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Lee, Scout Cloud, Ed.D, THE CIRCLE IS SACRED : A MEDICINE BOOK FOR WOMEN, Tulsa, OK: Council Oak Books, 1995. 272 pp. US\$17.95 paper ISBN: 0-933031-97-1.

Scout Cloud Lee is a woman of many talents. Trained as a recreational therapist (and author of several books on the subject), she now works primarily as a motivational speaker, focusing her work on personal development and "dream-stalking," the Native American concept for what more conventional Westerners might call "listening to your inner voice." But that's not all.

Lee is also a spiritual healer -- or Medicine Woman -- and a singer. And with the publication of this book, she joins a growing list of authors who are providing members of a troubled age with new tools for living, grounded in age-old wisdom.

"The time of the gun and the rifle are over," says Lee in the book's preface. "The time of the Medicine Power is here" (8). Lee's Medicine Power is an interesting marriage of traditional Native American ritual, Christian referencing and New Age folk lore. While the mix may baffle some readers, or seem an odd contradiction to others, in its own strange way, it works.

Starting with a broad overview of the need for ritual in daily life, Lee offers a series of practical steps toward spiritual awakening and healing: honoring the Earth and the Creator with ritualized, individual prayer, creating alters and "sacred space," ceremonial dancing, sweat lodges, healing circles, and an important primer on Earth etiquette.

It's easy to see how Western ideas of Christianity complement Lee's approach. Ritual prayer has always played a part in Christian ceremony; Rome uses incense, while Native American tradition calls for sagebrush. And Lee's altars allow the introduction of personal, individualized offerings, so that the inclusion of an effigy of Jesus of Nazareth in no way precludes a rock from Mother Earth, a feather from an eagle, or a handwritten poem expressing a personal sentiment.

Lee's point seems to be empowerment through inclusivity, demolition of social and ritualistic barriers and a basic celebration of life. These concepts can seem foreign to a cynical Western audience crippled by the media and a largely out-of-touch traditional Church body politic. Unconditional love of life and ritual without walls, are uncommon practices within the hallowed confines of most religious institutions, despite biblical teachings to the contrary.

But perhaps the most fundamental and moving aspect of Lee's spiritual guide is her unflinching certainty about the Earth's inseparable bond with all that we worship and revere as sacred. In fact, it is the very root of what we call "holy," and the entity that will ultimately set us free from our (ironically enough) Earth-bound troubles.

Though directed primarily to women, there is nothing here that precludes men from adopting Lee's recommended spiritual practices. And while the author occasionally waxes a bit poetic (perhaps even self-indulgently) about her own spiritual journey, the musings are sincere enough and don't intrude on the book's overriding message of spiritual growth and power. The bottom line is that Lee's philosophy makes sense in the face of global environmental crises, and her advice is easy to swallow.

"When we acknowledge that all of life is sacred and that each act is an act of choice and therefore sacred, then life is a sacred dance lived consciously each moment," says Lee. "When we live at this level, we fully participate in the creation of a better world" (84).