

Reclaiming the shamanic tradition from Chiron's Pelion mountain



In this personal account Fotoula Adrimi, shamanic teacher and practitioner shares her quest to reclaim her ancestral shamanic lineage dating back to ancient Greece. In childhood Fotoula was immersed in the ancient history, myths and legends of her native country. Her paternal grandfather, teacher of ancient Greek, inspired her to follow the writings of Herodotus and Plato. At the same time, she was intrigued by the ceremonies of fire healing, bone divination, moon and weather prediction that her elders practised. Researching the history of her land, in Chiron's Pelion mountain, she discovered an ancient lineage that had lain dormant and was fast disappearing. Originally a town planner, in 2005 Fotoula changed her life and followed her soul's calling by practising the healing arts and shamanic ways. She studied with indigenous shamans and western teachers and is a member of the Global Shamanic Teachers network established by Sandra Ingerman. In 2013 Fotoula founded The ISIS School of Holistic Health in Glasgow and holds shamanic trainings, workshops and retreats in Scotland. She is the author of "The Golden Book of Wisdom: ancient spirituality and shamanism for modern times", a UK bestselling title.

"No", said my family elders. "We will not teach you the old ways. You are a woman. It is unlucky for a female to practise the old magic. This was the grandfather's way and all those before him. The secret art is passed down from father to the first born son. It has always been so."

I cried. I cried for myself and all the women before me. I cried for my grandmother, an amazing healer and herbalist who had also been told 'no'.

It was true, my grandmother was not allowed to learn, even though she was the only child and for a while my great grandfather's only opportunity to share the old magic with another generation. My great grandfather had waited for a long time for a boy. Yet, all his children were either stillborn or died soon after birth. Then, after many unsuccessful pregnancies, magic was employed for my grandmother's birth, ritual that combined the fairy world, Greek orthodox blessings and invocations to mother Earth. Miraculously, a child was born who stayed alive. Whether it was the indigenous or the church's medicine that had helped, was not a concern for my great grandfather. It was common to employ a combination of the two, to make sure the ritual was potent.

The child lived and true to her conception she was given a name that referenced both faiths. The name, the same name that I carry, means the light of epiphany, as its root, FOS, means light in Greek. Her nickname Phony, was short for Persephony, a Goddess whose shrine had been on the

Pelion mountain for thousands of years. My grandmother became a local healer, helping her father and mother. She knew the herbs and their uses and how to stitch and dress wounds. She also had the second sight that she passed to me, along with her name.

Despite her natural gifts, my great grandfather and family elders refused to teach her the shamanic ways. They waited for a grandson and when my father was born, their wish was fulfilled. By this time my great grandfather was in his 80s, and there was not enough time to teach his grandson who, as a child, was not interested in learning the old tradition. Even as a teenager my father's natural logical and scientific approach was at odds with shamanism. Reading the stars and preparing herbs for hours had little appeal for him. Consequently, much of the knowledge is now forgotten.

Then I was born into the family, the first of three daughters. No son for my dad and the elders to pass on the knowledge. And I am the only one who is passionate about seeking the old ways.

When I first discovered shamanism in the west I took to it like a duck to water. I was also intrigued. I recognised the similarities between the native cultures and my elders' ceremonies. I found bone divination rituals in Canada that use the same bone that my father looks into for guidance. After studying with teachers from the Himalayan, Peruvian, Mayan and North American traditions, I realised that these ancient practices are scattered throughout the globe.

So I went back to my elders, asking, pleading with them to teach me the old ways. I tried to explain that the old grandfather had thought it unlucky for women to practice because he had been born in the late 1800s, that it had been his culture not the truth. But it was to no avail.

My story of being denied access to ancestral magic due to gender, is not unique. Back in Scotland synchronicities took me to a workshop on spiritual leadership where we were shown the film, "Whale Rider". In the film, a young Maori girl is interested in the shamanic ways of her land that are linked to the whales. Her grandfather is the keeper and teacher of the tribe. Yet, she cannot access the spiritual teachings due to her gender, even although the whales come to her, speak to her, and allow her to ride with them into the sea. By almost drowning, she proves her calling and becomes a female shaman of her tribe.

Amazingly, after two years of praying to Hecate, my prayers were answered. An almost fatal incident showed my elders the impermanence of life. They realised that the knowledge would be lost if they did not share it. We began my apprenticeship with the first lesson of Fire ceremony.

Fire Ceremony of Manifestation from the Pelion mountain

In the Greek tradition fire is a gift from the gods, a Living Being that carries our prayers to the sky. This being is so powerful that the gods wanted to keep it for themselves. The ancient myths tell us that the Titan Prometheus stole the fire and gave it to the people, and Zeus or Dias, chained him indefinitely to the mountainside, until he was rescued by Hercules. Similarly, in Peruvian myths, it was the woodpecker who stole the fire from the gods to give to humans. As a result, the woodpecker's feathers on the top of his head were singed and turned permanently red by the blazing log he was carrying.

In the Greek tradition, the fire ceremony of manifestation is done early morning before breakfast. The fire is small and contained. The branches chosen for the fire must be aromatic, so the smell is pleasing to the spirits. A combination of four types of wood are used, namely olive, lemon, eucalyptus and Greek bitter laurel with berries (a teacher plant).

As the fire is lit, the ancient Gods of the Sky, the Sea and the Underworld, their power animals and respective nymphs, are invoked. A glass of dark red wine is offered to the ancestors. Once the fire is well lit and subsides, a thin fatty membrane from a sheep's belly, called "SKEPI", is placed on the fire as an offering. Prayers are then offered for the stability of the house, the health and wellbeing of all family members, and anything else that the shaman wants to add.

The prayers are offered but will the gods answer? This is not always certain as the prayers may be blocked by the three Fates (the Goddesses who determine one's destiny in the ancient Greek tradition). So the shaman observes the direction of the smoke that arises from the burning Skepi. A favourable direction means that all is well and the next twelve months will be easy, an unfavourable direction can point to difficulties ahead. Whether the smoke is favourable or not, bone divination is employed to understand the will of the Fates and offer guidance to those present.

Although this ceremony can take place any time during the year, it is usually performed in spring and combined with Easter celebrations.

Fotoula practices and teaches core and cross cultural shamanism as well as ceremonies from her own lineage, in her workshops, retreats and practitioner courses. True to the path of direct revelation she has worked with her helping spirit, the ancient Egyptian Mother ISIS, to channel a vast body of spiritual teachings which ISIS calls "The Path of the Living Light". She has rediscovered and teaches the lineage of the Priestess of the Moon, working ceremoniously in

community. In March 2018 she published her bestselling book: "The Golden Book of Wisdom: ancient spirituality and shamanism for modern times".