

The Four-Fold Way:

The Four Archetypal Ways for Deep Engagement

by Angeles Arrien

To survive in the twenty-first century, we must become more capable of handling change than ever before. Essentially, the challenge in the next century is to become a “change master.”

Individuals support change and states of health through dreams, images, play, relationships, and acts of creative work. Cultures support change and states of health through these mythic structures and through the institutionalization of art, science, music, ritual, and drama. In cultures that are alienated from mythological roots, renewal requires a return to the basic source from which all personal and cultural myths are ultimately forged – the human psyche.

Among many native cultures the following four principles are used as a guideline for leading a life of quality and integrity. These principles form the core of deep engagement.

The Way of the Warrior: Show up or choose to be present.

When we choose to be present, to become “visible,” we are able – through example and intention – to empower and inspire others by what we model. We extend honor and respect, set limits and boundaries, and align words with actions. When challenges present themselves, we embrace them with full-bodied presence rather than constrict with fear. This principle guides us to be both firm and yielding, honoring our own individual limits and boundaries as well as the limits and boundaries of others.

Universally there are three kinds of power. It is believed in shamanic societies that if a person has all three powers, he or she embodies “big medicine.” These three powers are:

The Power of Presence. Every human being carries the quality of presence. Some individuals carry such presence that we identify them as charismatic or magnetic personalities. We are drawn to them, and they captivate our interest.

The Power of Communication. Effective communication is accomplished when there is an alignment of content, right timing, and right placement. Communication that empowers and inspires us is communication that is delivered at the appropriate time, and in the right place for the person involved to hear it and receive it.

The Power of Position. The leader demonstrates the willingness to take a stand. It is the capacity to let others know “where I stand and where I don’t stand, what I stand for, and how I stand up for myself.”

The Way of the Healer: Pay attention to what heart and meaning.

It is the healer's way to pay attention to what has heart and meaning, to open oneself to the possibility of removing the blocks and obstacles to receiving love and giving love. This principle guides individuals to observe where in their experience they are half-hearted rather than open-hearted; carrying a doubting heart rather than a clear heart; and experiencing weak-heartedness rather than strong-heartedness.

Cross-culturally, there are four universal healing salves: singing, dancing, storytelling, and silence. Important questions that enable individuals to assess the condition of their own states of health or well-being are: "Where in my life did I stop singing?" "Where in my life did I stop dancing?" "Where in my life did I stop being enchanted by stories?" and "Where in my life did I stop being comfortable with the sweet territory of silence?" It is our life story and how we attend to it that allows us to experience the human resource of love, the most powerful healing force on Mother Earth.

The Way of the Visionary: Tell the truth without blame or judgment.

Many Native American cultures hold a belief that each individual is "original medicine," nowhere else duplicated on the planet; therefore, it is important to bring the creative spirit and life dream or purpose to Earth. Since we are "original medicine," these native peoples see that there is no need for comparison and competition. The work is to come forward fully with our gifts, talents, and resources and to powerfully meet our tests and challenges.

The visionary is one who brings his or her voice into the world and who refuses to edit, rehearse, perform, or hide. It is the visionary who knows that the power of creativity is aligned with authenticity. The field of creativity that exists within each individual is freed by moving out of ideas of wrong-doing or right-doing. If we can answer "yes" to the questions "Is my self-worth as strong as my self-critic?", then we are ready to engage in our creative expression.

The Way of the Teacher: Be open to outcome not attached to outcome.

The process of learning and teaching is universal. Shamanic traditions believe that wisdom is flexible and fluid, never positional; the human resource of wisdom is accessed by learning how to trust and how to be comfortable with states of not knowing.

Trust is the container out of which the qualities of wisdom grow – clarity, objectivity, discernment, and detachment. Wisdom is at work when there is non-positionality and openness to options not considered. Mother Teresa recognized that it is the teacher's way to use trust as an instrument. She said, "I feel like a pencil in God's hands...God writes through us, and however imperfect instruments we may be, he writes beautifully...He deigns to work through us. Is that not marvelous?"