

The Shadow as Ally

with Caelum Rainieri and Ivory Andersen
by **Julia Griffin**

Most of us have used oracles in one form or another. We may draw an Angel or Medicine card for inspiration, gaze upon a Tarot layout in search of understanding on our Path, or consult the I Ching for insight into important questions. In fact, as we move through these End Times, more and more oracular decks are appearing, focusing on aspects of the new spirituality that were not emphasized in times past.

But now, in a kind of reversal of this forward-looking trend, Ivory Andersen and Caelum Rainieri have created the *Nahualli Animal Oracle*, a new deck that draws its symbolism from the spirituality of the Aztecs. Their purpose, they say, is to balance our current focus on the Light with a deeper and more compassionate understanding of the Shadow.

As a result of their work with the Aztec symbology, Ivory and Caelum have much to say about the Shadow, and especially how we might be able to work with it in a positive way.

Julia: How did you happen to start working with the Aztec symbology?

Caelum: It all began when we discovered the Nahualli — the Aztecs' animal double, or Shadow self. We all have the Nahualli side, they believed.

Of course, all energy can be used in positive or negative ways. Sex can be ecstatic or addictive. It's all about how we use the energy

But unlike the typical Shadow of Western culture, the Nahualli is actually an ally. It can support you.

Ivory: The rabbit, for instance, signifies a time to go underground, rest, and re-establish an energy flow. Taking time out for reflection is positive, not negative; and yet this is an Underworld symbol.

An example is the Red Dog. In Aztec mythology, for a period of four years the Red Dog leads the newly dead across a vast river and through a sort of Purgatory. This legend is similar to that of Anubis, who takes the dead to the Goddess Ma'at for the weighing of the heart. The Dog also is an Underworld creature, but it gives loyalty, protection, and guidance. Viewing the symbols in this way can help us to understand the Underworld in a different sense.

Caelum: There were two warrior societies in the Aztec culture, one based upon the qualities of the Jaguar, and the other, the Eagle. The Jaguar warriors were nocturnal; they were spies, with covert movements. The Eagle warriors raided in the light of day. They were rapid, truthful, and direct.

Even today, many martial arts traditions are based on the fighting movements of animals. For

example, in the Indonesian Tiger Silat, you begin by practicing the tiger movements. But once you have mastered these moves, you make contact with the tiger itself. The tiger "Nahualli" fights through you.

In the same way, the Aztec Jaguar warriors absolutely identified with the Jaguar, and the Eagle warriors with the Eagle. Energetically, they became the totem animal.

Julia: How do we figure out what animal wants to be our ally?

Ivory: In the Aztec culture, there were priests who had the knowledge of binding animal and human spirits. The priest would perform a ceremony and tell the person which animal would become his totem.

There are recognizable signs that an animal may be your totem. You might feel either a strong repulsion or attraction to it. Dreams might be an indicator, or you might look inside to see if you have feelings toward a particular animal.

And of course you can also use oracular decks, like ours or the Medicine Cards, to find out about your animal totem.

If an animal becomes your totem, you would work with it on your own. You would ask it questions, form an attachment to it, study its habits and territory. Hopefully, you would begin to dream of the animal and receive insights from it.

Julia: How might a Nahualli help us? And how would we know if it did?

Caelum: Here's an example from my own experience, when the wolf Nahualli aided me in finding an answer I'd been seeking.

At that time, we were creating runes based upon the Egyptian alphabet, and it seemed impossible for me to find the correct symbol for Osiris, a deity with whom I have a close connection. The symbol had to be absolutely correct!

I decided to meditate on Osiris. And that same day, I was also planning a visit to a wolf sanctuary.

When I did the meditation, I received an indication that I would be given a strong message on my return trip from the sanctuary.

So we went to the wolf haven, had a wonderful time with the wolves, and took many photographs. And that afternoon, when we had the photographs developed, we found one that was very striking. It showed this black wolf lying on the ground, with a white, triangular shadow extending out just below his head — it was a photographic glitch of some kind.

Because the black wolf is so strongly associated with Osiris, I knew this was a clue to the rune shape I was seeking.

Later that afternoon, I found an old book on Egyptology that showed the symbol of a triangle representing Osiris. So I knew that this was the answer to my question. And it was through the black wolf that I had received this answer.

Julia: I understand that Barbara Hand Clow, who helped publish your book through Bear & Company, claims that the energies of the universe speak to us through oracles. How does this work?

Ivory: There are many ways of thinking about that. One belief is that there are deities, or archetypes, that are part of the human experience, and that these archetypes actually speak to us through the oracle.

Others believe that archetypes are forms of energy that we can interpret. And still others believe that an oracle is a vehicle to carry our own thoughts, emotions, and heart.

For me, oracles are a voice to the hidden aspects of the human psyche. An oracle can show places of balance and imbalance within each of us, giving tools to change that reality.

Caelum: I believe that oracles can work either way — through the higher self, or by aligning one with archetypal energies. I also think that they work according to one's individual belief system. If you have strong beliefs about how the oracle works, it will respond to those beliefs.

But there's another dimension. When we look at the shapes, pictures, and colors in a beautiful oracular deck, they take us into a sensual, intuitive world that opens the heart. Simply by meditating on the pictures, we may find doorways to strength and wisdom.

Julia: How do you recommend using an oracular deck?

Caelum: A very simple method is to ask for guidance — for example, "What forces, animal, or energy should I work with during the next lunar cycle?"

Then fan the cards out and select one or more that seem "warm" to you. Once you have selected a card, you could simply read the information about that card in the book that comes with the deck. Or you might want to meditate on the card itself, as I suggested before. Many decks have beautiful, intricate images that may be used for a meditation tool.

Or you might want to carry the card on your person.

Ivory: Personally, instead of drawing a card, I like to use meditation. I visualize the ancestral fire and call upon the ancestral forces. Then I ask an animal to appear to help with whatever situation or time period I want to know about.

I might ask, "What animal should I work with for my best and highest good during the next lunar cycle," or "What animal can best help me with this problem?"

An animal will appear. I meditate on the animal, and ask what it has to show me. What does it have to teach me?

I may write down what I learn. And I will always thank the animal for its help and wisdom, affirming and confirming that I have received its help.

In following through with a process like this, many amazing synchronicities may occur in our lives.

Julia: You say that the Nahualli, or Shadow, can actually become an ally. How can we enlist this kind of help?

Caelum: It's important to develop mutual respect. We have to stop thinking we have dominion. In fact, we are sharing this Earth. We are no more a part of nature than the animals are.

If we can move toward innerconnectedness with animals, we can open doors to understanding both ourselves and them.

Ivory: I always knew that animals were sentient and had souls. They are just as important as humans, perhaps more so. And as I studied multi-cultural religion and mythology, I saw that animals are a part of our spirituality. They are an important aspect of our own divinity.

So when we take from the animals as Nahualli, it is just as important that we give back. We have to make a symbolic sacrifice for the energy that they give to us.

A symbolic sacrifice can be money, time, emotions, or energy. This is part of the pact we make with Nahualli when we accept their help.

In the Western culture, there is an idea of cost. I'm not talking about cost, but a "give-away" from the heart to help animals in some way.

We could be working to preserve a habitat for animals, for example, or to reduce animal suffering.

If we want the Nahualli to be our allies, we would also want to help them in every way that we can.

Ivory Andersen and **Caelum Rainieri** have been teaching classes in indigenous magical traditions, animal totemism, and mythological archetypes since 1992. They live in the Pacific Northwest. Ivory and Caelum may be reached by email at Andersen-Rainieri@earthlink.net.

The cards images were done by Ralph Montoliu, an artist and illustrator with a lifelong involvement in Native American art, mythology, and spirituality. He lives in Lakeport, California.

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