly is a look at what I call the morning fire. From this little ceremony much of the art and most of the understanding I have of life and art have arisen, been measured against or reflected from within it.

In the beginning of the traditional life with the sacred societies of tribal people, the first teaching offered to beginners, to those wanting to know how to walk the life of the mystery people.

.....this first teaching is called “the morning fire”.



Used in a modest, disciplined and thoughtful way; a small fire can open a place in your own life and mind to many discoveries and revelations. Having some sense of clarity is a powerful tool for any walk of life.

Imagine that somewhere on the earth, people with real knowledge and real spiritual awareness sit in a sacred manner to sing and breathe as the sun rises. These enlightened and patient people continued morning after morning, generation after generation. What did they learn from doing this? What did they pass on of what they know? Clarity is one important part of the answer.

From the many ashes, ruins and broken pieces of this knowledge, much has been retained and rescued and preserved right inside this little fire.

At one epoch in time, this fire was the center of all teachings representing truth for a human being; in daily life; interested in direction and clarity. Remember as you read this; this is just the first teaching. These people of the morning fire use many kinds of fires, and practice many types of ceremonial learning..... timed to the seasons of the sun, the light, the water, the moon, the pleides, and the winds themselves as they moved upon the earth.

In many of the old tribes it was important to make welcoming songs and engage in formal behavior when entering an important place. For example, the teaching house of a particular society when the teachers are present. You would not just walk into such a place. One of my elders used to always stop at every river in his path and make a song there, before crossing it. This made for some slow but powerful road trips. These are examples of this idea.

The morning fire is a welcoming ceremony. At the morning fire you introduce yourself to your mother the earth each day.

Your moment at the morning fire is a declarative event.

At the moment you address the morning fire, you send out your identity, you send out your desires. You send out a particular vibration that we believe will be heard by the Creation, that will be responded to. Being able to clearly use ceremony to frame your desires and balance this projection so that you also are hearing the earth at the same moment you ask the earth to hear you.....this can all be done with a moment's focus at the morning fire....in the space of a single breath.

Just having the clarity to do this has great value. Many moments in life are lost because we do not know what we want or when we want it. This practice can help with a problem like that.

This sounds like poetry. Standing or sitting before the fire is an exercise in finding a moment, however brief, of clarity. Clarity is like corn. If it is properly cultivated, it will grow in abundance.....stringing together each brief moment into a fuller state of consciousness and awareness.

Over the years I have become more cautious in what I say about the details of ceremonial teachings. It is important to the elders that people learn about these matters properly. Properly means directly from the oral tradition of qualified living elders period. Many modern people use discussions and writings of these ideas as a how-to manual. No person who truly respects these teachings would ever do that.

The first how-to instruction is to seek out qualified elders and teachers. Learning the right way is the only way. Many modern people live deceptive and misguided lives by imitating and stealing tribal ritual teachings. It is a very sad and widespread problem with tribal teachings.

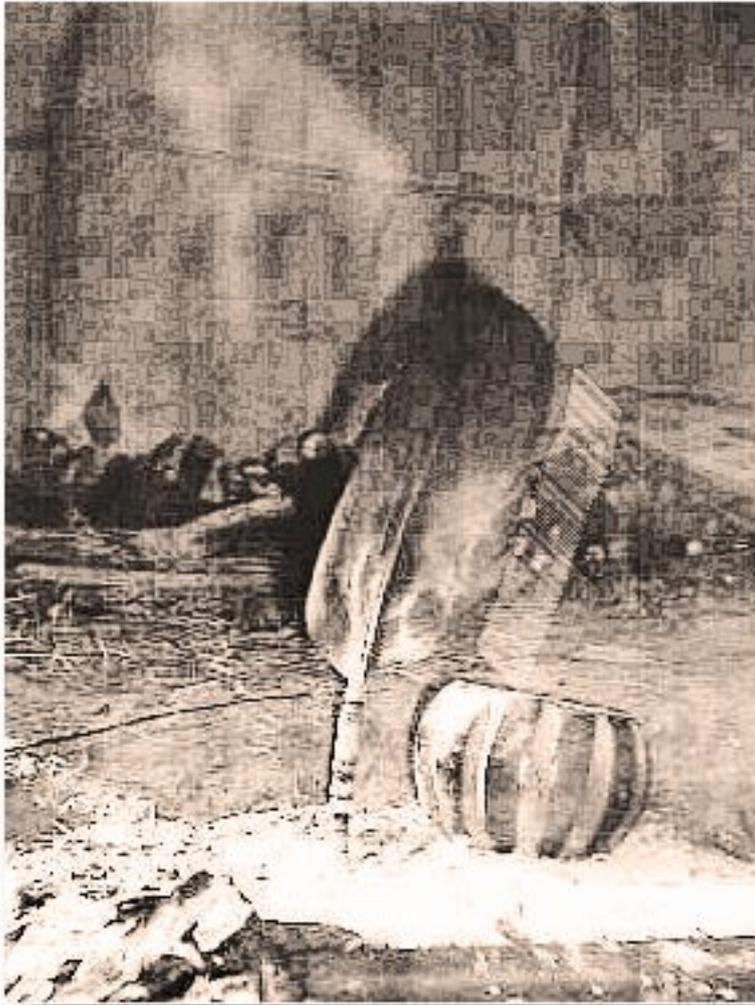
When I share the morning fire ceremony with other people I share more fully the details of how and what to use at that place and that moment to bring the ceremony into focus and clarity. On that place on the earth, made sacred for that moment, the truth may be felt, cultivated and expressed.



I have learned that keeping records is an important part of my work. I favor and support responsible and accurate keeping of records, advice and observations Throughout the many volumes of these writings I have made freely available, I believe I have demonstrated that.

In the Digital Tribal Arts Quarterly I have hoped to create a body of discussion, comments and ideas about subjects on which there is really very little intelligent information available.

I believe I have left plenty of space between the lines of these thoughts for the attentive reader to learn something useful.



This photo could be 100 or 1,000 years old. It was taken at the site of a ceremonial fire which was burning for 5 years in the remote California desert. What you see is a very fantastic old Eagle Feather and a rare black ceremonial pottery. This was a digital photo from one of the very earliest black and white digital cameras. Above and to the left of the feather you can see the smoke from the morning fire.

That bowl and that Eagle Feather are still at the morning fire. The picture of that fire today is the same as this one in 1990.

This fire has been burning each morning for over 9,000 days.



In this painting, the morning fire is being used in a cleansing or “correction way” ceremony. This is a real ceremony which took place several years ago in southern New Mexico.

Any object used within a ceremonial context has its own unique story. Each person who might have some object must behave with it in some particular way. These particular behaviors have everything to do with the consciousness of understanding how and why we gain our lives upon the belly of this sacred earth.

All energies move in reflected ways, in ways that we call “moving in both directions”.....there at the morning fire.



On the previous page is a photo of a sweat lodge being prepared near central Italy, in the mountains. This sweat lodge fire is another particular type of fire.

Purification and community are the key words in the sweat lodge practice. The morning fire is more about self, or individual responsibility and in being able to hear in a moment what the earth might say to you.

If prayers to God can be heard and believed in by the church, then I believe the earth can be heard and felt and spoken to in just the same way.

God and the Mother Earth are not different things. They are different parts of the same thing. The Earth is alive and sustains all life.



A morning fire of some four continuous days in 2003, attended by 13 or 14 people. Notice an offering bowl and the presence of feathers.

Feathers make an outstanding and amazing tool for fanning and bringing air to a fire.

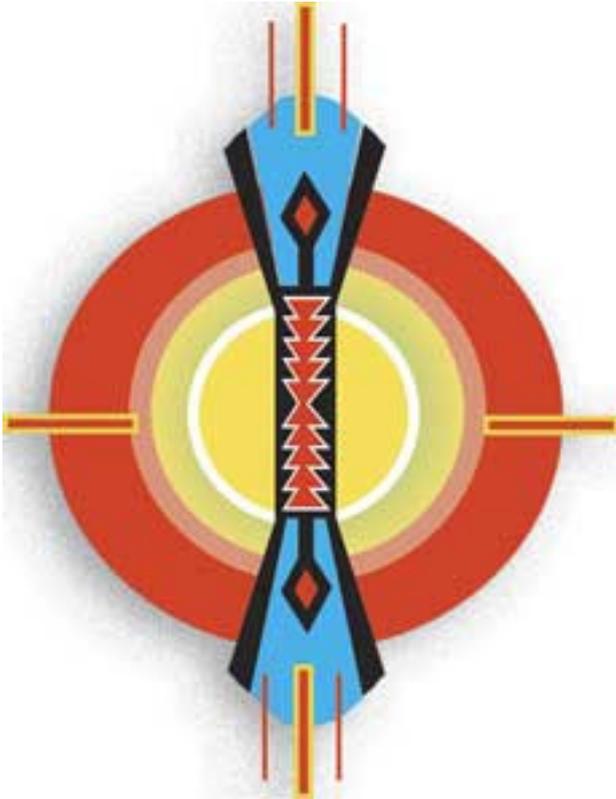
These are small fires. Smaller than most people imagine these days I think. A big fire completely obliterates the point of the Morning Fire.



Procession of the Virgin at Taos Pueblo, 2001. This is a particular ritual fire of the Taos Pueblo (Tiwa) culture. It is a combined act of defiance and a moment of celebration in a union of Catholic (Spanish, not Mexican) and Tiwa rituals of fire. Wherever fire is used it is a signalling. The morning fire is a more quiet and subtle form of sending a signal. No act of defiance, aggression or protest is ever present at the sacred fire.

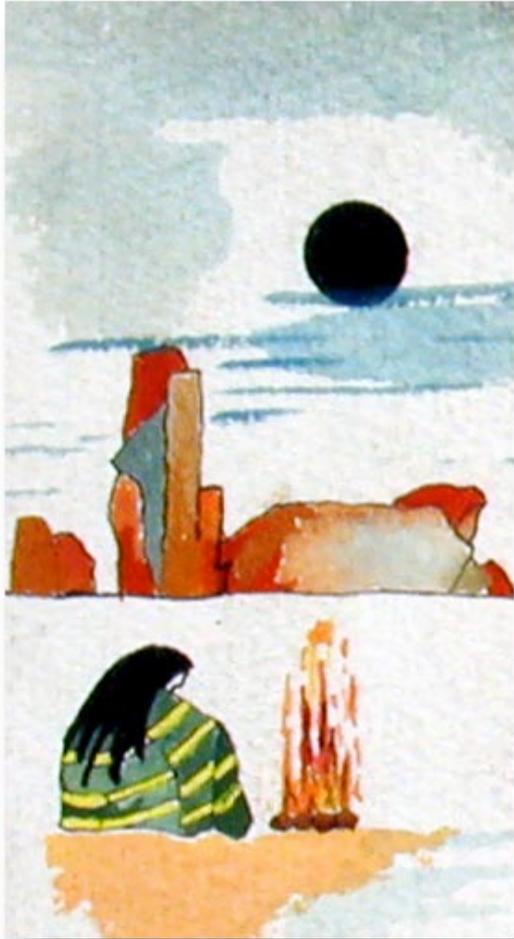


Prayer Fire, morning fire in 2003, attended over 4 days by more than a dozen people (Not the same fire as previous page) This was a very powerful fire. Over a period of four days many things happened to these people. Borgonova, Italy. This fire still remains on this property and has occasion to “smoke” several times each year.



This image is a representation of how a human heart looks while doing a really proper morning fire ceremony.

In the place where the earth and sky are meeting, you will be singing and opening a prayer into the belly of the earth....just by breathing and being there.



I have followed myself. I have eaten my heart and grown strong. I am everywhere around myself. I have given myself a name. I have followed the winds into the mountain and I have made the whole earth wet.

I have taken the silence like water, I have used the thunder to listen to the world following me to the sacred river.

I am just a man, I could be just a woman.  
I was thinking like this, that the old men and the old women would know me.  
Where I sit the fire is burning and the old men and the old women will know me.

I have eaten my heart and grown strong. I am everywhere around myself. I have given myself a name. I have followed the winds into the mountain and I have made the whole earth wet.

Painting by Turtle Heart.



Mass produced social fires put forward in the modern world take great advantage of the beauty of the ancient knowledge which exists only in the shadows of the modern world.

In my many years of experience with these fires. I have seen many beautiful things happen. The power that human beings have to express and to realize their spiritual power can be clearly felt and absorbed at a good morning fire. I have witnessed this myself many times.

The morning fire is not a place to talk, hold conversations or socialize. At best it is a place of focus....one could say it is a (safe) place to focus the empty mind.

Our elders believe the Creation has provided all that we may ever need. Sometimes each of us wonders how to get what we do not have. The elders believe that we must first find a clear picture inside of ourselves of what we need to live in beauty, abundance and balance. This is the place to practice forming that clear picture.



## Smoke

Smoke is more often than not something people find irritating. Smoke is a very powerful element of the physics as well as the spiritual power of a morning fire.

A small amount of smoke that turns in a clockwise spiral is a sure sign of the greatest energy of a good fire.

The people who are present are the ones who make the smoke behave or not behave in this way. It is a fact. One well worth thinking about. When I visit an area to work with people, the smoke of the first morning fire will tell me many things. I will build my entire plan for sharing with people based on what I see and feel from the smoke of the first fire.



Photography by Turtle Heart

Contact Turtle Heart if you want to discuss having these ceremonies in your community.

The Ojibway are people of the Great Lakes and Forests of the North East and Central United States.

Since 2000, Turtle Heart has lived in Taos, New Mexico.



This little fire welcomed me home from a recent trip of some weeks.

The wind covers and uncovers the fire circles we make here in the high desert.

My computer is about 10 feet from this fire.

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