

Mikkel Aaland



"It's All an Adventure"

Do Rocks Have a Spirit?

I have a thing for rocks. I like to photograph them, I like to throw water on them in the sauna and feel a blast of invigorating steam. I like leaning my back up against them on chilly sunny mountain day hikes. I like picking up rocks with odd shapes and colors from an ocean beach or the banks of a mountain stream. I like to pluck rocks from magical places, like the slopes of Mt. Kailash, the Tibetan holy mountain, and make presents out of them for my friends.

Two of my favorite books are [Megaliths](#) by Paul Caponigro, and [Within the Stone](#) by Bill Atkinson. Linda Connor's 2018 exhibit at the Haines Gallery [Speak to the Stones, and the Stars Answer](#) took my breath away. (A selection of Linda's work was also exhibited last May at the [Nordic Light Festival of Photography](#) in Norway.)

What is it about rocks?



I found this rock rack on a walk around our neighborhood. Remember when "pet rocks" were so popular in the mid 70s?

Sweat Rocks

In 1978, in my book *Sweat*, I wrote:

Many sweat bath cultures discovered that rocks could absorb the power of fire, and thereby acquired spiritual significance. The Omaha Indians, for example, referred to the rocks as Grandfather, symbol of earthly endurance, and moved them from the fire into the revered sweatlodge. When water was splashed over the rocks, the vapor produced became another medium for the transfer of heat and another object of worship. The Finns named this vapor löyly, spirit of life. The Fox, another American Indian tribe, believed that Manitou, a friendly spirit, dwelled inside the rocks and was released through the vapor to penetrate the skin of the bathers and drive out sickness.

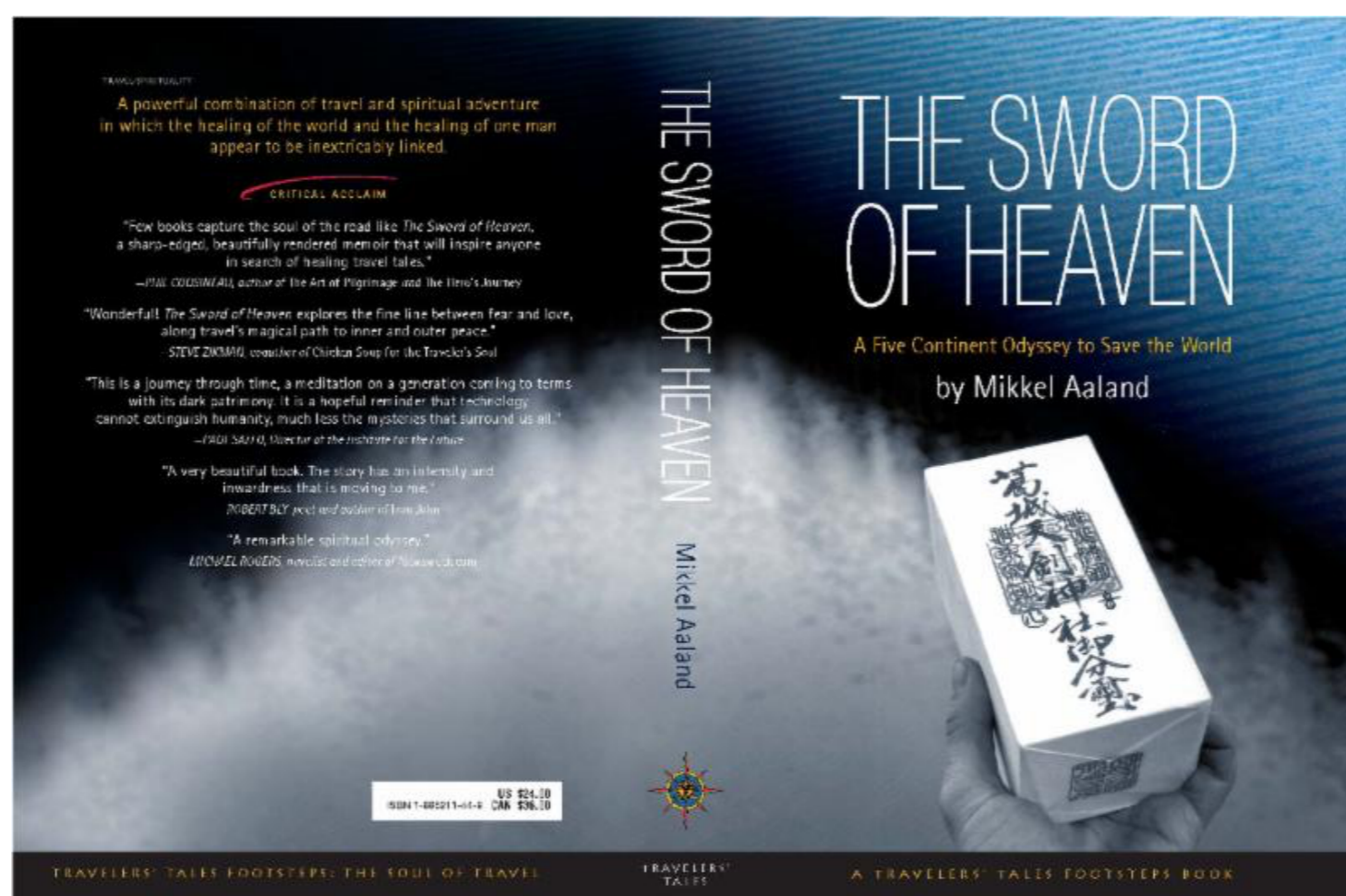


The best sweat bath rocks are those least exposed to weather. Certain quarried rocks are therefore the strongest. Peridotite from Finland is very popular but Norway has its own sweat bath rocks as well!

As anyone who has experienced a sweat bath knows, the type of rock makes a huge difference in the sweat experience. Rocks have human-like traits. River rocks are temperamental. They often contain moisture that expands when heated, causing the rock to crack or even explode. Rocks with a lot of iron are stingy, they don't produce a satisfying steam. Think of what happens to water when it is dripped on a hot plate: it beads up and rolls away. Even the strongest rocks are mortal. After constant heating and cooling even they will eventually crack and crumble.

Shinto Rocks

In the early 80s I was drawn into a mysterious project originating in Japan with a group of Shinto priests that challenged my western Judo/Christian beliefs. They worshipped nature and ancestors, and believed trees and waterfalls, and even rocks, can have a spirit. They called these spirits *kamis*. I spent a good part of the 80s connected to this group, traveling all over the world, dropping off *kamis* they believed would protect the world from nuclear destruction. (My adventure is chronicled in [The Sword of Heaven](#), Travelers Tales, 1999.)



In the cover photo I am holding a *kami* containing a fragment of a holy sword encased in stone and covered in cloth.

My father was a scientist at a nuclear research facility and I was heavily influenced by his rational approach to life. My experience with Shintoists (and Native Americans) opened my eyes to a more inclusive approach. The question is, how do I reconcile the two?

Vibrating Rocks

A few weeks ago I came across an article titled **Could consciousness all come down to the way things vibrate?** It's from a web site called the [Conversation](#) and I think it provides a bridge I've been looking for between science and *kamis*.

Here are some of the key points from the article:

"All things in our universe are constantly in motion, vibrating. Even objects that appear to be stationary are in fact vibrating, oscillating, resonating, at various frequencies."

"Based on the observed behavior of the entities that surround us, from electrons to atoms to molecules, to bacteria to mice, bats, rats, and on, we suggest that all things may be viewed as at least a little conscious. This sounds strange at first blush, but "panpsychism" - the view that all matter has some associated consciousness - is an increasingly accepted position with respect to the nature of consciousness."

"The panpsychist argues that consciousness did not emerge at some point during evolution. Rather, it's always associated with matter and vice versa - they're two sides of the same coin. But the large majority of the mind associated with the various types of matter in our universe is extremely rudimentary. An electron or an atom, for example, enjoys just a tiny amount of consciousness. But as matter becomes more interconnected and rich, so does the mind, and vice versa, according to this way of thinking."

I highly recommend reading the rest of the [article](#). Let me know what you think.



The Movement of Heaven is Full of Power.--I Ching

Mikkel Aaland Photo

This is one of a [series of photos](#) I took to illustrate *The Sword of Heaven*, inspired by a style of Japanese black ink drawing called *sumi-e*.

Print/Book Offer

I'm offering a limited number of signed 13x19 inkjet prints from my [sumi-e series](#) along with a hardback copy of *The Sword of Heaven*. If you are interested, send me an [email](#) and I will reply with details. (The book is also available separately through [Amazon](#).)

Why are You Receiving This?

As humans, we share 99.9 % of the same DNA but you and I are also connected in other ways. Maybe we met at a photography workshop or festival or perhaps we share a passion for saunas and open cold-water swimming. Maybe we sat together at a café somewhere and discussed the myth of Sisyphus or the purpose of life or perhaps we met on a wilderness trail or a river where I likely carried a fishing pole.

It could be we share the same commitment to family, community, and the pursuit of wellness or we are connected through my world-savvy wife, Rebecca or one of my world-trotting daughters Miranda and Ana Mikaela. Some of you may have received this because you were recipients of one of my previous mailings called World of Light.

If it is ok with you, I would like to use this medium from time to time to stay connected. My interests are wide ranging and so will be my posts. If that doesn't appeal to you, no worries. I totally understand. Just click on the Unsubscribe link below.

Coming Up

In subsequent communications I continue to offer my thoughts on photography, co-ed nudity, health benefits of sweat bathing and the consequences of ghost genes. I will introduce Fish Stories, and tell you about another new project I am working on: a moving stills homage to the legendary French filmmaker, Chris Marker, who would be 100 in the year 2021. And more... Hope you stick around.