



A Journal of

Contemporary Shamanism

**Australian Aboriginal
Wisdom**

Backyard Spirit House

**Firebird - Working
Shamanically With
Cancer Patients**

**The Place of
Reconciliation**

***Immrama*: Journeys
in Indigenous Celtic
Shamanic Practice**

***Ñust'as*: The Healing
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The Sacred Plant





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Tom Cowan is a shamanic practitioner specializing in Celtic visionary and healing techniques.

Tom Cowan is a shamanic practitioner specializing in Celtic visionary & healing practices. His work draws on the principles of core shamanism that can enrich our own lives and the lives of others. From his background in history and spirituality he brings the old ways of our ancestors into the modern world so that they can serve as a foundation on which to create a dynamic spiritual life. His teachings focus on natural elements, seasons, animal powers, landscapes, and poetry. He also evokes the wisdom woven into ancient myths and stories.

Go to Riverdrum.com for a list of Tom's workshops, trainings, retreats, and articles on various topics.



A Journal of

Contemporary Shamanism

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Cover Art: Where The Crows Turn
by Ross Lewallen

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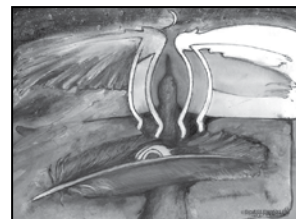
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Dear SSP Members and Subscribers:

Our Journal is slowly shapeshifting into a new form and look that we hope will appeal to our readers. Last year we introduced our new name: *A Journal of Contemporary Shamanism*. We believe this will reflect more accurately our call for more diverse articles on all forms and traditions of shamanism.

We are adding a new department: letters to the editor for which we have guidelines published below. Also, our hope is to publish more interviews with people who are doing exciting work in shamanism whether it be professionally, with drumming circles, or in their private daily lives. We are putting out a special call to SSP members to contribute articles about their shamanic living, which can be short essays or longer pieces.

We also want to welcome our new editors: Kay Kamala, Mary Pat Lynch, and Nita Renfrew. They have done a spectacular job on this current issue. And as always a hearty thanks to Jonathan Horwitz who has been our European editor and correspondent for the last several issues.

Tom Cowan
SSP Board Member and
Journal Editor-in-Chief

Bios of New Editors

Kay Kamala is an intuitive life counselor and student of varied spiritual traditions. She has been writing newsletters, forecasts and articles for her intuitive counseling practice for over 25 years and has done editing and research for several authors. Kay is the author of the e-book *Seven Voices, One Song: Relationship Compatibility Between the 7 Archetypal Roles*, published in 2010 by Power Path (www.thepowerpath.com). She lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Visit her website at www.kaykamala.com

Mary Pat Lynch is a writer and explorer of intuitive languages. Her academic background combined anthropology and education, and she designed instructional materials and worked with faculty on their teaching and writing for almost twenty years. She writes poetry, essays,

Guidelines for Submitting Letters to the Editor and Opinion/Editorial Contributions

Beginning with the Autumn 2014 issue of *Contemporary Shamanism*, we will be publishing Letters to the Editor, Op/Ed and Debate contributions from you, the readers. We are looking for responses to articles in *Contemporary Shamanism*, and also your personal views on any issues relevant to shamanic practitioners and living with a shamanic practice: for example contributions on shamanic ethics or shamanic tourism.

To begin, we invite you to send ideas about the relevance of core shamanism today. For example: What is Core Shamanism to you? How has core shamanism influenced your practice? Has core shamanism changed over the years? How does it relate to working with other shamanic traditions? Does shamanic work need to connect to ancestral land or can it be "rooted" in other ways?

Please send your thoughts to: Tom Cowan, cowanwoods@aol.com

Letters to the Editor should be no longer than 250 words, Op/Ed pieces can be up to 750 words. Due to space limitations, not all contributions may be published and contributions may be edited for length.

We hope you will take this opportunity to share your passions, questions and insights with the larger shamanic community and we look forward to receiving them.

The Editors

and fiction. Her work has appeared in *Parabola*, *PanGaia*, *Sagewoman*, *Rocky Mountain Dream Journal*, and online in *Earthsongs and Mythology*, as well as Llewellyn annuals. <http://threecauldrons.com>

Nita Renfrew has been an arts and public affairs consultant, an editor, and a writer / journalist and foreign affairs commentator for television and radio. For several years she was on the staff of a hospital and a medical facility doing shamanic energy healing, which she has taught in the U.S., Europe, Greenland, and Latin America. She is a Healing Prayer Minister in the Episcopal Church, an ordained Interspiritual Minister (CMH/OUNI) and shamanic practitioner, and is a research associate at the Coyote Institute. nitarenfrew@yahoo.com or (212) 879-3961

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Thank You, Carol Proudfoot Edgar and Sandra Ingerman!

Sandra Ingerman, MA (www.sandraingerman.com) is one of our founding board members. Sandra helped create SSP from the ashes of Shamanism In Healthcare conferences with other original board members and Bonnie Horrigan, our founding executive director. Sandra has brought all of her talent to help make SSP a place for shamanic practitioners and those with an interest in shamanism. She has been a voice of integrity and values, community building and outreach to practitioners. Sandra has taught at our gatherings, regularly written for our books, newsletter and journal, and has given fully of herself to making SSP a better organization. She has transitioned to our advisory board where she will continue to be a presence as one of our wise elders. Thank you, Sandra, for all that you have done to create and enliven SSP! We will miss you on our board, but know that you are still there for us.



Carol Proudfoot Edgar (www.shamanicvision.com) has served as an SSP board member for more than 10 years. During that time we have been gifted by her shamanic wisdom gleaned from her indigenous background and years of building shamanic community and gatherings. She was instrumental in creating our Shamanism Without Borders conference near Santa Cruz, California and contributed much to the *Shamanism Without Borders* book. Carol gave freely to our board and membership by asking the more difficult questions such as “what words are really trying to speak” as we followed the ebbs and flows of our board and member energy. We have enjoyed her soft presence and deep thinking. Thank you, Carol, for being you! We have enjoyed every minute of your guidance and work on the board.

Welcome to our newest Board Member, Genie Hobbs!

Genie Hobbs, LCSW is a shamanic practitioner and teacher who works primarily in the Denver area. She's been on a dedicated shamanic path for 15 years and has studied primarily with The Power Path School of Shamanism and with healers from the Huichol and Shipibo traditions.

Shamanism is an integral part of her day-to-day life and world view. Genie combines new thought with ancient indigenous wisdom so that her clients and students enjoy restored and invigorated connections to their hearts, their inner wisdom, and their personal power.

She also works as a psychotherapist and is passionate about supporting her clients as they remember who they are as beautiful and powerful reflections of Spirit.

Genie is excited about the opportunity to serve the existing membership of SSP and to introduce shamanic principles to a larger community. <http://www.theshamanicway.com> and <http://geniehobbs.com>



Ross Lewallen

by Sandra Ingerman

Ross Lewallen (1937 - 2014)

When Ross Lewallen transcended from his earthly home to the spiritual realms, some of us in his community in Santa Fe had the honor of being at his bedside to drum, rattle, and sing for him as he made his transition peacefully.

Ross was a brilliant shamanic practitioner and teacher. He lived in Santa Fe since the 1970's and had a well-known gallery where he sold his jewelry which he imbued with the power of the invisible realms. Each piece of jewelry and every painting held shamanic power to assist in healing and transformation. He brought healing, joy, inspiration, and magic into all his artwork and shared his craft generously with others.

When tourists came into his store, he would immediately start talking about shamanism and hand them a book about it. He was so enthusiastic about the subject of shamanic practice that one could not refuse his invitation to explore and learn more.

Over the years I have received letters from all over the world from people who wrote that after meeting Ross they either took a workshop on shamanism or had a shamanic healing with him or with another practitioner. All expressed gratitude for how his teaching and healing work influenced and changed their lives.

Ross was an extraordinary shaman, teacher, artist, jeweler, traveler, sailor, fisherman, father, grandfather, husband, and brother (to his men). He lived enthusiastically and joyfully. His eyes sparkled, and all who came into his presence felt loved and accepted without condition. He was always so kind and generous.

Ross's presence was a gift to the earth, and we will miss him. I know his love and laughter will continue to fill our hearts.

Sandra Ingerman

David Corbin

by Elaine Egidio

David Corbin (1953 - 2014)

I first met David Corbin in Phoenicia, New York in 1996 when he was assisting a Foundation for Shamanic Studies week-long training program. I was impressed by his calm demeanor, his sense of humor, and his kindness.

Over the years I have had many inspiring moments with him both as his student and later as an assistant for the workshops that he offered with his wife, Nan Moss. I have always been impressed by his calmness under many trying circumstances, incredible sense of rhythm, ability to inspire people in a gentle yet direct manner, and a sense of humor that never seemed to fail him. He shared his knowledge, connection, and deep love of the spirit world with many people.

I remember how David would lean forward to hear and engage workshop and training participants. He listened with his heart, with his connection to the spirits, and he never failed to make himself available to others to help them find their way through the spirit world.

With Nan, he spent years driving coast to coast and teaching weeks at a time to bring healing and inspiration to others. His work as an astrologer led both him and Nan into a deep love of the stars, the sky, clouds, and the ever-changing weather. David was a solid man who could hold space in this world while engaged in the world of spirits. He was a strong mentor, a dependable teacher and guide, a deep thinker, one who knew how to listen and be present with eyes that were kind and knowing.

Many people will miss him as a teacher, friend, and shaman.

Elaine Egidio

A Tribute to Angeles Arrien

by Bonnie Horrigan

Angeles Arrien (1940 - 2014)

Angeles Arrien, cultural anthropologist, award-winning author and educator, unexpectedly passed over on April 24, 2014. Angeles, who was one of the early pioneers of the transpersonal psychology movement, had served on the advisory board of the Society for Shamanic Practitioners since its inception.

Most people knew Angeles from her books, which include *The Four-Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary*; *Signs of Life: The Five Universal Shapes and How to Use Them*; *The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom*; and *Living in Gratitude: A Journey That Will Change Your Life*.

At Angeles' wish there will not be a public memorial. She requested that once a month on the anniversary of her passing (the 24th of each month), those wishing to honor her over this next year should light a candle and say a prayer.

*Bonnie Horrigan,
Founding Executive Director
Society for Shamanic Practitioners*



Australian Aboriginal Wisdom

By Hank Wesselman, PhD.

We Westerners live in a world of continual and unrelenting distraction. Our days begin with the newspapers in the morning, our work world during the day, and television, other entertainments, or the internet in the evenings. In addition, there are our self-promoting schemes and our ever changing lifestyles, replete with families and friends, restaurants and films and various cultural and endless sporting events, all of which are part of the multi-leveled template of distraction that we call life.

Accordingly, throughout our days, and our nights, our minds are never, ever still. The internal chatter in our heads continues to surge this way and that, dealing with our problems and our fears and our widely-flung networks of relationships with everyone, everywhere. In response to all of this, we Westerners worry... and we worry a lot.

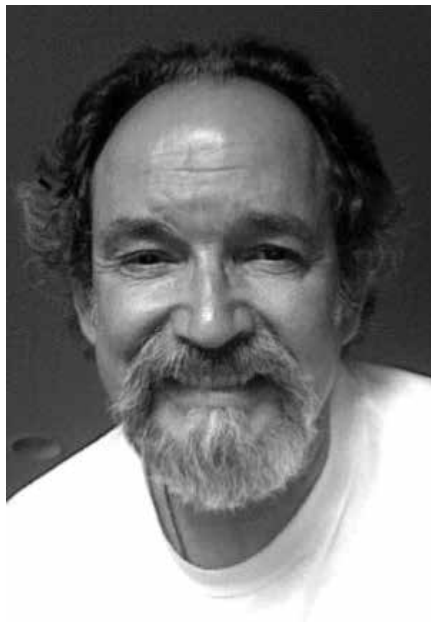
The Indigenous World

This brings me to consider a quite different state of being, one that the indigenous peoples of the world know well—a state that few in the Western world remember, although as I make this statement, I have to acknowledge that those worthies who have a meditation or yoga practice will know exactly what I'm talking about.

Among some of the Australian Aboriginal peoples, this state of being is known as "*dadirri*," a term that literally translates into English as "deep listening." Some information about this is included in [HYPERLINK "http://www.sharedwisdom.com/product/awakening-spirit-world"](http://www.sharedwisdom.com/product/awakening-spirit-world), *Awakening to the Spirit World* (by Sandra Ingerman and Hank Wesselman, 2010).

Several years ago, I received an email from some unknown soul—an unexpected missive that included the words of an Australian Aboriginal elder named Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann. I had never heard of her before, but as I read through her brief statement, I realized that her narrative was filled with power in its simplicity and directness. Miriam Rose's message is clearly for all of us, and so I share some of it with you here enhanced by some additional information about Aboriginal thought.

For starters, Miriam Rose defines the ability called *dadirri* as a special quality that allows each of us to make contact with a deep spring that lies within us. To connect with that spring requires that we achieve a state of quiet, still awareness. It is similar to what we Westerners call "contemplation" or "meditation." Shamanic practitioners know it well.



Dadirri

For the traditional Aboriginals, Miriam Rose proclaims that this contemplative focus permeates their entire way of life, their whole being—that *dadirri* continually renews them on a day to day basis, bringing them peace, creating harmony where there is disharmony, producing balance where there is imbalance, restoring health where there is illness.

There are no great hidden truths here, no "secret knowledge" hidden away for centuries, waiting for a bunch of New Age charismatics with PowerPoint presentations to rediscover them, excavate them, and write a book about them, proclaiming them as the solution to all our problems, personal and collective.

This woman's message conveys a simple and unmistakable truth—that the practice of *dadirri* makes the Aboriginals feel whole again. She shares that they cannot live good and useful lives unless they practice *dadirri* and that they learned how to do this from their ancestors.

As a Western anthropologist who has done considerable time in the indigenous world, I can appreciate this traditional woman's words. During my years spent among the tribal peoples of Africa, one of the things that I learned is that they are not threatened by silence. To the contrary, they are completely at home in it. Their traditional ways have taught them how to be still and how to listen to the silence. Accordingly, they do not try to hurry things up. Rather they allow them to follow their natural courses—like the seasons... and they wait.

So the Aboriginal woman's message from Australia conveys a familiar message as well as an extraordinary claim—that those Aboriginals still living in their traditional lifeways don't worry... that they never worry. They know that in the practice of *dadirri*, the deep listening and quiet stillness of the soul, that all ways will be made clear to them in time.

The Aboriginal Perspective

The traditional Aboriginals are not “goal oriented” in the same way that we Westerners are programmed to be from childhood, nor do they attempt “to push the river” which they know with absolute certainty is an exercise in absolute futility.

In Miriam Rose’s words: “We are like the tree standing in the middle of a bushfire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burnt, but inside the tree, the sap is still flowing and under the ground, the roots are still strong. Like the tree, we have endured the flames and yet we still have the power to be reborn.”

After more than 200 years of assimilationist practices inflicted upon them by church and state alike, the Australian Aboriginals are still here. They are used to the ongoing struggle and to the long waiting. In this sense, they still wait for the white people to understand them better. They have spent many generations learning about Western ways. They have learned to speak our language and have listened to what we have to say. Yet they continue to wait for us to come closer to them. They long for those things they have always hoped for—respect and understanding.

In Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann’s words: “We know that our white brothers and sisters carry their own particular burdens. We carry burdens as well. Yet I believe that if they let us come to them, if they would open up their minds and hearts to us and hear what we have to say, we might lighten their burdens. There is a struggle for all of us, but we, unlike them, have not lost our spirit of *dadirri*.”

She concludes her message by observing “I believe that the spirit of *dadirri* that we have to offer to the world will help you Westerners to blossom and grow, not just within yourselves, but within your nation as well.”

“There are deep springs within each of us and within them, there is a sound—the sound of the deep calling to the deep. The time for rebirth is now. If our culture and your culture are alive and well, as well as strong and respected, they will grow. In such a case, our culture will not die, nor will yours, and our spirits will not be lost. We will continue, together, as this was always meant to be.”

Aboriginal Philosophy

This wonderful statement reminds me of a paper I read years ago in an anthology called *Shamanism: Expanded Views of Reality* edited by Shirley Nicholson (1987). The paper is titled “The Dreamtime, Mysticism, and Liberation: Shamanism in Australia,” and it is authored by the Venerable E. Nandisvara Nayake Thero, PhD., then the chief Sanghanayaka of the Theravada Order of Buddhist monks in India.

A former professor of comparative religion at Madras University, as well as Director of the Maha Bodhi Society of Sri Lanka and Secretary General of the World Sangha Council, Dr. Nandisvara had recently returned from a research expedition with an anthropological team in Australia, where he had lived for some time with a native Aboriginal community—in his words, an extremely ancient race whose way of life (hunting and gather-

ing) had not substantially changed for perhaps 35,000 years.

In his report, Dr. Nandisvara makes an extraordinary statement.

“To those who judge the degree of (a) culture by the degree of (its) technological sophistication, the fact that the Australian natives live in the same fashion now as they did thousands of years ago may imply that they are uncivilized or uncultured.”

“However, I would suggest that if (a) civilization be defined (by) the degree of polishing of an individual’s mind and the building of his or her character, and if that culture (reflects) the measure of our self-discipline as well as our level of consciousness, then the Australian Aboriginals are actually one of the most civilized and highly cultured peoples in the world today.”

From his conversations with their shamans and spiritual elders, Dr. Nandisvara concluded that their spiritual tradition is highly advanced and that their religious beliefs are parallel with those found in the various branches of the Perennial Philosophy.

The Aboriginal elders told Dr. Nandisvara that the spirit of a human being is always in contact with the higher spiritual realms of being, even if there may be no awareness of this contact in one’s ordinary state of consciousness. They informed him that this gives to each one of us an extraordinary gift in that there can be direct communication between the human and the divine planes of being without the need for any ecclesiastical intermediary or priest.

In other words, in Aboriginal thought, there is quite simply no great impassable gulf between the human and the divine—a perception that is in direct opposition to most esoteric schools of theology, including Judeo-Christianity. This is why the Aboriginals had no need to develop any organized religion run by a bureaucratized and stratified priesthood. What they have instead is an authentic spiritual egalitarianism in which they, as individuals, can access the Dreamtime through trance, giving them direct and immediate access into the spiritual dimensions through the shamanic techniques of ecstasy.

This ability gives them an unshakable authority to make highly evolved philosophical observations. For example, like the religious thanatologies of other spiritual traditions, the Aboriginals describe the progression of human consciousness after death as “survival in infinity.” They know from direct experience that the individual point of contact with the infinitude of cosmic consciousness continues to expand after death until it is co-extensive with it... until it literally “becomes” it.

This is not a theory for the Aboriginals, nor is it a concept. It is a percept based upon their own direct experience, a revelation that is revealed also in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The Hindus and Buddhists use the word Samadhi to describe this state. The Aboriginals call it the Dreamtime, yet it is clear from their descriptions of it that empirically and phenomenologically, these states are the same.

Earth and Sky Philosophies

Dr. Nandisvara’s essay also reports that there is a tradition of personal spiritual aspiration in Aboriginal society that is similar

to that found in yoga. This is not surprising as the shamanic tradition is the ancestral precursor to all the yogic traditions.

The four stages of life in Hinduism are: *brahmacharya*—unmarried student; *grihastha*—married householder with children; *vanaprastha*—forest dweller; and *sannyasa*—wanderer. During the last years of their lives, many of the Aboriginal elders leave their communities and go off alone into the mountains to engage in spiritual practices, much as in the last two stages of the Hindu system which are characterized by solitary retirement to the forest, a striving for spiritual understanding, and preparation for death.

One of the techniques reported by Dr. Nandisvara practiced by such “renunciate Aboriginal elders” is gazing at the sky with wide-open eyes. This is not a type of astronomy or astrology. Rather it is a meditative method used to obtain spiritual inspiration and intuition directly from the cosmos.

In Buddhism, Yoga, Judeo-Christianity, and other relatively recent religious systems, “sky philosophies” predominate in which the concepts of space and sky deities are of greatest religious import. In opposition to this are the earlier religious as well as indigenous traditions in which “earth philosophies” were the norm, focused as they were upon the Earth as Mother as well as other earthly deities, power animals or fertility goddesses as the predominate objects of reverence.

Interestingly, in Aboriginal thought, both philosophies are present. The Earth is the basis for all spiritual studies during the first and intermediate stages of life. But with the approach of life’s end, the basic Earth study is completed and there is a refocusing of the still embodied spirit of the individual toward the boundless reaches of the sky.

Thus, for the Australian Aboriginals, the highest spirituality is associated not with the Earth, but with the shamanic Upper Worlds and with the infinity of space—with Cosmic Consciousness itself. This again is in complete alignment with the great teachings of the Perennial Philosophy.

At this stage, both the body and the mind have become absolutely still. This is not the same state associated with the chakras as described in kundalini yoga and the other esoteric schools, for it is beyond such experiences. It is in fact a withdrawal of energy from the chakras so that they no longer have any effect on the mind whatsoever.

This is the state of *dadirri*... the deep listening.

Dr. Nandisvara describes this state as the borderland between the mind that is connected to this world, and the mind that is not connected to this world—the mind that is absolutely free. It is the interface between the explicate and implicate orders of reality of the physicist David Bohm... the intimate one-on-one connection with the “higher self” of the mystic.

This is the state that the Aboriginal elders seek as they leave their homes and go off to live in the mountains to practice gazing at the sky. This is the shaman’s invitation to the spiritual cosmic force to approach and embrace the focus of our mind. It is and was and will forever be, union with the infinite—authentic non-dual mysticism.

Reconsidering Indigenous Wisdom

It is time, I think, to acknowledge that the indigenous tribal peoples were not and are not at some childlike form of awareness. Rather, the time has come for us allegedly “civilized” Westerners to seriously reconsider their worldviews and their spiritual practices. For their ways of being in the world have kept them and their societies alive and well for 40,000 years and more... while we who consider ourselves so highly evolved have only been here for a few hundred... and things are not going particularly well these days.

Dr. Nandisvara also discusses something else of interest...

Along their way to achieving the higher states of consciousness, the shamans in Aboriginal societies are able to develop various sorts of psychic abilities. They possess, for example, the capacity to travel out of the body across the sky in an altered state of consciousness and visit any place they wish.

It is also known among the Aboriginals that their shamans can journey to the moon, or to any other planet at any time they choose. This is why they were not particularly impressed when the Apollo missions flew to the moon and back. In fact, they failed to understand why we had needed machines to go there as they are both bulky as well as slow.

Dr. Nandisvara concludes his essay by observing (with considerable reverence) that those Aboriginals still involved in their traditional lifeways are so peaceful and quiet, as well as so harmoniously in tune with Nature and the spiritual dimension. By contrast, the rest of the world around them, including most of the so-called “civilized” societies, are in crisis, dominated by murder and mayhem, political mendacity and corporate greed, with people killing each other in the name of whatever god they espouse, exploiting the environment and their fellow living beings of this beautiful world, only some of whom happen to be human.

We could observe in passing that there is little doubt that we are the Romans of our time. Is it therefore surprising that Dr. Nandisvara, who some have called the “Pope” of India, has chosen to describe the native Australians as one of the most civilized and cultured peoples on the planet today?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hank Wesselman, PhD., is an anthropologist who has been involved in the search for human origins in the fossil beds of Ethiopia for over 40 years, a time that has allowed him to live for substantial periods with traditional peoples rarely, if ever, visited by outsiders. He is also the author of eight books on shamanism including *The Bowl of Light: Ancestral Wisdom from a Hawaiian Shaman*, the award-winning *Awakening to the Spirit World: The Shamanic Path of Direct Revelation* (with Sandra Ingerman); and his critically acclaimed *Spiritwalker Trilogy*. He lives on Hawaii Island where he and his family are involved with sustainable horticulture. Hank also offers shamanic training workshops at retreat centers across the US and abroad. Visit his website at www.sharedwisdom.com

THE PLACE OF RECONCILIATION

By Ellen Winner, J.D.

Last July, a few weeks after my seventieth birthday, I had a dream in which an authoritative male voice matter-of-factly announced, “God is calling you home.” In the dream, I found myself between and slightly behind two men I didn’t know, standing so that we formed a triangle. Another voice remarked that the three of us would be leaving together.

Fear of death has plagued me since childhood, so it was odd that it all seemed so ordinary. I would never personally have said, “calling you home.” Those were words for sanctimonious preachers or for church ladies to echo to each other with false assurance. Yet in the dream, they felt obvious and right, with no sense at all of whistling in the dark. Being “called home” was nothing more than a natural next step, something mildly pleasurable to look forward to.

I didn’t tell my family because I thought it would scare them, but made a note in my journal just in case. If anything happened, I wanted everyone to know I’d been “called home” rather than “snatched by the cruel jaws of death,” or “cut down by the grim reaper.” And now that months have passed since the dream, I’m no longer worried about waking up dead any time soon. It got my attention though – enough to investigate further.

Already familiar with Raymond Moody and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’s Perry’s *Life After Life*,¹ I now read neurosurgeon Eben Alexander’s *Proof of Heaven*² and Jeff Long and Paul Perry’s *Evidence of the Afterlife*³ and found several good websites.⁴ A common element of the near-death experience is a “life review” in which a loving spirit shows you, without judgment, scenes from your life when you caused harm to others. Fully experiencing the hurtful emotions you caused as if they were your own, you are moved to compassion. You are so deeply sorry for the pain you caused you have no desire even to try to justify your actions; and at the same time, you understand how your own pain and ignorance caused you to act that way and are able to forgive yourself. The loving spirit also lets you relive the kind acts you performed so you can fully realize how important they were.

Exploratory Journey to the Place of Reconciliation

In addition to learning about the near-death experiences of others, as a shamanic practitioner I felt compelled to investigate further with a journey to my own death. Imagining myself on my deathbed, I traveled upward, passing through a line of demarcation into a darkish place I took to be an “interworld”⁵

between the Middle and Upper Worlds in non-ordinary reality. There, stretching into the distance as far as the eye could see, was a scene of thousands of human heads and bodies like the views on television of massed protests in Egypt’s Tahrir Square. I understood that these were all the people who had shared the Earth with me during my life, and wondered briefly how the ones who were still alive on Earth could also be here in this after-death place. But it didn’t matter. There we all were, together in a gigantic crowd – middle-eastern men with beards, Africans, Asians, Americans, children, babies, women and men, of all ages, races and nationalities. Some I felt good about and some, like the Taliban men I could see in the far distance, could have been frightening, yet I felt no fear. The whole human mass was gently vibrating, jostling together as though settling in, reconciling to each other.

A surge of social anxiety triggered a temptation to come out of the journey until I heard a male voice say, “The principle of beauty applies here.” I refocused in non-ordinary reality. Everyone here was in it together. No one could escape, and in this place we no longer had power to do each other harm. There was nothing we could do but reconcile – accept each other as we were. That’s what the voice meant. We had to find beauty in this place because this was our whole reality and beauty was there to be found.

I began to sense the movement of compassion in the crowd as individuals focused on each other, feeling each other’s pain and grief as their own. This was a life review on a very large scale – but different from near-death experiences I’d read about because I wasn’t being asked to confront things I had personally done to hurt others. I had come into the journey with a strong need to understand dying, and now the compassionate spirits were showing me this place.

I knew it was real place in non-ordinary reality that others could visit, staying as long as they wished. The words, “The Place of Reconciliation,” sprang to mind like a recognition of its true name. As the journey ended, I knew I would be back.

The journey reminded me that compassion is a natural law for human beings. Despite the existence of selfishness and cruelty in the world (no one can deny that “survival of the fittest” is one of life’s operating principles), the highest law is love and connection. When we don’t feel scared or threatened – and in the Place of Reconciliation we don’t – compassion automatically arises.

You may be wondering what makes me so sure the place I reached in my journey is reliably compassionate and safe. What if a bully or criminal arrived there, someone so damaged they had no experience or capacity to care about the well-being of others? How could they be expected to suddenly begin feeling kindness and goodwill just because they had come to this Place? I can only say that in my journey I never thought to question my sense that bad behavior was impossible there – any more than I questioned the truth and basic kindness of the message in my dream that “God was calling me home.” If you journey to the Place of Reconciliation, you will experience it as it shows itself to you and see for yourself.

We are hard-wired to pay extra attention to the thoughts and emotions that help us react to threat. This is an ancient strategy to keep us alive in a dangerous world. Yet when not disturbed by threat, we naturally settle into a happy resting state. When physical death has already happened, where is the need to continue running instinctual behaviors to avoid it? I found the Place of Reconciliation in a journey beyond my own death, and that’s the only way short of actual physical death I know for anyone to reach it. It

makes sense to me that whoever arrives, no matter how brutalized by life, must succumb to its harmonizing forces.

Compassion is a tool, a skillful means for arriving at reconciliation, acceptance, and harmony with the rest of the universe, defined by Webster’s as “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” I would add that in the Place of Reconciliation compassion is more than a desire to relieve another’s suffering: it’s a heartfelt will to do so.

As a place of compassion, the Place of Reconciliation is a destination for healing, where shamans can journey for healing.

Based on my own impressions and reports from others I’ve introduced to this journey, visitors to the Place of Reconciliation discover a deep appreciation for the suffering of others and a strong and heartfelt will to make it better. They feel truly sorry. Their compassion can be so strong it sends out tendrils of force to surround and dig beneath the pain, lifting it out and away from a person’s soul.

Compassion can help you see your client as a hurt child and give free rein to your instinct to rush to his side and make the pain go away. In the Place of

Reconciliation that kind of compassion is the operating principle. It is the law. Everyone knows there’s no way out. They’re stuck there together with nothing to do but adapt and accept it as it is. No one has the power to harm anyone else, and no one can be harmed. The only movement possible is the movement toward beauty, harmony, and total reconciliation with what’s there. (Note that reconciliation, a movement toward life, is not the same as resignation, which is a giving up to the numbness of despair.)

Instructions for an Exploratory Journey to the Place of Reconciliation

Intent: to visit the Place of Reconciliation in non-ordinary reality to learn about it and experience the compassion there. Be open and willing to accept whatever happens and alert to witness kind, loving acts between beings in that Place.

You come to the Place of Reconciliation by right. It is a place in non-ordinary reality designed for you. You see it as your own. The others are there both for you and for themselves. You come as one of them.



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Travel upward to the Place of Reconciliation. Watch for a line of demarcation, probably not as definite as that between the Middle and Lower Worlds. Ask for a compassionate guide to meet you there. It can be an angel, sage, saint, religious deity, ascended master, ancestor, or friend who has passed on before you, or any other being of power who loves you unconditionally and whom you trust. The guide is to assist you in giving and receiving forgiveness and reconciliation.

Let this be a personal journey, just for you, to a place you will be taken after death for reconciliation with those who lived with you on earth – or since there's no time there, we could even call it a place where your reconciliation is going on right now. Your Place of Reconciliation may not look at all like the one I experienced. We all see things differently in our journeys.

Unity of All Things

“In shamanism, we repeatedly receive messages from our spirits that everything is alive and able to communicate. And the more we journey, the more our spirits teach us lessons of unity with a loving universe.”⁶

Thaddeus Golas, an intrepid LSD cosmonaut of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, who well understood the unity of all beings, wrote about his acid trips to help his brothers and sisters on this dangerous path deal with bad trips. A marvelous teaching he brought back was, “Love is the action of being in the same space with other beings.”⁷ In the Place of Reconciliation, we have no choice but to be in the same space with other beings. Our willed action of going there and our commitment not to leave is an act of love.

Golas describes how consciousness can expand to a level he calls “space,” or the One Mind, where we feel at one with all life. The One Mind, by definition, has a place and space within it for every being and everything that happens. If we fail to recognize a part of all that is and dismiss it as ugly, low, stupid, or unworthy of our acceptance in whatever

way, we deprive ourselves of access to the wisdom, power, and love contained in that part and basically create a shadow that won't go away until we accept it. When we journey to the Place of Reconciliation, we deliberately put ourselves into the same space with beings we failed to fully accept in the past, with the intent to accept them now (which is the same as saying the intent to love them now).

A Healing Journey to the Place of Reconciliation

Annoyed by chronic back and rib pain one evening shortly after my first journey to the Place of Reconciliation, and aware of Thaddeus Golas's teaching that pain is the experience of not being able to get into the same space with others,⁸ I thought of returning to seek relief. I could certainly use a little compassion.

This time I found the Place subtly changed – less dark and a little higher up – as though progress had been made in the reconciliation process since my first visit. I felt a greater sense of harmony. My body spread out, expanding to include within its boundaries every one of those multitudes who shared the earth with me in life. Focusing on the beings in my back and ribs where it hurt, I felt their compassion for me and for each other as they continued to harmonize, engaged in a process of recognizing each other's presence and consciously replacing feelings of antagonism or resistance with acceptance. They were willing to be in the same space as my pain; they felt compassion for my suffering and each other's; and their love and acceptance lessened my pain.

A good strategy for dealing with pain is to stop resisting and accept it. You can test this out for yourself if you happen to burn your finger. Instead of rushing to the faucet to numb it with cold water, focus on it. Concentrate as the pain comes up, reaches its peak, and then recedes. It will be gone in much less time than if you tried to avoid feeling it. In my journey, all I had to do was focus on the pain and notice that spirits in my back and ribs were present and feeling compassion, and something shifted to

lessen the pain.

Becoming aware of spirits who live inside your body at the site of pain and making a space for them to reconcile is always a good strategy for dealing with both physical and emotional pain. If you take a step back and look at the pain objectively, you'll notice it's arising simultaneously with resistance to it. As shamans we know that everything has a spirit, and that includes both the pain and the resistance. You can have compassion for both these spirits. In the Place of Reconciliation you find extra support for bringing these warring spirits into acceptance of each other.

The Place of Reconciliation can also help deal with after-effects of trauma. The consequences of trauma can be greatly alleviated by administering psychological first aid at the time of the trauma. If someone is there at the time of the injury to comfort a victim of disaster or battle, the long-term need for treatment is lessened. (In shamanic terms, the effects of soul loss are reduced.) First responders are taught to show immediate compassion, engaging with victims and ensuring their safety and comfort. In the Place of Reconciliation, outside time, you may be given psychological first aid as you re-experience a trauma in the presence of healing compassion. When you come out of the journey, you may notice the memories of the trauma in your body and mind have become less insistent.

Instructions for a Healing Journey to the Place of Reconciliation

Intent: to journey to the Place of Reconciliation in non-ordinary reality and ask for healing of pain you have. It can be physical or emotional. It can be anything from a chronic back pain to a constant negative reaction you've been having to a situation or person in your life.

Identify where in your body the problem is. Locate the physical pain, or if you want to work with a chronic negative reaction or emotion, allow yourself to feel the emotion fully, and then ask, “Where in my body do I feel this most strongly?”

Then visualize that part of your body and work there. You can identify the place in your body before you start the journey or wait until you're in the journey to scan your body and find the place of pain. Pain often moves around, and you can follow it if you need to. But begin by locating a place to start where the pain seems most intense and work with the beings you find there.

At the Place of Reconciliation ask to meet at least two beings who are most involved with your pain. It may be that merely recognizing them and knowing they're working with compassion in this Place of Reconciliation will make the pain go away; or you may have to give them a little help to reconcile with each other. You can simply remind them that you are all here together in the Place of Reconciliation where compassion is the law, and ask them to make friends with each other, accept each other fully, and be willing to be in the same space with each other.

No judgment, no straining to get rid of anyone – not even a spirit of someone who hurt you in the past or someone you quarreled with, rejected, and could never forgive. In the Place of Reconciliation, you are able to forgive and be forgiven for everything.

You might ask to see both the spirit who's resisting the pain and the spirit who seems to be causing it by trying to arise and be noticed. Acceptance and love, the action of being in the same space with the other beings, is what happens here.

You may find a male and female spirit at odds with each other in the painful place in your body. Let them know that all acceptance is here and if necessary, help them reconcile their differences.

You can do this type of healing process in the Middle World without journeying anywhere except inside your own body, but the results are supported and magnified by doing it in the Place of Reconciliation where every being is willfully exercising compassion and learning to accept all that is.

A Journey to the Place of Reconciliation for Healing for Another

The Place of Reconciliation can also be a place where shamans take others to be healed. Asked to do shamanic work for a friend who suffers from “altered cells” in his brain that cause short black-out seizures, I decided to journey to see if healing would be there for him.

Again I traveled upward from the middle world, this time merged with a lower world helper and carried my friend's reclining body in my arms like a sick child. I had to go even higher than before to find the line of demarcation between the Middle World and the Place of Reconciliation. Crossing it easily, I saw that the crowd had grown larger. People's heads and bodies stretched so far into the distance they looked like the tops of pine trees on a mountain seen from an airplane at twenty thousand feet. I questioned whether we were in the right place. Puffy dark clouds moved in and blocked the scene, and I felt us floating even higher. When the clouds cleared I could make out individual people nearby with compassionate helping spirits bending over to help them, and knew we had reached the right place.

I asked for healing for my friend and sensed we were inside

his skull, my helping spirit and I, surrounded by his distinctly identifiable but diffuse spirit. I became aware that many, many of his ancestors were here inside the skull with us. At first they seemed uncomfortable with each other, trying to avoid physical contact, but this was the Place of Reconciliation so I knew they'd soon settle down and start accepting each other. As this happened, disembodied feelings of love began to arise. I simply witnessed, feeling what was going on. When it was time to come back, the harmonization was still in progress, so I left my friend and spirit helper there and returned to ordinary reality, knowing they would gently return when the process was complete.

As in both my previous journeys to the Place of Reconciliation, things seemed to happen without my active participation, confirming that this was indeed a Place of Power. I knew I couldn't have created it by myself with my own little imagination.

As all shamans know, the spirits are always happiest when we work to help someone else. You can bring others in need of healing to the Place of Reconciliation and ask the spirits there to help them.

Instructions for a Journey to the Place of Reconciliation to Heal Another

Intent: to take another person (referred to here as the “client”) to the Place of Reconciliation and ask the compassionate spirits to heal them.

If you know someone in need of healing, ask if they would be willing to journey with you to the Place of Reconciliation and open themselves to any healing that's available. Have them describe a pain they're experiencing, physical or emotional, and encourage them to locate it in their body and tell you where it is. If they are unable to locate an emotional issue in their body, it's not necessary to press them. The spirits will know where the healing work is needed.

Bring your client with you to the Place of Reconciliation. Ask for compassionate spirits to be present and for a healing for your client.

If you can see or sense spirits that are causing the pain in your client's body, surround them with your love and express your compassion to each one individually, letting them know how very, very sorry you are for their suffering. Remind them that you are all in the Place of Reconciliation where compassion is the law.

If you are called to take an active part in the healing, you might model the acceptance and compassion you want the beings involved in your client's pain to show toward each other. In the Place of Reconciliation, you can put yourself right inside your client's pain and feel yourself digging it out, scraping it out, lifting it out, concentrating your whole soul on making your client whole and well and happy.

This kind of compassion can feel like a physical force – an energy you could almost cut with a knife. It's that powerful.

You may be given details about the causes of your client's pain and how the healing is being accomplished. Accept whatever you learn without judgment. If you are not given such details, simply

trust that the healing is taking place. Healing that takes place in Consciousness like this is the most effective there is. Healing at this highest level automatically results in physical and emotional healing at lower levels of being.

* * *

It's not clear how many people still in bodies have been allowed to visit the Place of Reconciliation, but these journeys have been tried with good results in healing circles I belong to. The need we have on earth for this Place of Reconciliation is great, and surely the compassionate spirits there are moved by our suffering and want to help. The more we visit and use this Place for healing, the more powerful it will become.

Endnotes

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellen Winner, J.D., Certified Shamanic Counselor® lives in Boulder, CO and practices and teaches core shamanism, serving as Guest Faculty for the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. She apprenticed with indigenous Himalayan shamans in Nepal and organized and facilitated the First Annual Colorado Cross-Cultural Shamanic Conference in 2013. Author of *World Shaman* and *Thoughts in the Mind of God*, she works during the day as a Patent Attorney. www.worldshaman.org.

Maryphyllis Horn

M.Ed., Certified Therapist, Interfaith Metaphysical Minister, was a high school award-winning choral music teacher for 31 years. She is now a spiritual/shamanic counselor and healer in private practice in North Carolina since 1995. In this book she reveals her profoundly soul-healing modality of Ancestral Lines Clearing that she channeled initially in 1996.



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The Sacred Plant

by Pat Tuholske, Naturalist

The Shaman Hunts the Plant

The shaman healer stalks the forest, searching for a plant remedy. A person of the tribe has asked for treatment of aches in the joints, sadness of heart and disconnected confusion. The people have relied on the healing plants of this forest for thousands of years. The shaman's feet have walked these woods for many seasons, seeking the wisdom of the wild healing plants. During her medicine walk, she calls out to the spirits who tend the plants that one may give of its power to the sick person.

With her green vision, the shaman sees one plant flutters without wind. The plant glows in the shadows and whispers a song. Plant spirit has spoken. The wise woman identifies the plant as one first learned as a child from a grandmother long ago on an herbal teaching walk. This plant is one of many used by the forest shaman, this one's unique healing power will soothe the sickness.

An offering is made, thanks is given and the plant is tenderly harvested. Prayers of gratitude are made to the spirits of the land for showing the way to help the soul of the sick one. The plant is prepared with care and administered to the tribal member. The sickness that began first in the soul and is now reflected in the body is comforted.

This was the path of our shamanic ancestors. They listened to the plants for healing advice. Herbal knowledge was passed on from generation to generation. We owe our current wealth of herbal knowledge to their application of what they heard from the

plants themselves. And this is still the practice of some present day indigenous healers.

When I first started studying herbalism, I read books cover to cover, searched through indexes, worked correspondence courses, and experimented on friends and relatives. With piles of herb books beside my bed, I'd even dream of herbs. Hours were spent in the Ozark woods and fields with identification guides. Falling in love with the plant, in my early twenties I received my degree in horticulture. Immersing myself in the plant world, I'd found my passion.

One day I closed the books. Feeling I was relying too much on the written words of someone else, I announced to the plants that I wanted to learn



Me and the plant spirits: John took this photo of me while I was gathering goldenseal. Notice the spirit hovering just above my open palm?

directly from them. I wanted them to be my teachers. At that moment, I felt a deeper connection and the spirits of the plants began to talk to me.

"Watching gardeners label their plants, I vow with all beings to practice the old horticulture and let the plants identify me." Robert Aitkin.

Weeds at the Door

I hunt weeds. Searching the ground around house and barn, I track the weeds that have become perennial old friends...Plantain, Yellow Dock, Sheep Sorrel. Seeking fresh plant partnerships, I greet the newcomers that have found their way to me this year...Violets, Red Clover, Mullein.

I eat weeds. I add Chickweed to salads, Lambs Quarters to soups, Violet Flowers to eggs, Nettles to stews. My body is hungry for the nutrition in weeds. My cells recognize and utilize every part of this wild food. Maximum nutrition is absorbed. Vital energy is ignited. My body is nurtured, my spirit filled. I have the power to live the life I love.

I heal with weeds. The weeds at my door are my remedies. Yellow Dock cleanses my liver. Burdock keeps my blood and skin healthy. Black Walnut sharpens my brain function. Dandelion plays with my joyous child. With Mugwort, I dream.

A "weed" is merely a plant growing where it is not wanted. As an herbalist, I work around my weeds. Some I encourage to come back year after year, while others may thrive for only one summer. My gardens are fairly full of "weeds" that are powerful medicinal na-

tive plants and nutritional natural food. I love the wildness and the adventure of watching which green weed friend will grow with me.

The weeds growing at your doorstep have come to help your spirit. Disease is often a symptom of soul sickness. Looking outside your own door, you will find nature offers the cure. The weeds at your door are a reflection of what you need to heal in yourself. Make friends with them, identify them, and ask about their healing qualities.

We have disconnected from the weed world. We eradicate them with poisons, battle them with diggers, and smother them with mulch. We have done the same with our own essence, our true heart. We don't listen to our bodies. We shut out our inner longings. Often we make the mistake of fighting the weeds at the door that can help us find our center.

Weeds are the footprints of the helping spirits in nature. Learn to interpret the language of the weed before you kill a potential plant ally. Those with an alert eye and a willing heart can follow their path to a happy heart and sound soul.

Wild Plant Medicine

The wild plants in our natural environment can make us strong and healthy. We share with them the wind, sun, seasonal changes and earth energy. In our global society, we often turn to herbs growing on the other side of the planet. Nevertheless, the weed at your own door may be the best healing herb for your condition. I believe in the power of our native wild plants.

I deeply respect the knowledge and medicinal herb research assembled over 50,000 years by indigenous shamanic healers. We cannot dismiss this valuable wisdom that has been collected in cultures all over the world. These healers kept the human race alive by applying the knowledge they received from the plants.

The current revival of "Essiac" is proof of the medicine in native weeds. Essiac is a blend of Burdock Root, Sheep Sorrel, Slippery Elm Bark and Rhubarb Root. The formula was given to a Cana-

dian nurse in 1920 by a Chippewa medicine man. The nurse's name was Rene Caisse. Essiac is her last name spelled backwards. Rene helped hundreds of cancer patients with these humble plants. The Essiac herbs grow wild in Ozark fields and forests.

Herbs maintain the balance of body, mind, heart and spirit. Using herbs over a period of time brings health and well-being. Be committed and consistent, taking the appropriate herb one month for every year the condition has been present. A symptom is not suppressed as with the use of prescription drugs. Herbs support the body to heal itself deeply and at its own pace.

Consult a qualified healer before attempting self-diagnosis. Herbs can harm if taken too long, too strong or combined incorrectly. Herbs can sometimes interact with prescription drugs. Some herbs may have unwanted side effects. Work with a knowledgeable herbalist. Educate yourself to the proper dosage and right plant that will remedy you. Each of us is unique and an herb that helps one may not help the other. Know your body and which herbs are your allies.

Herbs are very effective and deserve our respect. Don't take them for granted just because they are found on every store shelf today. Thirty-five years ago when I first started in the business of herbs, I had to explain what an herb was. Never did I think I'd see the day when medicinal herbs could be purchased at the local store.

Buy herbs from a store that circulates the herbs quickly. Medicinal herbs lose their potency after one year. If you buy your herbs from a busy healthy food store or a reputable herb company, chances are better that they will be fresh and potent. Best yet, grow or gather your own.

Buy only organic or ethically wildcrafted plants. Imported herbs are fumigated at the shipping docks as they enter our country. The pesticides that have been banned here in the US, we ship to other countries and they come right back to us on our food, herbs and coffees. Never consume an herb that has been gathered from a roadside or near a

railroad track. These areas have a high concentration of chemical pollution. Know where your herbs come from.

Many local herbs have been overgathered by enthusiastic wildcrafters. There are plant hunters who are in it only for the buck and sell to the highest bidder. Echinacea, St. John's Wort and Sheep Sorrel are stolen from roadsides. Ginseng and Goldenseal are poached from woodlands. Plants are harvested at the wrong time of year, reducing medicinal potency. All the plants are removed, leaving none to reseed the plant community. An ethical wildcrafter takes only what is needed at the proper time of year and leaves the patch to easily recover. I always encourage students to leave an offering of thanks and to never harvest the oldest plants.

There are hundreds of wild native medicinal herbs and it can seem overwhelming. Start your studies with a few...five or so. Learn the medicinal properties, the botanical names, how they look and smell, where they grow, which part is used (leaf, flower, bark, root), the time of year they should be harvested and how your body responds. You will find yourself developing an intuitive relationship with your plant allies and feeling a stronger connection to the blessings of the earth you walk upon.

Go to the wild native plants of the forest and field when you feel bad. Quiet your thoughts and critical thinking. One will choose to speak to you if you choose to listen. Learn about your plant and how you can use it. Respect its power. Plants are great teachers and healers. They treat more than our symptoms. They heal our soul.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pat Tuholske is a Missouri Ozark forest dweller working with herbal medicine and practicing shamanism for four decades. She is the crafter of Willow Rain Herbal Goods providing remedies and wreaths made from the wild native plants of her Ozark mountain farm.



Firebird — Working Shamanically with Cancer Patients

Diana Denke talks with Magda Rohanszky

Hungarian psycho-oncologist Magda Rohanszky talks with Shamanic Practitioner Diana Denke about her longstanding practice in bringing a spiritual aspect to conventional cancer treatment.

When did you first come into contact with shamanism?

I must have been around 40, and for me it was a period of change. I had to decide which way to go, whether to continue to do executive coaching and trainings for big corporations, alongside of my conventional psychotherapy practice. Or, instead, to include a spiritual element and make healing my path. This was the time when I began to get interested in metaphysics, learned Bach flower therapy and met shamanism. Shamanism caused me a lot of trouble!

It has always been of utmost importance for me to comprehend causality, to see the links between phenomena and to gain understanding. I had a materialistic approach to life and it caused me enormous difficulty to take in something that I didn't understand. My teacher, Jonathan Horwitz, had a substantial role in my integration of shamanism. He was giving workshops in Hungary two or three times a year then, and I was organizing them.

There was a big resistance in me at the time, towards religion mostly, but also toward spirituality. I wasn't really considering the difference between religion and spirituality. Then I met Buddhism, and almost simultaneously shamanism, and something started to slowly change. Shamanism, as Jonathan shared it, offered a very pure path. One that connected me with my own powers and that offered to consciously build and strengthen them with the help of my spirits.

How does shamanism fit into your psychotherapeutic work?

As a psychologist, I try to find a scientific explanation and understanding for the phenomenon experienced. While in my shamanic work, I come into direct contact with the powers of

nature and the happenings of the hidden world that is around us. In fact, it is mostly conceptual or methodological differences that I come across between psychotherapy and shamanism, but essentially they are about the same thing: empowering people, unlocking their potential so that they can be masters of their own lives.

Because I work as a psychotherapist, shamanic counseling fits the best with my approach. This method helps the clients to be disciplined and focused. It enables us to go deep quickly. However the most difficult phase is the last one, when the insight from the journeys are put into practice in daily life. This is also the most difficult part of the psychotherapeutic process. Many times this is the point when the work fails: there is a good mission formulation, a successful journey, the key teachings are unlocked and understood - but it is never put into practice!

Tell me about your work with Firebird

Firebird was born some eighteen years ago, on the first shamanic counseling course that I attended. I was in a very difficult life situation at the time. Looking back, it was a mid-life crisis, I would say. In one of the journeys my spirit helpers dismembered me and threw me into the fire. I came to be re-born from the flames, just like a Firebird, the Phoenix.

Coming home, I contemplated how to integrate the quality of the Firebird into my life. Firebird first came into life as a crisis center for the middle-aged. It hosted individual therapy sessions, shamanic counseling and courses for self-development. It offered an opportunity for patients to re-define themselves, to let go of the old, and to start anew.

Then, in 2001, I was contacted by a Professor of Oncology, who invited me to work as a psycho-oncologist in his cancer ward. I asked for time to think it through and traveled to India. The one and a half months spent in India was a big learning experience about myself. I found myself in a completely new environment compared to the one I grew up in and lived in until that point. I learned how vulnerable I could become when faced with situations where different rules apply.

Thinking about it, I realized that newly diagnosed cancer patients, when entering the health system, must feel a similar vulnerability to what I had felt in a totally unknown culture. The health-care system *is* a different world. Here it doesn't matter who you have been before, what you know, or what values you have. Here you are a patient. You have to adapt. You have to understand a different language, a different behavior and meet different expectations in order to successfully accommodate and get all that you need to regain your health.

So I said "yes" to the offer and my journey in medical healthcare began. I found myself in one of the most hierarchical of institutions - a hospital - and it was a big challenge for me. But at this point of my life, I had much experience behind me, and I also had my spirit helpers. I had to adapt to many things. Fixed time schedules, rules and regulations, and nomenclatures to name but a few. But most of all, I had to find the interface to connect to a form of healing that was still mostly based on a biological medical approach. I was called a psycho-oncologist, and my task was to work out how therapy could work in oncology and then implement it.

Within months it became clear that this task was not only relevant in this medical department, but also nationwide, and so, with a few colleagues, we established the Hungarian Association for Psycho-oncology. We have been working hard to gain recognition for psycho-oncology and to make psychological intervention - and thus the healing of the soul - an equally important part in treatment of cancer.

I worked out a holistic program for psychosocial rehabilitation, which regards patients as physical *and* spiritual beings. The new program received the name, Firebird, followed by the establishment of Firebird Foundation. The management of St. Laszlo Hospital appreciated the new approach and we were given a separate pavilion within the territory of the hospital to launch the project. We moved in in 2009, and since then Firebird has been flying.

So how do you work with patients? What is the program?

Firebird offers help for patients and their relatives alike. The program starts with a first interview, similar to an exploratory discussion. The patient talks about himself, tells me what brought him here, what makes him anxious, and what obstacles and difficulties he has to face. He also talks about changes that have happened in his life since the diagnoses, how his life was before cancer and what makes his adaptation to his new situation difficult.

In its setting it is similar to a shamanic guidance session. At the end of the interview we look back to our discussion together and identify what has come to the surface. We discuss what the best intervention could be.

With cancer, it is important for the help to arrive quickly. Therefore we don't have waiting lists. We offer short-term (5-6 sessions) dynamic psychotherapy, but in practice the patient is receiving help as long as she needs it. We often have couple's therapy and family consultation as well.

If the patient comes to see me and we agree on psychotherapy, in the beginning I don't know whether or not shamanic counseling will be introduced. I never work without my spirit helpers. They are always around, and often, when I am stuck, I ask for their advice. Shamanic practice is a very intimate, inner work. Usually I offer the option of shamanic counseling to those whom I don't regard as capable of using verbal therapy. Or when it is difficult for someone to connect to their feelings, or when somebody sees himself and his life perfectly, even though he is not functioning well. These walls are hard to break.

On these occasions I offer to introduce a "new method" - shamanic counseling - and we start to talk about it. It is very important that it is explained in a way that suits the person's intellect and knowledge. Sometimes even introducing a notion can give rise to resistance. Those who contact me are seeking a psychotherapist, not a shamanic healer,

so introducing shamanism can only happen when a trusting relationship has been developed. At a certain point of our therapeutic work, I may start to feel intuitively that shamanism needs to be introduced in order for the patient to strengthen, and open to a process with which he can move.

How I name shamanic terms highly depends on the person. I receive a lot of guidance from my spirit helpers in this regard. I put all my attention to the person and often the words most suitable to the situation appear by themselves. I can use different terms to describe the same thing in different situations. For example, I may say she will come across 'spirit helpers' or 'inner guides' or her 'inner powers' in the journeys. I can't say the same thing to everyone, because some will shy away, or simply declare it nonsense.

How do shamanism and modern medicine relate?

I believe that what used to be the shaman's task in ancient times is now the combined task of the medical doctor, the priest and the psychologist. It is unfortunate that the healing process is so fragmented. Including psychotherapy in the treatment of physical diseases is a great leap forward in the healing process - to say nothing of the spiritual dimension! If this were always the case, patients could be receiving healing for all aspects, the body, mind and spirit. I often experience the advantage of having both the psychological *and* the spiritual domains accessible to me. But I also experience the disadvantage of not having enough knowledge about the physical body. I endeavor to learn more about the body, about the impact of medical cancer treatment, and the nature of cancer itself. I think that the more levels on which you can connect to the patient, the better your chances are to understand what is happening, and the higher your chances are to intervene in a healing way.

The shamanic practice that I am doing is not about making the patient believe that I am able to heal him, that I hold the power and knowledge to do

so. Rather it is about helping him to realize that he himself can contribute to his healing. I am only helping to find his way to those powers, then facilitating in their unfolding and strengthening. Therefore the psychotherapist-shaman puts herself in a different position to that which traditional shamans held.

I also believe that a psychotherapist-shaman can only act authentically when he himself has experienced this process of transformation and healing in collaboration with the helping spirits. This additional spiritual dimension not only means that you are bringing in a new approach for the patient, but that you yourself are in connection with the source.

Would you share a few case studies?

Balint had colon cancer. He was a young professor at a university, with whom I was working in a psychoanalytical therapeutic setting. We worked a lot with interpreting his dreams and dealing with his emotions. Balint wrote extensively, which helped him to process his problems. The colon cancer receded and he became symptom-free. We ended therapy. Critical areas which still needed to be addressed were clear, but Balint decided to build up his new, healthy life first. I met him several times afterwards, when he came for control visits. He felt very happy that he recovered and told me what turns his life had made and what were the most difficult changes to be implemented.

Three years later, cancer knocked on his door again, not colon cancer recurring but a new primary tumor. It was a highly malignant type, and the prognosis was bad. When we met and he told me the diagnosis, he was completely desperate. He did not understand why this was happening. He had made so many changes to his life and he did so much in order to remain healthy. He was also disappointed with himself. We decided that this time we would work differently, in a way that would allow him to connect more deeply, and on multiple levels, to his 'inner world'. Balint thought that he knew what the major obstacles in his self-actualization were, and why he could not make certain changes recently and move forward. Therefore he accepted shamanic counseling, the new method, easily. Our aim was to improve his chances for living and to remove the blocks that were in the way of his healing and transformation.

Balint had three small children. He was deeply concerned with how he could share the most of his life experiences, help their way, and give them the strongest imprint of what his life had been. He learnt shamanic journeying quickly. He drummed for his children and his wife. These shared 'family journeys' were giving them an opportunity to tune to each other's souls and deal with their fear of loss.

Balint had beautiful journeys. He had three spirit helpers in the lower world, and two of them took an active part in his healing. One of them was a bear. In most of the journeys Bear was standing in a fire, burning the metastatic tumors from his liver. He not only received teachings about how to deal with psychological issues, but he was given dietary and lifestyle advice as well. For a long, long time we had great results. The new cancer was a tumor in the pancreas with liver metastases. Shamanic

journeys and chemo treatments were happening during the same period. Balint grew stronger mentally, and physically. His relationship with his wife and children became more harmonious. As a result of the treatments his tumor was receding. Balint started to relax. He started to feel good again, he felt once more that he was taking control of his life. While Balint grew stronger and stronger, the family has also recovered from the shock from the new cancer.

Balint decided to go back to teach at the university, and at the same time became engaged with the advocacy of cancer patients. Suddenly he felt that with the support of his spirit helpers, he was capable of everything. We met less and the shamanic journeys become less frequent. He was dealing with so many things - and had less time for himself. Suddenly, at one point, his health stopped improving and it all turned backwards. He was set on the path of a slow but unstoppable progression of the illness. Then Balint came back to journeying again.

When his condition deteriorated, and he started to feel weaker, he was no longer a strong young Native American figure in his journeys, but one of skin and bones. Change happened in him spiritually as well. He was preparing to let go of life. His children appeared more and more often in his journeys. Sometimes they were receiving teachings together, other times they appeared as a supportive power for him. He was very close with his spirit helpers, who also made him familiar with the realm of death. He was fearless in his preparation to leave the land of the living. He felt the strong presence of his spirit helpers even in the very last period of his life, when he was unable to journey more. During this time, I brought him a power animal that would help him go through this phase. We also did a soul-retrieval in order to sort out remaining problems in his relationship with his parents. On one occasion when I visited him in the hospital, I brought him a strange blue stone. He used it as a power stone. His wife and children were charging it with power for him, every day. He had the stone until the very last moment. I talked to him 2 days before his death. He had said goodbye to his friends, he had the strength to talk to his children, to tell them how he will always be around, and look after them. When he finally lost consciousness, his wife was drumming for him to help his journey to the realm of the dead, which he already knew from his journeys. This was a beautiful but tragic process for all involved. With the help of his spirit helpers, Balint had finally grown into his situation and walked every moment consciously on his path.

I had big - and naïve - expectations towards shamanic work. I thought that those people, who can be present to their processes, who have their power animals and spirit teachers around them, will always find their way. They won't fall ill seriously, they won't become depressed. I remember Jonathan telling me about his first client, who was a cancer patient. He told me his client died and I remember being so disappointed. How could that happen, if Jonathan and the spirits were working with him? How could he have died?

While death is a natural part of life, when working in a place

where it is occurring daily, we were still hoping for some sort of supernatural power to intervene. Sometimes it does, yet today I know that with a malignant disease, struggling for life *and* recognizing the moment when it is time to change are equally important. Sometimes one's life cannot be prolonged anymore.

Birth and death are inseparable from each other. They are part of the same cycle. Maybe it is our separation from the natural world that has pushed the acceptance of this simple natural law so far away. Consciously living through this natural process however, is an opportunity for fulfillment. And wonderful things can happen on the way! Miracles happen in many forms.

What about miracles?

Recognizing miracles requires conscious presence, awareness, maturity and a sort of wisdom. A few days ago a patient came to see me. She had undergone an operation and chemo, and was currently receiving radiotherapy. She had no symptoms and had a brilliant prognosis for a healthy future. But she came to see me it was because she was constantly anxious about whether or not she was *really* healthy. She was constantly preoccupied about when she was going to die. She couldn't be happy that she was in good health now, and accept that whatever the amount of time is left, she is good now! This heightened stress and anxiety state that she found herself in is often evoked by the trauma caused by the disease. We could call it a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. This state had caused a complete loss of power in this patient. She was unable to stay in the present, because of her fears of the future which have their roots in the past. In her case, shamanic counseling could be a great help to move forward, to see the miracle of her present situation. She could re-connect to her own powers, bring her fears under control and learn to trust again in the opportunities that life is offering to her.

Have you ever worked with a client who found shamanic counseling difficult?

Liza is a 36 year old mathematician, the eldest of three sisters. She was diagnosed with breast cancer and at the start of our therapy she had undergone chemo- and radiotherapy treatments. I met her on one of our assertiveness trainings, and later she applied for individual psychotherapy. She wanted to work more so that she could fully and definitively heal from the breast cancer. Initially, on the surface, we made good progress with Jungian therapy. But soon it became clear, that the problems that were seemingly understood and processed did not vanish. She gained much understanding, yet these insights were never incorporated, there was no real transformation and no behavioral change. The process was stuck.

Liza saw what was happening but she was so deeply attached to the problems that the insights gained in the processing could not enable her to let them go. This was the moment when I offered shamanic counseling to her.

We proceeded slowly. Releasing control and experiencing an altered state of consciousness frightened her. She did not do the journeys she received for homework and she would always find excuses. Her strong religious attitude made it difficult for her to embrace shamanic cosmology and working with the spirits. It was difficult for her to surrender to the sound of the drum.

A breakthrough came finally with a power animal she received from me for

providing support in her shamanic work. The hummingbird fluttered around her helping her to see the essence of matters. After the power animal retrieval of the Hummingbird, she was able to journey, and had very powerful experiences, receiving both teachings and help. She also made journeys to ask for the power to receive healing and about relating to the world around her.

During this period I also did two soul retrievals for her. The integration of one of the lost soul-parts, which was a powerful, strong and independent little girl, was hard. But on a journey to ask "What can I do to make you happy?" they bonded and Liza is now coming to feel that she is ready for some deep changes in her life. Later, she journeyed to her great-great-grandmother in the upper world to ask: "What is my task in life?" The result of this journey is that she is now working toward a career change, moving from mathematics and programming toward the helping professions.

This has been some very intensive work you have been doing. Where is she with it now?

Liza has been symptom-free for two years. Thanks to shamanic counseling her therapy work has deepened and she has committed herself to rebuild and maintain her healthy self. Her abusive, stressful long term relationship with a partner ended. Her relationship with her controlling and strict mother is slowly resolving. Liza feels ready for a new relationship. Her trust in life is getting

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stronger, and she has an intense bond with her spirit helpers. She relies a lot upon them in this process of change, gaining understanding and self-knowledge.

What is it that you feel the Spirits can offer that conventional medicine or psychological counseling cannot?

There is a difference. In traditional psychotherapy we mostly work with experiences, thoughts, emotions. With shamanism we can reach much deeper dimensions. A patient is enabled to quickly solve serious problems that would normally require a long process. She can evaluate situations from a previously unknown perspective. Most importantly, her own resources are more present to her and help her deal with difficult situations. Her autonomy increases and a dependency does not develop with the psychotherapist. It is very important that solutions come from the client. Working with the spirits is empowering!

Traditional psychological categories become meaningless when it comes to shamanic work. The patient is never on her own. She can turn to her spirit helpers anytime. The control is in her hands. If somebody learns to journey well, has a strong connection to her spirit helpers and manages to unlock the messages, she can work on her issues and dreams even without a counselor or therapist.

How do your Spirits feel about this work? What have you learned from the Spirits about cancer and working with cancer patients?

According to them, cancer is a manifestation of a loss of balance in the functions of the personality, the loss of emotional balance beyond which there are important learning processes indispensable for the soul. This disease, cancer, starts a learning and developmental process both for the patient and his surroundings. They have told me: 'This disease is like a huge spider, lying in ambush, waiting for the right moment to pounce and suck the vital energy of the patient. Escape is through cutting the spider net, which holds the spider and provides movement for it. By cutting the net, the spider becomes unviable, condemning it to atrophy.'

What advice would you give to those who wish to combine shamanism with counseling or psychotherapy? What is important to consider?

A goal has to be set stating what we want to accomplish with our joint work. It has to be clear for the client (and the therapist), that the work is done by the client's spirit helpers - *with the indispensable active involvement of the client.*

Shamanic counseling requires a rigorous practice and self-discipline. Journeys that were previously agreed upon can be made at home, then the processing can happen in the therapist's

office. The merging of shamanic work with psychotherapy is an interesting dance. It has to be a dynamic relationship, where spirit helpers of the therapist are always around. But in terms of behavior and wording, the credibility of the psychologist has to be maintained.

Does it feel different for you when working with a client in a psychotherapy session or working with them shamanically?

Yes, I do work differently when I can only build on the repertoire of psychological tools. But I cannot always distinguish between the two methods these days! My helpers are generally around, and they sometimes come up with surprising ideas in the therapeutic process. My helpers teach me a lot, mostly by giving insights about what is happening beyond the concrete manifest reality. These insights reveal a more genuine meaning. They encourage me to understand the operations of a complex, expanded world.

How do you work with the Spirits to support yourself and to get guidance for Firebird?

My spirit helpers are always around and I particularly consult them in difficult situations. When I am uncertain whether or not to offer shamanic counseling to a client, or when I am stuck in a therapeutic process, I always journey for help. I ask for guidance about which way to follow, or to be shown what I am unable to see. I go to them for supervision regularly. I present interesting or challenging cases to them. Sometimes we even argue! I also consult them regarding my own doubts, my own difficulties, and my own life situations. Sometimes, when I get very tired, or have had enough of the sadness and pain, I just surrender to them in my journeys. And they clean me, heal me and recharge my batteries.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Magda Rohanszky began practicing Clinical Psychology in 1975. She has been working with cancer patients for fifteen years. In 2006 she started The Firebird Foundation and became president of the Hungarian Psycho-Oncology Society, of which she was a founding member. She has four children and four grandchildren and lives in Budapest, Hungary. She can be reached at: tuzmadar51@gmail.com

Diana Denke has an MSc in International Relations, and is currently taking a degree in Psychology. She has studied Buddhism and meditation in Burma and has an active shamanic practice. She has also translated this interview.

Going Solo in Nature: The Ancient Shamanic Practice For Awakening To Spirit

By José Luis Stevens, Ph.D.

From time immemorial human beings sought the great outdoors for solitude, observation, listening, and learning the ways of nature to enhance their own survival and empowerment. Shamans from many continents sought isolation in the forms of walkabouts and vision quests to increase their powers, and to develop special supernatural abilities. The well-known Native American Vision Quest is an example of ceremonial alone time dedicated to seeking inner knowledge and direction from the spirit world.

Why spend solo time in nature?

Solo time in nature is worth its weight in gold when it comes to relief from the daily grind of stressful conditions at work. But relief from work stress is far from the only advantage offered by solo time in nature. The mystics and shamans of old went to nature because they knew that the only way to recharge was to hook up with something more powerful than they. What better way to recharge than to sit on a mountain, in a forest, or next to a waterfall for a few days and nights? They knew that some of that natural power could be gathered and stored using special techniques and then applied later to their active endeavors. There is no reason why an ordinary person, or a business or organizational leader, cannot learn and apply similar techniques to recharge, gather, store, and apply the renewed vitality gained from solo time.

While an intent and solo time in a natural environment are actually sufficient to accomplish a great deal, there are other important additions to a solo that enormously enhance its effectiveness. First of all, during a solo a participant can engage in a series of powerful ancient practices designed specifically to break through old patterns, gather and store vitality, and enhance visioning. Secondly, there is great power in doing a solo under the guidance of an experienced solo guide who supervises the experience of a number of people doing solos in the vicinity. This brings a measure of safety to the experience as well as a sense of community even though the time is spent in solitude. After the solo the group can gather, share, and integrate their experiences, thus providing much greater overall insight and learning.

What happens on a solo?

In a true solo there are no outer distractions, nothing to leak or help discharge the power of the experience. Prior to and during the solo there is an all important declared intent, a riveting focus to break through to gather power and clarity. This focus, this intent, makes all the difference in the world and distinguishes time alone from an ordinary vacation.

Most often solo experiences, long or short in duration, include special practices, concentrations of the mind, physical postures or chi gong for gathering vitality, and deep meditation. One practice might be to answer the question,

“Who am I?” or “What is truly important in my life?” Or “What is my impossible dream?” Some participants practice tai chi, yoga, breathing exercises, or other methods of gathering energy. People spend time in prayer, saying hello to nature, recapitulating their lives, forgiving and erasing negative memories, clearing away personal energy leaks, focusing on intentions and the like. The possibilities are practically endless. A person can be as busy or as relaxed as he or she chooses to be during their solo time. There is truly no one correct way to do one.

What are the challenges of the solo?

Perhaps the greatest challenge for many people participating in a nature solo is boredom. Unaccustomed to having much time on their hands, they become restless, fidgety, irritated, and impatient. At first they are not quite sure what to do with themselves with none of their usual distractions. Their minds might flit from thing to thing in a random, annoying way that revisits worries and regrets circulating with no resolution. One may feel compelled to pace back and forth being distracted by the thoughts that they are wasting precious time while they could be working on projects, putting together deals, and making important calls. In a word, these people have become addicted to stress and have a challenge experiencing an environment that can be exceptionally peaceful.

An impatient person can come face to face with their time demon in a rather unpleasant way. Others might worry that while they are isolated their competition is getting the upper hand on them or somehow they are falling behind. While this phenomenon might plague most people for short periods of time, it is extremely rare for a person to experience discomforts like these the entire time because the experience of the solo tends to wash these temporary worries away after a time.

All these challenges can be irritants or they can be excellent teachers for the willing student or learner. The vast majority of working people know how to learn from difficulty or challenges met in their work settings so a little outdoor discomfort should not be a grave deterrent. Most say afterwards that the challenges helped them to become quiet and introspective, appreciative of isolation and silence.

Solo Value: What is the gain for the average person?

The great majority of solo veterans feel that the experience somehow changed their lives for the better. Follow up shows that upon returning to their work world they are more accepting of differences, more disciplined, more positive, and more productive. Most feel spiritually renewed no matter what their religious or spiritual orientation. More than a few find the experience the single most transformational experience of their entire lives.

Today the need to spend time alone remains as important and necessary as ever, perhaps even more so given the unrelenting hectic pace of modern life. While the ancients always lived in harmony with the natural environment, modern people are mostly disconnected from nature for the major part of every day. The vast majority of people who experience a nature solo report that their personal understanding of the power in nature and the need to protect it grows phenomenally following their solo.



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Going Solo in Nature: The Ancient Shamanic Practice For Awakening To Spirit

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Go to <http://www.shamansociety.org/ssp-international.html> for more information or contact Sara@shamansociety.org.

Members Share Their Solo Experiences

On my three-day solo I had to learn a song from Spirit that I would then be called upon to sing in the ceremony closing the solo experience. I didn't consider myself a singer, but I also understood that a part of shamanic practice is singing. On the second day, I lay down on the ground early in the morning and with great gratitude for this time alone prayed to Spirit for help in my task. I called on every goddess I knew by name to surround me, and they did. And it was Mary Magdalene who stood at my head. With no effort, a song honoring her power and healing ability and beneficence and sacred place as consort to the Christ energy filled me. For a day and a half I sang that magnificent song gift, and I took it back to my circle with the courage to sing in front of 30 people.

*Pat Liles
San Anselmo, California*

The transformation experience of my wilderness solo came not from any dramatic revelation, but because I did the hard, tedious, inner work of reviewing my life, starting with my first memories, releasing any anger or fear, and giving myself acknowledgment for the triumphs and kindnesses. That effort was emotionally draining work; and it took most of the time on solo. The result, however, left me feeling cleaner and lighter. The experience left me more in tune with myself and nature, and much more open to Spirit.

*Tracey Whitley
Attorney at Law*

I was located up on a wooded ridge, overlooking a field. A stand of pine trees created a nice circle of shade and wind break. I created a simple medicine wheel and each morning and evening prayed to and connected with the four directions, Great Spirit, and Mother Earth. The quiet of the place allowed me to meditate for an extended period of time and deepen my observation skills. I chose to fast to add to an altered

I was blessed to pilgrimage to a mountain on the southern shores of Lake Tahoe within the Paiute tradition and introduced by an elder to this deity's manifestation in the world: Gratitude.

I thought that I knew and understood thanks, but I realized after my three days and nights of fasting and placing sacred offerings, that my previous knowing of this powerful emotion and way of being in the world had been superficial. It took a mountain "falling" on me to experience gratitude and warmth and connection that come with unrestricted giving.

This deity gave the great gift of being gratitude, and having lived this, has allowed me to return again and again to my place in the world.

*Peter Brown
Olympia, Washington*

I have done many many solos with wonderful experiences. Sitting quietly, listening to nature, and getting into my heart always makes me feel one with nature. The quietness and being alone gives me time for reflection and to get questions I have about myself answered.

There were times that I stayed awake all night to communicate with the night sky which was very satisfying. Lying on the earth, looking up at the stars and seeing meteorites was a very powerful experience. I always felt safe, even when the elk came romping by my spot and when I could hear the bears. There were insects to see, and many birds to watch and talk to, especially the hummingbird. I felt so privileged that I wrote a song about all the critters.

Flora McCormack

state while on solo. The connection to nature engendered by the solo, for me is the heart of a shamanic practice. The connection to nature transfers to the ability to connect with myself. The solo reminded me I am also part of nature and her rhythms.

*Karen DiTrapani
Albuquerque NM*

Last summer, I backpacked in the Marble Mountains taking my pack, rattle and intentions. I hoped for support with my intense fear of bears - a shadow on an otherwise beautiful love affair with the outdoors. I'd never seen a bear while backpacking, but the fear was alive and real. I left an offering, asked for support from spirit of place and hiked in. Within an hour, I heard then saw, a black bear cub gazing at me while romping up a hill. Pure awe and delight! The first night by the fire, I rattled, connected with the spirit of place and had a surprisingly restful sleep, interwoven with dream visits from wolf and others. Over the next two nights, I worked through layers of fear and limiting beliefs. When I set up camp on my final night under a tree with fresh sap dripping from a bear's claw, I had to laugh. Bear had been with me the whole way, with its strength and power, helping me call on my inner resources and find my way to freedom in the wilderness.

*Eleni Livitsanos
San Francisco Bay Area*

Sitting inside my stone circle at the edge of the Ozark forest, I watch the sky moving further away as the stars recede. Lurking shadows scurry from the half-light as the glow of predawn slips in. The dawn feels so alive! I feel so alive!

Everything that occurs within my sacred circle of stones is part of my vision quest...my thoughts, dreams and fears in the night. An insect's buzzing, a snake's meandering, the voice of a bird, shapes in the clouds, the wind in the trees.... all are answers to my prayers and messages from spirit.

Nature shows me the inner workings of my soul and where I fit in the world. Time alone, sitting and being, makes me reach deep inside. My yearly quests give me valuable insights. It is a process I trust deeply. I go to the Wild to remember who I am.

*Pat Tuholske
Grubville, Missouri*

Ñust'as: The Inka Healing Forces of Nature

(Pronounced nyoo stahs)

By Elizabeth B. Jenkins, MA, MFT

There is no denying that the mysterious allure of Peru, Macchu Pikchu, the Inkas and the “shamanism” of the Q'ero Indians of Peru—the modern lineal descendants of the Inka—has been magnetizing people from around the globe for the last twenty years. Tourism has increased to such a degree that access to many sacred sites is now highly restricted, or even off limits. We Westerners know innately that there is something there that we want—something that we desperately need.

Q'ERO NATURE WISDOM

The Inka Nature Wisdom tradition (also known as Andean Mysticism, or Q'ero Shamanism) is a sophisticated-yet-simple indigenous knowledge system.¹ It describes in great detail the interface between humans and nature, to a degree that is truly mind-boggling. Unfortunately, there is very little accurate information written about the spiritual and philosophical worldview of the Inkas, both ancient and modern—the true Inka gold! There is very little written at all. Perhaps it is because writing is not their way of knowledge. Their true knowledge is personal, direct, based in intimate communion with nature, and passed on through oral traditions kept alive thanks to five hundred years of resistance by the Q'ero, high in their mist-shrouded Andean homes. It is literally impossible to reach the Q'ero Nation without crossing a 20,000-foot mountain pass. Perhaps this is a safeguard to ensure that anyone who approaches must come into resonance with nature, at the very least, by adapting to the extremely high altitude!

It has been my privilege to study and participate in this wisdom tradition and attempt to serve as a translator of its worldview since 1988. Alas, I confess that my twenty-six years of experience have permitted me to touch little more than the tip of an ancient and enigmatic iceberg of knowledge, whose true girth, breadth and depth remain a mystery. I present my personal experience and knowledge as it is and has come to me, without pretense of it being any more, or any less, than what it is. I pray that it will be of value to the reader. I honor my teachers from the great Q'ero Nation, whom the Peruvian Institute of Culture has officially designated the “Last Inka Ayllu of Peru.”

The Inka tradition is based on human perception and participation in the laws of the most modern and advanced theoretical physics. *Kawsay pacha* means the “world of living energies” in Quechua. To perceive and move through this world

is the basic function of the *paqo*, or “initiate,” on the Andean Path. According to this ancient tradition, we inhabit a super-abundant cosmos in which everything is made of living energy. The world, and indeed the universe, function through sacred exchanges of energy, a principle known to the Inkas as *ayni*. This energy exchange takes place continuously and on every level, down to the tiniest particles, where, as modern physicists would describe it, a quantum field is generated by particles exchanging energy. The work of the *paqo* is to maintain these sacred exchanges with nature, based on mutual advantage and respect. Consider the act of breathing for a moment, which springs from a fundamental biological collaboration between humans and plants, where the carbon dioxide we breathe out is exchanged for oxygen from the plant world. What we exhale is life giving for plants, and vice versa. Furthermore, in the Inka's living energy world, just as in nature, where there are no good or evil plants or animals, there are no “positive” or “negative” energies—only *hoocha*, meaning the heavier energies, and *sami*, the more-refined energies. *Sami*—the Quechua word for “finest living energy”—literally means “nectar,” and is supplied in abundance by Mother Nature.

The Ñust'as

One important component in the Inka energy cosmology is the concept of the *ñust'as*, or nature spirits, of which we still know very little. For years, we students of the Andean Path were told, and learned from dictionaries, that the Quechua word *ñust'a* meant “princess”—literally, the daughter of the *Qoya* or “Royal Queen.” We knew, or thought we knew, that *ñust'as* were also female forces of nature, and that they were called upon by the Q'ero for their healing powers and wisdom. I first encountered and understood the *ñust'as* as being an overarching energetic archetype of female nature energies during an Inka initiation called the *Hatun Qarpay*, meaning “Great Initiation” or “Great Transmission” of the Inka. (The word *qarpay* literally means “irrigation” in Quechua, whether physical or spiritual.) This ten-day initiation ceremony was recovered by Peruvian anthropologist Juan Nuñez del Prado, after he, himself, was initiated into the fourth-level by his teacher, Don Benito Qoriwaman. This authentic Inka initiation rite takes place within the sacred Inka geography. Initiates perform rituals of energy exchange with sacred sites, beginning in Cuzco's sacred center, and

moving through the Sacred Valley of the Inkas to the lower elevations of Macchu Pikchu, and then on to the highest and largest temple complex of Wiraqocha Inka at Raqchi.

It was at the *Pachamama* Cave in the Macchu Pikchu citadel complex, during the *Hatun Qarpay* initiation, that I was personally introduced to “the *ñust’as*” as female nature spirits. We had already been informed that the famous “niches,” found everywhere built into the walls of these temples of Inka organic architecture, were receptors for specific living energies of nature. At the entrance to the *Pachamama* Cave below *Wayna Pikchu*, at a temple complex commonly known as the Temple of the Moon, there are five niches. We were told that these niches were actually the “houses” of five *ñust’as*, “princesses” or primary female living energies of nature. The first four niches, grouped together on the left side of the cave entrance, are homes to the Black, Red, Gold and Silver *ñust’as*, designed to collect and contain the finest feminine living energies of the Water, Earth, Sun, and Wind/Moon/Stars, respectively. The fifth niche is that of the Green *ñust’a*. The purpose of this ritual is for the *paqo* to establish a personal and energetic relationship with each of these *ñust’as* by entering their niches, one by one, and exchanging personal power with them. Next, the *paqo* releases any heavy energies liberated by the ritual into a stone seat located between the group of four niches and the fifth niche. The initiate then pulls the power from the other four niches into his/her personal bubble and offers this combined power to the fifth and final niche. The ritual is thereby completed through the exchange of the *paqo*’s personal power with the Green *ñust’a*. The significance of the ritual lies in the *paqo*’s personal experience with each *ñust’a*.

Over many years of ceremonies with many Q’ero *paqos*, we have heard invocations of many different *ñust’as*, from the now familiar Gold and Silver *ñust’as*, to names as enigmatic as the “*ñust’a* of the Fifth Granary.” Not until December 2008, however, did we learn that there is a broader meaning of the term *ñust’a*. This was during a ten-day study session with a small group of *paqos* at my farm

in Hawaii, with an excellent translator and two of the most famous and beloved Q’ero healers, Don Humberto Sonqo Q’espi and Doña Bernardina Apaza Flores. Don Humberto and Doña Bernardina, from the Q’ero communities of Charqapata and Qolpa Kucho, became a couple at the tender ages of fourteen and fifteen. A year later they were initiated by a great Q’ero master as a sacred healing couple (it was their cure for a grave illness) and they have been performing healings together now for more than half a century!

Always curious about the *ñust’as*, we asked to know more about them. To our great surprise, Doña Bernardina, holding up an arthritic index finger, stated, “The *ñust’a* is one, but it has a male and female part.”

This statement opened up a veritable Pandora’s box. Obviously, we had a lot more to learn about the *ñust’as*, which we had thought were solely princesses or female nature spirits.

“Please, what *are* *ñust’as*?” asked a relatively new student.

“The *ñust’as* are the healing forces of nature,” replied Don Humberto, looking askance at us for asking such an obvious question. For the Q’ero, whose knowledge is based on direct perception of the living energy world, it is very strange that we should ask another person to explain what we can know through our own direct experience. “Right here on this hillside,” Don Humberto continued, gesturing toward the orchard, “you can see thousands of *ñust’as*. They make the trees grow and the flowers bloom. Look at how they are working.” He pointed to the flowering macadamia nut trees and added, “We must never forget to thank them.”

What I wouldn’t give to live inside the perceptual field of Don Humberto and Doña Bernardina for even a day! The Q’ero knowledge system functions at a precisely inverse angle to ours. Direct perception of living energy is how they are raised, taught and trained to “know” the world.

I had had occasion to experience something equally revealing on another dramatic occasion, in 1996, when a young Q’ero *paqo*, Don Augustin Paucar

Ccapa, was invited by the Wiraqocha Foundation (a non-profit that I founded for the purpose of preserving indigenous wisdom) to teach in the U.S. During a visit to Redlands University, he suddenly stopped, looking stunned, in front of a six-foot-high globe of the Earth that we told him was a representation of the whole of *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). As we pointed out South America, Cuzco, the approximate location of Q’eros, and the ocean he had traveled over to reach California, his eyes grew wider and wider. He circled the globe slowly, exclaiming excitedly, “Of course! Of course! No wonder Mama Qocha (“Mother Ocean”) is SO powerful when you call her. Just look at how big she is!” Don Augustin’s knowledge of the ocean had not come from a textbook, and now the globe was giving him a confirming visual and mental framework for what he already knew, what he had perceived directly from her living energy.

Doña Bernardina continued with her explanation of the *ñust’as*, telling us that *ñust’as* come in complementary pairs of male and female—reflecting the Andean principle of *yanantin*—meaning the harmonious relationship of complements. “Like the *apus* (mountain spirits),” confirmed Don Humberto. “Each *apu* has a wife.” The *apus* are generally (but not always) male, while the river beings are often (but not always) female. The concept of *yanantin* (where there are no opposites, but only life-affirming complements) is a foundation of the Andean worldview. “If you meet a beautiful sexy man in your dreams,” Doña Bernardina continued, smiling at the women, “that is a *ñust’a*. But if you are a man you will see a very nice lady.”

OUR NATURE FATHER AND MOTHER

In the Inka tradition human identity is a *tawantin*, a unity of four. We descend from a pair of human beings from whom we receive our DNA, as well as from a pair of nature beings, which are the male and female nature spirits at the precise geographic location of our birth. Our *paqarina*, or nature mother, and our *itu apu*, or nature father, are thought to hold the wisdom as well as offer the en-

ergetic support that we require to achieve our destiny. Don Humberto told us in no uncertain terms that, “Without the connection to your *paqarina* and *itu apu*, your power as a healer is almost nothing.” From his point of view, the primary ability of the healer is to be a channel through which the forces of nature, such as the *ñustas*, the *apus* or *pachamama*, can be delivered to accomplish the healing. “What am I by myself?” Don Humberto asked us laughing, “just a big sack of *hoocha!*”

And so, it is through our connection and right relationships with nature that all healing is accomplished. Don Humberto told us, moreover, that in the thousands of healings he and Doña Bernardina have performed across the U.S. and Europe, he consistently finds patients who are suffering from a severe depletion of living energy due to their missing connection with their own *paqarina* and *itu apu*. “When your relationship with *Pachamama* is not in harmony, you get sick,” Don Humberto told us. Luckily, the Andean teachings provide numerous tools that can be used to restore that harmonious relationship!

Don Humberto explained that, as a man, he has a natural connection with the *apus*, the mostly-masculine living spirits of the Mountains. “But she,” he said, looking with eyes full of respect at Doña Bernardina, “she is connected to the real power, *Pachamama*.” This Andean respect for Mother Earth lies in the fact that the entire Andean Tradition is considered to be female, and the greatest power is the female power of receptivity—the ability to receive EVERY kind of living energy, as does *Pachamama*, without rejecting anyone or anything. This is a highly-inclusive tradition, where the Q’ero *pagos* proclaim their staunch Roman Catholicism while, at the same time, they invoke the spirits of *Pachamama* and the mountains with profound reverence and not a hint of contradiction.

Don Humberto left us pondering one final mystery. “The *ñustas* come from five sources,” he proclaimed, removing his broad-brimmed hat to indicate that what he would say next was sacred. “They come from *Pachamama*, from the

Inti Kuna (a curious use of the Quechua plural, meaning “the suns”), the *Quillya Kuna*, meaning “the moons,” the *Ch’aska Kuna*, meaning “the stars,” and from *Miskayani*.

THE MYTH OF MISKAYANI

The first time I heard of *Miskayani* was from Juan Nuñez del Prado in 1992. But the first time I heard a Q’ero speak the word was in 1996, at the 25th International Transpersonal Association conference in Manaus, Brazil, where Juan and I were escorting Don Manuel Q’espí, one of the last great Q’ero masters (since deceased), who was the keynote presenter. When Don Manuel arrived, I invited him to come and greet the mighty *Rio Negro*, the river that ran next to the hotel where the conference was being held. As Don Manuel proceeded to make his traditional coca leaf offering to this magnificent river, Juan and I observed as Don Manuel’s *poq’po* (the energy bubble of a person or being) grew and grew, expanding as he spoke his prayers. When he had finished, Don Manuel turned to face us, his bubble huge with river *sami* (“nectar”), and a thousand-watt smile spread across his features. He made this enigmatic comment, which I was to recall later, during the teaching with Don Humberto and Doña Bernardina. “There are hundreds of *ñustas* here. They are so beautiful. We must be very close to the borders of *Miskayani* for there to be so many of them!” The *ñustas*, Juan explained to me, appeared to Don Manuel as very sexy, young, nubile females: therefore, the big smile.

The myth of *Miskayani* has, so far, been found only in Q’eros. It was Juan’s father, anthropologist Oscar Nuñez del Prado, who “rediscovered” the Q’ero and recognized them as a remnant of the Inkas, during his first expedition in 1955. *Miskayani* was (and still is) spoken of as an etheric city of highly-spiritually-evolved females who are very beautiful and very sexy. This myth of the Q’ero (and I have heard the Q’ero speak wistfully about it) says that only someone who is very pure of heart will be allowed to enter *Miskayani*. Alternately, a person would have to live a very good life to

be reborn in *Miskayani*. This comment is generally followed by a nudge and a wink. Among some of the older generations, the very powerful *pagos* were said to have been descended from *pagos* whose wives came from *Miskayani*.

Miskayani is considered the female counterpart of *Paititi*, but is much more enigmatic. *Paititi*, or El Dorado, the mysterious lost city of Inka gold, was so sought after by the Spanish during and after the conquest, that great numbers of soldiers were lost in the Amazon jungle, lusting after it. Apparently, the search continues even today. For *Miskayani* and the *ñustas*, however, the search has only just begun.

Endnotes

1. Jenkins, Elizabeth B. *The Return of the Inka: A Journey of Inka Initiation & Prophecies*. Naalehu, Hawaii: Pu’umaka’a Press 2009. Originally published as *Initiation: A Woman’s Spiritual Adventure in the Heart of the Andes*. Putnam, 1997. The *Hatun Qarpay* initiation is described in detail in this book.
2. Jenkins, Elizabeth B. *The Fourth Level: Nature Wisdom Teachings of the Inka*. Naalehu, Hawaii:
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Immrama: Journeys in Indigenous Celtic Shamanic Practice

By Sharon Paice MacLeod

Memory of the Ancestors

The Celts originally inhabited most of ancient Europe, from Ireland and Britain in the West, eastward into France, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, Central Europe, northern Italy and parts of Turkey. Over time, Celtic cultures, languages and spiritual traditions were marginalized and dismembered until only remnants of this once-flourishing tradition remained.

For many of their descendants, Celtic beliefs and traditions run like wildfire in the blood, with traditional songs and stories opening a deep pool of remembering. Like other indigenous cultures, many Celtic peoples lost their traditions, language and ancient connection to the Divine. Fostering spiritual connection and cultural soul retrieval is an enormous task around the globe. By healing our own ancestral ways, we may be more able to help our brothers and sisters in shamanic cultures wherever they are found.

There are three primary ways in which a dismembered culture can begin to remember its wisdom traditions. The first is through physical sources – the archaeology of domestic settings and ritual sites, sacred objects and artwork, and the testimony of living tradition bearers. The second is through written sources, preferably by members of that culture, but also including reports of those outside. The third, of course, is going directly to the spirits for information, guidance and counsel.

Several years ago, I was teaching Celtic religion and shamanism at a large holistic learning center. Many of the students were of Celtic ancestry, or felt a connection to the tradition through past lives (reincarnation is an element of the native Celtic belief system). One woman of African and Scottish descent knew nothing about her Scottish heritage. Another woman from India became fascinated with the sound of invocations in Celtic languages, once she learned Sanskrit and Old Irish were related. An indigenous Taino woman from Puerto Rico told me her people were trying to revive their traditions through the same three methods: archaeology, written accounts, and information from elders (all of which were scarce). She had come to the workshop to learn shamanic journeying to help her in that quest.

Keepers of Knowledge

Originally there were three classes of holy people in Celtic culture – druids, bards and seers – with the druids apparently fulfilling many of the traditional roles of the shaman. In Gaul, druids trained for up to twenty years, in theology, mythology, divination, healing, ceremony, tribal and cultural history, medicine and law. Druids served as teachers, judges and healers, presiding over ceremonies and preserving and reciting traditional wisdom. They were experts in the nature of the Divine and specialists in communicating with the sacred realms, able to “see” what others could not. In fact, the word “druid” (Old Irish *druí* / Middle Welsh *derwydd*) comes from two Indo-European root words meaning “Strong or Steadfast” and “To See.” Therefore, the word druid meant “Strong Seer” or “One Strong in Vision.”

Tragically, the druids in Gaul and southern Britain were driven out or exterminated by the Roman invasions. However, druids still existed in Scotland as well as in Ireland until at least the ninth century. Eventually, as a result of the increasing power of the church and other changes in medieval culture, their power and influence waned. A new class of poet-seers emerged known as the *filid* (*sing. fili*) in Ireland and Scotland, whose roles may be paralleled in Wales by native seers known as *awenyddion*.

The *filid* trained in special schools for seven to twelve years, and almost certainly preserved some aspects of the original druidic / shamanic wisdom. They served as poets, historians and storytellers, and were also highly trained seers. In fact, a *fili* could not become an *ollam* or master poet until he or she had mastered three types of native divinatory practice: *imbais forosnai* (great wisdom of illumination), *teinm laeda* (cracking open of songs / poems) and *dichetal di chennaib* (spontaneous incantation). These training schools existed until about 1600 in Ireland and in Scotland until almost 1750. Training manuals and wisdom texts associated with the *filid* preserve information about how indigenous Celtic practices survived, changed and persevered.¹

One of the most perplexing questions is exactly how the druids or *filid* connected with their gods or spirits. What

practices or techniques did they use? There are many descriptions of people traveling to the Otherworld; eating special foods; chanting, singing or reciting sacred lore and texts and so forth. But how were these things accomplished? Were they journeying - as we understand that term - or using other indigenous Celtic methods?

Vision of the Bull-Sleep

Although the written records are far from perfect, there are fascinating accounts of traditional methods which appear to be shamanic in nature. One of the earliest comes from ancient Ireland and is known as the *tarb-feis* (bull-sleep or bull-feast). It is described in an early Irish tale called "The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel" to help the community choose a worthy leader after the old king or chief had died:

The men of Ireland gathered together for the bull-feast... A bull was killed on account of it and he ate of it and drank its broth and an incantation of truth was chanted over him while [he was] lying down. Whoever this man saw in his sleep it is he that would be king, and if he speaks a lie he dies...²

A similar version of the *tarb-feis* is provided in the myth "The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn," one of my favourite early Irish tales and a story full of shamanic content.³

A bull or ox skin appears in the thirteenth-century Welsh tale "Rhonabwy's Dream". Rhonabwy is granted a vision when he sleeps on a yellow ox skin. In the vision, he and his two companions travel across the land and encounter a man on a horse who gives them access to visions of the Arthurian past. At the end of the vision, Rhonabwy awakens on the yellow ox skin and realizes he has been asleep for three days and three nights.⁴

Geoffrey Keating's early seventeenth-century Middle Irish work "*Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*", while not entirely reliable, offers detailed descriptions of similar rituals we can examine for comparative purposes. *Gessa* (sg. *geis*) are injunctions or taboos:

As for the druids, this is the service they made of the hides of bulls in sacrificial offerings, for keeping in front of them while making conjurations, or while putting spirits [literally 'demons'] under gessa [i.e. to do the druids' bidding], and many are the procedures by which they put gessa upon them, such as to be gazing [for a vision] at one's own image in water, or by looking at the clouds of the heavens, or by listening to the sound of the wind or the voice of birds... whenever each of these methods failed them, what they did was



Ardagh chalice, symbolic of a vessel of divine wisdom, Ard Macha, Ireland

to make round wattles of the rowan tree, and spread the hides of the bulls given in sacrifice upon them, and the side that was next to the flesh was put on their chests, and in this way they had recourse to a geis to call the spirits, to gain information from them...⁵

There are many similar ritual practices described in these and other accounts.

These include:

- the offering of a bull / eating of a ritual meal

- the chanting of druids (in Old Irish) over the prophetic dreamer
- divinatory sleep
- use of a bull's hide
- laying on sticks of rowan (a tree associated with magic and divination)

Here we have the foundation of an actual native Celtic shamanic ritual to call upon the Gods for information or guidance.

In a modern version of the *tarb feis*, a group of three to five people (or more) gather together at an appointed time and place. While we no longer engage in direct animal sacrifice, the offering of something of value is important in completing the circle of reciprocity and demonstrating gratitude to the spirits. In Celtic culture, bulls were a sign of wealth. So, we should offer something

of value, such as a vessel of cooked meat, or a stew of organic vegetables. In my practice I have had profound experiences offering the flesh of a sacred animal, such as the salmon (which symbolizes divine wisdom), as the spirit of the animal (which should also be thanked) is present at the ceremony. Part of the ritual involves the celebrants partaking of the sacred meal along with the spirits, "ingesting wisdom" from the source itself.

The dreamer lies on a ritual bed of rowan branches, and wraps him- or

herself in a white or light-coloured cattle hide. This object may have been chosen to connect the person with the spirit of the animal whose flesh is being offered. Or, it may have been used simply because it is large enough to wrap the person inside. I have journeyed over a period of several days in a chestnut-coloured horse hide, deeply connecting with my primary power animal. Journeying and bound inside the animal skin, the spirit animal's presence is felt, empowering the journey and protecting the dreamer as well.

Next, two to four "chanters" or



Bird-head figures holding human head, seat of the soul, ancient Scotland

druids (strong seers) chant prayers over the dreamer, until he or she achieves an altered state of consciousness. We are working to rejuvenate this tradition by combing the ancient texts for prayers and invocations to bring forward along the spiral of time. As Old Irish is difficult, chanters may wish to make separate offerings to the spirits, explaining they are using another language to connect with the Otherworld and empower the ritual. The important thing is that the language is respectful, sacred and heartfelt, and prayers chanted for a sufficient time. In addition, the images and words that have been chosen should help the dreamer connect with spirit and obtain the needed information.

Invoking the Ancient Spirits

Other references to druidic divination rites include looking at clouds (*néladoracht*) and listening to the voices of birds (which the druids were said to understand). The word used to refer to the calling or summoning of the spirits is *taghairm*. This derives from the Old Irish verb *do-gair* meaning “call, invoke, petition, conjure,” a word that is attested as early as the ninth century.⁶

This very word, in a later form - Scottish Gaelic *taghairm* - is mentioned in a number of folklore accounts from early Scotland. A visionary ritual is described (but not named) in an early eighteenth century account of the Scottish Highlands written by Martin Martin (“A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland, 1703”). There were several variants of the rite, including “Summons by Water”, and “Summons by Cow’s Hide”.

The water ritual was used by those wishing to inquire about the fate of families, battles, and so forth. At night, a group of men gathered together and one person was chosen from among them by casting lots. Four men carried him to a river that served as the boundary between two villages. They swung him back and forth and struck his hips with some force against the bank of the river (ostensibly to use him in bodily form to attract the attention of the water spirits).

One of the men cried out, “What is it you have got there?” and another answered, “A log of birch wood.” The first man then cried out again, saying, “Let his invisible friends appear from all quarters, and relieve him by giving an answer to our present demands.” Within a few minutes a number of “little creatures” came from the water who answered the question (sometimes rather ambiguously) and then disappeared very suddenly. The man who served as the “log of birchwood” was then set free and the men returned to their homes. Birch is used in divination rites in a number of European settings, and the man substituting for the log of birch may represent an original sacrifice that was given to the spirits in exchange for their assistance, or the use of birch staves or wands in visionary settings.⁷

Martin’s second account, “Summons by Cow’s Hide”, is reminiscent of the Irish rituals. A group of men gathered at a solitary natural site, away from any dwellings. They singled out one man for the rite and wrapped him in a large cow’s hide so his entire body was covered except for his head. He was left in this position all night long, “until his invisible friends relieved him by giving a proper

answer to the question in hand, which he received...from several persons he found about him all the time.” His companions returned at daybreak and the seer communicated to them whatever news or information had been obtained.⁸

Thomas Pennant witnessed a similar ritual in his 1772 tour of Scotland and the Hebrides. Here the divination ritual is directly referred to as the *taghairm*. In the region of Trotterness lived a family renowned for practicing a ceremony used to obtain oracular knowledge. There was a huge waterfall nearby which fell from a high rock, whose waters jetted out so far as to form a dry hollow between the waterfall and the precipice. One member of the family was sewn up in the hide of an ox and placed in the dark hollow behind the roaring waterfall. A question was put to the diviner wrapped in the ox hide, to which the practice of the *taghairm* provided an answer.⁹

John Ramsey of Ochtertyre also described a Scottish ritual that took place in the late 1700’s or early 1800’s, which involved the use of a cow’s hide and a waterfall. He describes the practice of *taghairm an uisge* (*taghairm* by water) which was maintained by a farming family who lived on the Isle of Skye near a beautiful waterfall called Eas-bhereraig. When they wished to consult the spirits on any matter of importance, a man from that family would cover his entire body with a cow’s hide and place himself between the waters of the cascade and the rock behind it.

Another man assisted, using a pole or stick to give repeated strokes to the waterfall, and to the man concealed behind it. Every now and then he would cry out in Gaelic, “An *maide fearna* so?” (“Is this a stock of alder?”). Here again the man is perceived as piece of wood from a tree. The process continued until the man in the cow’s hide was either “furious or frantic.” Indeed, a degree of frenzy was often reported to have been experienced by the Highland seers. At this point, the man was believed to be in a proper condition to answer important questions. His responses were believed to come “from something more than human.” Members

of this family were frequently consulted about events in the future.¹⁰

Other late eighteenth century accounts of the *taghairm* mention a similar set of ritual elements. Reverend McQueen from Kilmuir wrote about a family whose hereditary office involved the use of the *taghairm*. A large, dry crevice which could hold four or five people was resorted to in the rite, and one of the men lay down covered in a cow's hide. One of the men in the family laid many blows upon the man (possibly with a stick of hazel, the account is a little unclear), which seemed to "almost drive him out of his senses" in a prophetic fury. His words and groans were listened to carefully for answers to the questions posed by each person. Those who consulted the oracle paid him a sheep for his efforts. The ritual was censured by the church after the Reformation, like many native practices.¹¹

There are many common elements between these early modern Scottish *taghairm* ceremonies and the earlier Irish accounts of the bull-sleep:

- divination taking place near a body of water (a river or waterfall)
- choosing one person to act as a seer on behalf of the community
- wrapping the seer in a cow or ox hide
- solitary confinement in a natural setting
- ritual taking place for an entire night
- use of sacred wood – birch, alder, hazel / seer perceived as piece of sacred tree
- sensory overload – sound of rushing water, beating with wands or rods
- belief in appearance of spirit beings to provide information

In a modern version of the Scottish *taghairm* ritual, the dreamer is once again wrapped in a bull's hide. In this case, however, they are not chanted over (as in the bull sleep) but are left overnight in a natural setting, next to a rushing river or behind a waterfall. In this ritual, the sounds of nature (which are rich in overtones) provide the aural input needed to put the dreamer into an altered state of awareness.

In the *tarb feis*, the dreamer lays

upon branches of sacred wood. In the *taghairm*, however, sticks or wands of sacred wood can be used to beat upon the outside of the hide in order to intensify the ordeal and invoke the frenzy of the seer. This repetitive sound and action, together with the noise of the rushing water and the darkness of the setting, all intensify the shamanic experience.

While all of these aspects may be challenging for modern practitioners to enact, as in many other cultures, staying overnight in a natural setting is a powerful way of connecting with Spirit. The dreamer him/herself appears to be the offering in this ritual, bound in a sacred hide and beaten with wands of sacred wood. Many have had deep shamanic and prophetic experiences near a sacred river or journeying to the sound of a waterfall. In Celtic tradition, rivers and waterfalls were associated with the quest for divine wisdom and were understood to be inhabited by spirits.¹²

The Sound of the Spirits

Throughout the Celtic tradition, there is an enormous focus on the use of sacred sound. In early times people used flutes made of bird bones, quite similar to the modern tin whistle or penny-whistle but with a lighter, more breathy sound. We do not have any evidence for the use of the drum in Celtic tradition, and the Irish *bodhrán* or frame drum is not attested until the early twentieth century. However, we do have ritual rattles from a very early period. These were made of metal and were egg-shaped, with a small ring at the top for holding them. Inside were small pieces of metal or clay to produce a light, airy chuffing sound.¹³

There were also many kinds of horns, often shaped like a cow's horn, which produced a variety of sounds. Some would have been used to announce the arrival of a king or holy person, in a large community ceremony or procession. Others were more melody oriented, while another type was played exactly like a didgeridoo. This type of horn could have been played during rituals or ceremonies to help induce an altered state.¹⁴ There are also references to dru-

ids or poets carrying or using something called a *Craobh Side* (fairy branch) which appears to have been a wood or metal branched or forked object with small bells hanging from it. In the case of the *filid*, the colour of the metal used in the branch symbolized their level of expertise and knowledge.¹⁵

The most common method described throughout the entire tradition is the use of the human voice. Druids and poet-seers chant, sing, intone, and recite sacred words or phrases, wisdom texts, spells, song, poems, incantations and invocations in a variety of ritual settings. There is very specialized terminology for these type of practices, such as the word *for-cain* which means to sing over, teach or instruct or predict or prophecy.

Modern practitioners can use bone flutes or pennywhistles, egg-shaped rattles, and branches of sacred wood hung with small bells to create an authentic sonic ritual space for native Celtic shamanic ceremonies. You might also wish to experiment with sound recordings of didgeridoos, rivers or waterfalls.



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The *Immrama* Project (described below) is working to collect and record authentic Celtic songs, prayers, chant and music for use in modern settings. We will be working with experienced shamanic practitioners to recover and restore native types of practice, like *imbas forosnai* and other rituals mentioned above. One evocative native term we are exploring is *esnad*, which can refer to a musical sound, including a roaring, moaning or droning sound (like that of the wind), as well as the singing of certain birds, or a particular kind of human singing or humming. Other terms suggest that overtone singing was involved.

As there are other interesting similarities between aspects of Celtic spiritual symbolism and elements of Siberian and Mongolian shamanism, this could be a distinct possibility. I once had the honour of hosting the members of the Tuvan throat singing group Huun Huur Tu at my home. They enjoyed looking at the Celtic symbols and artwork, and experimented with the musical instruments on hand. Some of these they could play, although the harp and the bodhrán they found confusing.

Gazing at a replica of the famous Gundestrup cauldron, one of the men asked me about a figure represented in one of the panels. This was the Gaulish and British deity known as Cerunnos, the Horned or Antlered God, who was associated with the Lower World, animals, regeneration, and a number of other attributes. After I had described this spiritual being to him, he translated for the others, who nodded their heads. The singer (whose grandfather was a shaman), turned to me and said, “Yes, we have one of those.”

The Breath of Life

In many cultures sound and breath are related, and often associated with spiritual practice. In a number of early texts, druids are said to utilize the *ánál druidecht* (druidic breath) to perform magical or spiritual feats. The legendary arch-druid Mug Roith, an extremely shamanic figure, used the hide of a hornless brown bull and a speckled bird mask with billowing wings. He was said to have been trained in the Otherworld, and was assisted by the son of his divine teacher, a young man who wore a grey-brown mantle hung with talons, bones and horns. Mug Roith utilized the druidic breath to transform people and objects; create magic clouds, mist, fire or wind; repel dark magic, and empower the recitation of sacred words.¹⁶

There is also a possible reference to the use of breath in a description of the training schools of the *filid*. In Ireland, poet-seer candidates went to school during the dark half of the year and taught to compose poems in the darkness. They were given a traditional subject and meter, and left lying on their beds throughout the day in complete darkness. At night they emerged and recited their creations for their teachers. Many poets were said to only compose in the darkness, a traditional practice.

In Scotland, the students wrapped their plaids around their head to block out the light. They also put a stone on their belly, presumably to help regulate the breath – a practice known in other cultures to help facilitate an altered state of conscious-

ness.¹⁷ The potentially shamanic nature of these practices is supported by the fact that a master poet earned the right to wear the *tuigen*, a feathered cloak made from the feathers of mallards from the waist up, and white and multi-coloured feathers from the waist down.

In a training manual associated with the schools of the *filid*, the students are given instruction in the tradition of *séis*, a native Irish word that signifies music and melody, as well as ordering and arrangement, poetic composition and many other layers of meaning. This text has never before been translated into English, and I would like to share a sense of shamanic wisdom in the indigenous Celtic tradition. This native visionary text could be used in your personal practice, or in service of restoring the *tarb feis* or *taghairm* rituals. The breath (which is a feminine word) is described as supporting streams of knowledge, winds of songs, a magic mist, and the well of wisdom, and above all, illuminating and restoring ancient knowledge:

Breath of the Soul, Breath of Fire

Translated from Old Irish by Sharon Paice MacLeod

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I gather breath, the foundation of songs
A declaration of the soul, an emblem of life
It pours in, it departs; it enters and exits a stream
A skilled artificer seeks out refined winds

A foster-mother who nurses the bodies of human beings
Proclamations pour forth from bodies of skill
Which is bitter, which is pleasant; which is cold, which is fervent
Which is thick. Which is thin; which is heavy, which is powerful

It is seen, it is not seen, during my existence
It is not touched, it evades form, it disappears
It sustains a voice, maintaining confidence
Set in motion through a powerful focus

It is the mother of vowels, which is fresh, which is clear,
Which is bright; which is the breath of fire
A glorious current which runs, restoring knowledge
From bodies on account of its illumination

A wave of outpouring from a well, a place of origin,
A protection, a steadfast abode
Very slow, no greater emptying, no distinct mantle
A shrine of life which is secure [in] every foundation and height

Through magic mists it disappears
An enduring furnace of life
The breath of the soul in bodies
On account of its brightness.¹⁸

The Immrama Project

In Celtic myths, people set out on personal or spiritual journeys known as *echtrae* (journeys or adventures) or *immrama* (literally a “rowing around” to different Otherworld islands and locations). In many cases, they are guided, or lured away from the known world and into the unknown realms of the Divine, in a very shamanic experience. They encounter Otherworld beings, spirits in human or animal form, are tested and sometimes given gifts of wisdom or skill. In some cases the spirits form alliances with human beings. This is one of the most important aspects of Celtic religion.

The Old Irish word *síð* is often translated as fairy, but really means “pertaining to the Celtic Otherworld,” particularly as it was accessed through ancient mounds or bodies of water. It comes from a root word meaning seat, as in the “seat or abode of the gods.” It was also used to refer to the inhabitants of the spirit world, the *Siabhra* (the oldest word we have for the Spirits in Celtic tradition) or the *Aés Síde* (people of the *Síð* realms / Otherworld). But in addition to referring to the Otherworld, and to the spirits who live there, the word also has a third meaning: peace. This is not a guaranteed or perpetual condition, but refers to the peace that can result from establishing and maintaining right relationship with the Otherworld.

This is the focus of a new research project and program for shamanic practice which seeks to study, preserve and transmit authentic aspects of Celtic practice and belief, like the examples given above. The *Immrama* Project will explore a number of journeys into traditional Celtic spiritual and shamanic beliefs and techniques, taken directly from wisdom texts in the original languages (which is necessary for any culturally specific tradition), as well as living tradition bearers. Its goal is to restore this rich indigenous tradition into an accessible form for modern practice. After studying the history and culture of the Celts (which is standard practice for exploring any cultural form of shamanism), practitioners will explore native Celtic forms of practice, symbols and traditions,

including:

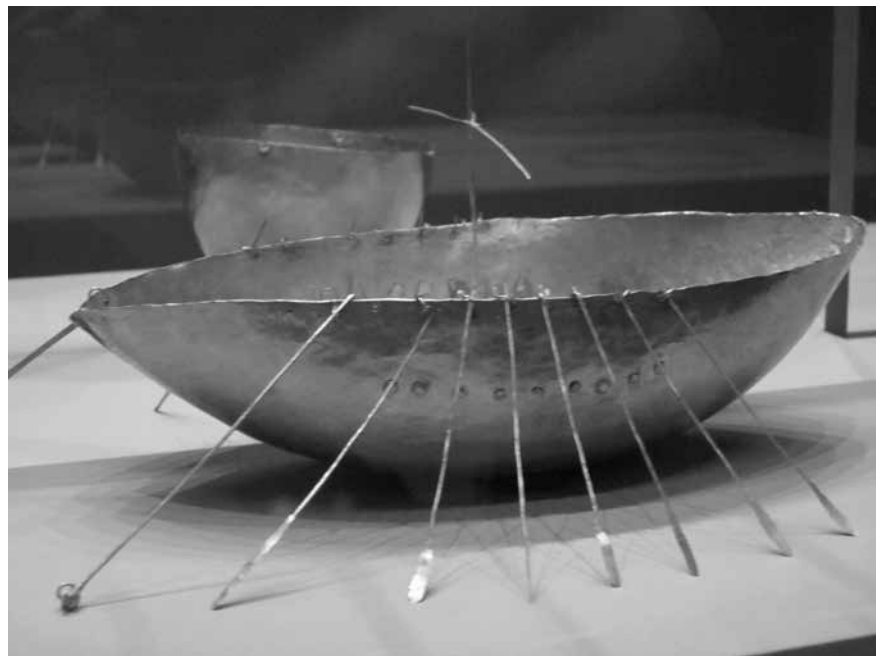
- learning the basics of Old Irish and Middle Welsh to explore the use of chanting in the original native languages for inducing altered states of consciousness
- exploring the related concepts of poetry / prophecy and darkness / sleep / dreaming
- using core shamanic techniques to retrieve native practices like the *tarb feis*, and the visionary practices of the *awen-nyddion*
- restoring the three types of divination learned by the *filid*
- learning modern Celtic languages to understand and make proper use of prayers and charms from the folk tradition for healing, guidance, and other purposes
- maintaining folk forms of shamanism, including the *taghairm*, the *frith* and *eólas*
- journeying to druids and *filid* to understand complex native concepts related to divine knowledge and vision, like *imbas*, *dán*, *awen*, *na trí coire*, in their cultural context

The project is also focused on organizing grant resources in order to meet with Celtic-language speaking elders and tradition bearers in the Celtic countries. They are the last flames of this tradition, and exist within small communities; a

private world of healers and seers who do not advertise and are not visible to people outside their communities. There are still also some traditional poets, singers and storytellers, as well as little-known guardians of sacred sites like holy wells.

Some of these practices are already being restored and incorporated into the daily lives and practices of Celtic shamanic practitioners. For example, there are several 8th-century prayers in Old Irish believed by scholars to include aspects of druidic belief and invocation. New and updated translations of the prayers have been provided to working groups, who use them in their practice and report their experiences. One of the prayers is for long life, and is so powerful that we have stopped using it for the time being; more journeying to the spirits is needed to ascertain under what circumstances the prayer should be used and if any offerings or precautions are needed. The other prayer, however, calls upon the elements of the natural world to protect the person using it, and practitioners report feeling more strength in their physical and energy bodies when they maintain this practice on a daily basis. They all report a marked shift in the energy of the room and the ritual, and a profound deepening of spiritual experience, when reciting the prayers in the original language.

Another rewarding aspect is weaving



Gold model of a boat, Ireland, early medieval period

together known ritual elements from Celtic settings. For example, we know the Celts performed ceremony in a sun-wise direction, and often walked around a sacred site or object three times. Offerings to the spirits of the Lower World were common: jewelry, coins and metal objects (replicas of cauldrons, swords, and tools used in one's profession) are traditionally given into bodies of water. Those in need of healing offer carved wooden images of themselves, or of the body part in need of healing, and offered those into pools or rivers. Once again, giving something of value intensifies the prayer and the experience. As the object vanishes beneath the surface of the water, we can see the rippling spirals of energy extending outwards, signifying the effect our action has in this world and the Otherworld. Salmon, hazelnuts and apples were traditionally associated with the quest for divine knowledge, and these are used as offerings (and ritual meals) with very evocative and tangible results.

Some of the teaching texts associated with the *filid* have proven very useful in modern settings. An untitled medieval text called (by scholars) "The Caldron of Poesy" refers to beliefs associated with the poet-seers. In this text, three cauldrons or 'vessels' are said to exist in every person: *Coire Goiriath* (The Cauldron of Warming), *Coire Erma* (The Cauldron of Motion) and *Coire Sois* (The Cauldron of Great Knowledge). Each cauldron has specific attributes, and the position of the vessels symbolizes the spiritual progress of the person. New translations have been recited to working groups, who in some cases are the first people to hear or use these words in over a thousand years. Shamanic journeying provides information about how to work with the cauldrons, and is especially potent when listening to the sacred words of the text. Chanting into the cauldrons is a very powerful tool for grounding, centering and connecting with Spirit.

It is hoped that with the combination of historical study, shamanic practice, and respectful reconnection with elder

traditions, the vibrant world of the Celtic shaman and seer can come to life once more. Walking the path of the Strong Seers is a vision that can become a reality for modern practitioners, if we dedicate ourselves to the authentic practices of the wisdom-keepers of the Celtic-worlds.

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Sharon Paice MacLeod is a Canadian writer, teacher and singer of Scottish, Irish and Welsh ancestry, a direct descendant of "Fairy Clan" MacLeod. She trained in Celtic Studies through Harvard University and presented at the University of Edinburgh, University College Cork, and Ford Foundation Lecture Series. Ms. MacLeod served as Faculty in Celtic Shamanism at the Omega Institute and is the author of *Celtic Myth and Religion* and *The Divine Feminine in Ancient Europe* (McFarland). She is a mesa-bearer in the Andean tradition and Pipe Carrier in Lakota tradition. Email: celticwisdom @ gmail.com.

Backyard Spirit House

by Jaime Meyer

I'm nervous about this healing ceremony. A few days ago the spirits told me what was needed for this young man was a "shaking out" healing, and that he may very well have a loud and flailing experience. It worries me.

It's evening, early autumn, we are in the House of Spirit Medicine, a domed structure made of bent willow branches crisscrossed and tied together with strips of willow bark. Even though the house is covered only in canvas, when we are inside, there is a profound feeling of otherworldly separation and privacy. It's a cosmic womb and each time we work in this house we are made new again in some mysterious, yet palpable way. But I still worry about one thing.

I've done all the preparation: prayers of permission, gratitude and protection to the land surrounding the House, to the trees, the crows, the fire, the ancestors, the winds, to the old mothers and fathers, to my human teachers and my otherworld helpers. I sang and rattled inside the house for an hour before the young man and my two assistants arrived to make sure the house was warmed and filled with the power of yearning for a better life, and to show the nine willow sisters who inhabit the House my dedication to the work I was about to do. Now as we begin the ceremony, I feel solid – my constant insecurities have been successfully put aside, I'm in the zone to do the work. I only have one worry.

The young man is lying swaddled under several blankets, in a between-the-worlds state of consciousness after my two assistants and I have sung over him for twenty minutes or so. I bend close and whisper to him that the two women will begin to scrape him with the deer rib bones that we harvested from the deer graveyard in the woods nearby, and that whatever happens in him, whatever begins to be released, feel free and safe to let it happen.

I feel a little panicky giving him that permission and I'm hoping like mad that he will just lie quiet. But he doesn't. Soon he is shaking, coughing, shouting, moaning. The spirits were right – he needs this. I tell the women to keep breathing deeply, keep singing the song steadily, and keep scraping and flinging the scraped-off energies into the fire. They can see the energies – they are good at this work. I rattle and hold the space, watch for unwelcome visitors from the other world,



and try to quell that one worry: that this time the neighbors on either side or right behind us are going to call 9-1-1.

The Spirit House is in my back yard, in a middle class urban neighborhood of Minneapolis. When we built it that May afternoon two years ago, we had no idea the lessons it would continually teach us, and what it would demand of me as its keeper. In two years I've only received one mild complaint from neighbors – after the summer solstice healing ceremony in which the twelve of us in the Spirit house drummed for four hours straight and made that HBO movie hard to pay attention to.

Without a doubt, the hardest challenge is when I need to step outside the house during a ceremony to sing to the spirits. My former in-laws live right behind me and it takes a mighty effort to put away the images of them clicking their tongues and muttering how they never knew I was quite this weird.

The House began as a simple effort to take seriously what it means to do "urban shamanism" – to have a wild space, a space dedicated to spirit and owned by it, separate from the house that the humans live in. Some people can buy a spot of land outside the city, build the perfect yurt on it and invite people to drive there for special and profound experiences. I'm not that person.

For reasons economic and theological, I felt called to make a space that my people could get to quickly and didn't require a long drive away from the city. A place that proclaims the core of shamanic theology as I understand it: the sacred is right here, right now, not somewhere else, somewhere



“unmarred.” The land I live on is sacred land, not because it’s idyllic, but because it allows me to live in this spot, to feed my children here, to do my work here. I belong to this land and am grateful.

I need to tend to the house as a living being. I need to feed it with ceremony

and offerings, with song and weeping. And I need to tend to the Willow Sisters and listen to what they want from me. This includes when they tell me to get out, as they did when I was doing the preparatory work for a soul retrieval, and a very dodgy ancestor of the

client showed up, and they told me for my own good I’d better leave while they worked on him. Or like a few days ago when I went in to make offerings after not visiting for two weeks and they said to leave them alone because they were sleeping for the winter. I’m not sure when they will let me in again.

The first time I did a group ceremony in the house, I had a profound vision of all kinds of spirit visitors poking their heads in through the smoke hole, checking us out in wonder and astonished glee that we were bringing this work right here, to this urban spot, where the buses rumble past, amidst the sirens and jet engines and leaf blowers. With this house we say “Yes, spirit is everywhere, yes we see you, and now we ask for your help.” And they help us, right here in the back yard.

So I ended up with this flimsy, half-crooked, canvas blob in my yard, as seen from the outside, but which carries enormous spiritual Presence for those who enter it. When I teach students in there, it’s clear that the teaching comes from well beyond me. When my students and I do healing ceremonies in there, even people who have little experience with

shamanic practice feel instantly safe and calm.

I feel protected, cared for and guided when I’m inside it, but to my surprise, I also feel protected by it when I’m in my house. I feel it out there all the time. I see it out the window a dozen times a day. It

has made this spot of busy city a specially charged piece of land, a *temenos*, a set apart place dedicated to the Great Mystery, the place where the work matters more than what my neighbors think of me. At night when I’m in bed, I can feel the

Spirit House out there, quietly securing the threshold between the worlds, a constant reminder of the agreement between me and the spirits, that as long as I keep my head on straight, as long as I keep my permission and protection in proper order, they will help me, they will keep me safe and they will allow me to do this beautiful work.

The Spirit House sinks into people’s consciousness in different ways. Sometimes I won’t see them for a year, and then they pop up at a weekend drum circle, faces all aglow. Sometimes they become my students or apprentices.



Sometimes I sense that I’ll never see them again – like the young man who shook out something profound in the house. I often don’t know the long-term outcomes of this work. So I simply rest on a trust of the work, trust in the willow sisters, and trust in the Spirit, and I just do what I’m called to do.

Sidebar:

How to build a spirit house

I honor my colleague and teacher Teresa Riley Baecker for teaching us how to build the first house. What we call Red Willow grows wild by ponds or lakes. Cutting it in spring time is good because they are full of water and very flexible. After many offerings and prayers, and when we felt we had permission, we cut 32 stalks, each about fifteen feet tall, and a little smaller than the size of our wrists. We stripped the bark off to use as ties. We buried 12 of the longest stalks about two feet into the earth in a circle with a diameter of the two tallest people stretched out on the ground (about 12 feet). We made an arched doorway facing east – in my Celtic shamanic tradition, the direction of new life, rebirth, and the goddess of healing and springtime, Brigit. I covered it with heavy canvas painter’s drop cloths from Home Depot. I placed scores of grommets in the canvas to make holes for tying the canvas to the structure. We ended up with a structure that could seat 12 people in a circle inside. I added the upright pole in the middle a year later, after heavy snow collapsed the house the first winter.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jaime Meyer, a father to two sons, is the writer of 20 plays and one book, and leader of hundreds of shamanic drum circles, healing ceremonies, and workshops. He works primarily from a Celtic perspective. He tries as hard as he can to bathe people’s strained faces in the juice of the raspberry, the milk of the stars, and the joy inside of all joyous things.

The Good Red Road

a review of *New Wasichu Crossing* by Gary Lindorff

by Tom Cowan, PhD.

In the globalized world of today we are witnessing the mass migration of peoples. In the Middle East millions of people are exiles and refugees from Iraq, Syria, and other war-torn countries. The same is true in sub-Saharan Africa. Many Western Europeans are hostile toward immigrants from Eastern Europe. In the United States there are movements to stop immigration from Mexico and return undocumented Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who are already here. There was never a time when human beings haven't been moving from one region of the Earth to another. In many of these places, people in the so-called "host countries" object to the newcomers with similar complaints. "They are different from us. They will destroy our way of life. We do not want them here."

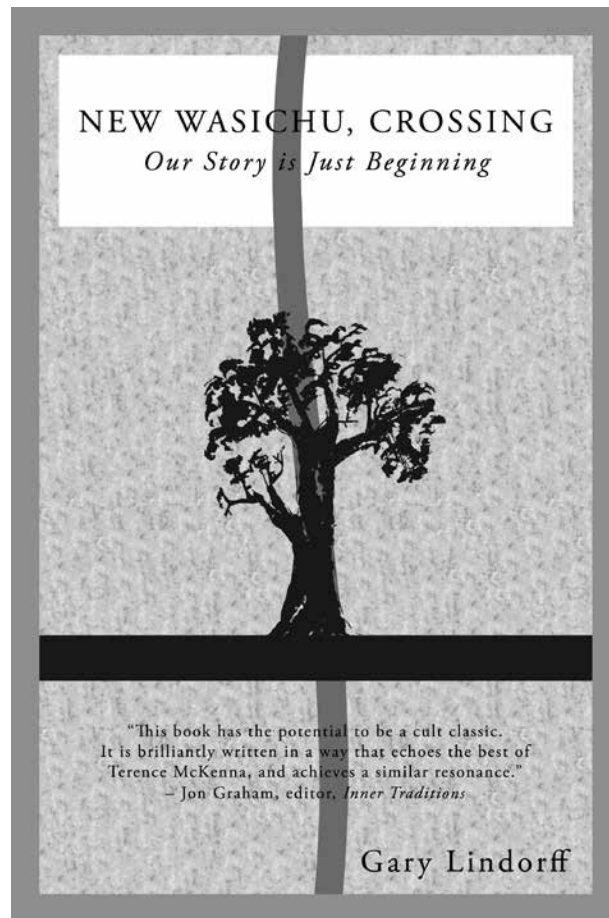
We heard these complaints—and ignored them—over the last five hundred years when they were expressed by native people here on Turtle Island. When the newcomers, from whom many of us are descended, reached the Great Plains, the Lakota people had a name for them: Wasichu. In the Lakota language Wasichu means *those who take the fat*. Specifically it referred to the growing American culture that sent the military, pioneers, and thrill-seekers to the Great Plains where they proceeded (sometimes just for "fun") to slaughter the buffalo, the "fat" that provided a way of life for Native Americans on the Plains. I am not sure whether any of my ancestors were literally Wasichu or even had conflicts with Native Americans. But as a descendant of European-Americans and a representative of mainstream American culture, I know that I carry Wasichu energy, the energy that destroyed the traditional lifestyles of Native Americans. I can look behind me and

see the long Wasichu shadow stretching out and back through the generations who preceded me. I can feel that karma in my bones. I know that the Wasichu legacy is part of the cultural baggage I carry from the past.

In his book *New Wasichu, Crossing*, Gary Lindorff is betting on me *not* to carry it into the future.

Lindorff's title challenges us to be "new" Wasichus and to "cross" over. His book is a thoughtful, inspiring, and intelligent account of what this might mean. Lindorff has pondered long and hard about our presence here on Turtle Island. Because he practices shamanism, writes poetry, records and follows his dreams, and reads voraciously some of the best thinkers past and present about the human condition, he realizes his (and our) moral obligation to use our heritage, use what-we-are, use what we cannot deny, to make a better world. Throughout the book he keeps in close touch with the wisdom teachings bequeathed us by the great Lakota visionary Black Elk and his great-nephew Wallace Black Elk. In addition, Lindorff personalizes his text with his own poetry and that of others, his dreams, crucial life experiences, and synchronicities that startle him out of ordinary consciousness—so that when he writes about the Wasichu heritage, he

sees it and feels it within himself. As you read, you know you are in the presence of a man who maintains a running dialogue with the writers who have inspired him as well as the people he knows in his own life, and even with himself. You feel he is not just speaking to you but with you. He wants you to become a "new" Wasichu.



The Red and Black Roads

The New Wasichu must “cross.” We must boldly step forward to cross the “black road,” that Black Elk calls “a fearful road, a road of troubles and of war.” We must cross to the “good red road” where people feel a closeness to spirit and the sacredness of all life. Where the two roads cross, grows the Tree of Life. Lindorff asks we who have shamanic skills to make that crossing, to cross over the black road to the red road, to leave the square culture of modern America and enter into the circular world of native people. As Black Elk says, “You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round.” But to cross is a kind of death.

Lindorff writes, “Crossing is a form of death no matter what one thinks.” But he has great hope for the shamanic communities because as he puts it, “A shaman is one who dies to him/herself . . . who has survived some life-changing experience. . . (and) proceeds to live in two worlds—the middle world and the sacred—between which he/she travels at will.” Practitioners of shamanism will know how to cross over, to meet this death. And it is precisely we who are not Native Americans whose presence is needed on “the good red road.” Some Native Americans recognize this. Lindorff notes that “there is a movement afoot among Native Americans that embraces the rainbow spirit of the new age and promotes the idea that it is time to pass along the native wisdom.” He reminds us that Black Elk gave John Neihardt the medicine name “Flaming Rainbow,” an image he had in his first great vision. Lindorff sees this name as “acknowledging (Neihardt’s) heroism, for he was not only Black Elk’s translator, but also his champion.”

And so it is a good day to cross. It is a good day to die. Not only good but necessary. Black Elk knew that mending the Hoops of Life, and nurturing the Tree of Life, cannot be done by any one people. It is a human endeavor. The

New Wasichu are not any one color but can be found among all of them. And the global movements of peoples, cultures, and knowledge, both secular and sacred, is needed to bring us back into harmony with the Earth. We must die to our old ways and be born as something new.

Are We Homeowners?

Once while Lindorff was busy writing, he was interrupted by a telemarketer who asked if he was a homeowner (he is) and if his home had a septic (it does, but he lied to get rid of the telemarketer). Going back to his work, he was struck by the omen of this interruption. He realized that home ownership “taps into the core issue of my life: the morality of owning a piece of a rapidly shrinking planet.” It led him to reflect on the “sacred indebtedness to the spirit of a place that we can choose to honor or not.” This is precisely what the New Wasichu must come to realize: that “possessing” land should lead us “into the land’s dreaming” so that we are “essentially being possessed by the land in the sense of being chosen by the land *to* possess it.” There may be deeds and titles, but home ownership is also a sacred covenant with spirit. Indigenous people everywhere know this. The New Wasichu must learn it.

The New Wasichu must find ways to be “at home,” to live as Lindorff says “in a place that I love, that I call *home*.” He reminds us that Wallace Black Elk says we must always have a spirit guide for “then someone is watching you.” Watching how we walk on our land, watching if we treat it in a sacred manner, watching us pray as we begin life each day. Every morning Wallace Black Elk’s grandfather lifted up his arms to pray to the morning star, *anpo wie*. When you do that, he said, it is like touching the face of *Tunkashila*, the Creator. Wherever we live we are watched by the morning star.

Healing our Broken Culture

A spirit is watching us struggle to find an alternative to the dualistic thinking

that separates us from the rest of the world, that places us in power over it. Dualism has been the Wasichu heritage, our *modus operandi*, and our legacy. Of course duality is real, as Lindorff acknowledges, but he suggests that we re-listen to Bob Dylan’s advice to “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right.” Power itself is not dualistic, and it’s “all right.” Native Americans do not question the existence of power but they criticize the way Wasichus use it: to conquer, to exploit, to destroy, to deprive Earth of its Life Force. Lindorff believes, as many of us do, that our culture is broken, but in his view, it’s “a sacred brokenness!” If we can see that, he writes, then we can be touched “by the pathos of it all” and then “Nothing is dull anymore; absolutely nothing is two-dimensional.” Everything can be seen in its rightness, in its connection to spirit, and we will no longer have to think twice. We can live in the exciting unity of all things and thus heal the brokenness.

Even the two roads are not really a form of duality, for we must walk both roads, black and red, simultaneously. Black Elk himself was told to do this. We cannot deny that the black road is our heritage, albeit troubled. It empowers us, and it continues to create as well as destroy. But our challenge on this road is to avoid the ecological disaster that awaits us. Lindorff quotes another Lakota visionary, Lame Deer, who warns: “Only human beings have come to a point where they no longer know why they exist. . . they stumble along blindly on the road to nowhere—a paved highway which they themselves bulldoze and make smooth so that they can get faster to the big empty hole which they’ll find at the end, waiting to swallow them up.” Black Elk put it simply, the Wasichu “had forgotten that the earth was their mother.”

In a way this is why Gary Lindorff became a poet: to find meaning and avoid the hole. He writes, “Meaning is elusive, but unless our lives are meaningful, we are going to care only enough to limp along but not enough to reinvent

ourselves, which is what we are being challenged to do. Poets are among those who can help people reinvent themselves.” They help us become people who remember that Earth is our mother.

Adore or Die

The New Wasichu will re-discover, or discover for the first time, that all life is sacred, holy, filled with spirit. Lindorff quotes the great Jesuit paleontologist and geologist Teilhard de Chardin who wrote in the middle of the twentieth century that “the day is not distant when humanity will realize that it is faced with a choice between suicide and adoration.” If we continue to build those smooth roads to nowhere, Earth will swallow us up. It is a form of suicide. But if we cross over to walk the “good red road,” we will lift up our hands and eyes and voices, and bow our heads, to celebrate the beauty of the world, we will adore the land because we have fallen in love with it.

The red road begins at the “stone people’s lodge,” the sweat lodge, where we fall on our knees to enter and sit reverently with the four elements and pray to them and with them. Here we see the stones themselves glowing red with the fire of Life. Wallace Black Elk reminds us, “Every living thing is red. My blood, my life is red. All winged, four-legged, creeping-crawlers, mammals, fish-people, and two-legged, their blood is red.” And if we can see that redness, the sacred force of life, then as Gary Lindorff concludes, “it doesn’t matter where we walk on this planet, as long we are walking as if each day is holy and all things are sacred. Then we are on the red path with the sun in our faces, and if we are walking in our power, then the morning star will always be rising in our souls!”

And this, of course, is the point: We will redeem our painful heritage and walk into the future as the New Wasichu.



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Awaken the Inner Shaman:

A Guide to the Power Path of the Heart by José L. Stevens, PhD.

Review by Terri Monroe, Ed.D., M.Div.

Sounds True, Boulder, CO, 2014

The highest compliment I can pay José Stevens's *Awaken the Inner Shaman: A Guide to the Power Path of the Heart* is to reveal that it has just claimed a spot on my "Desert Island" list: the five books I would want if I were shipwrecked. One of my criteria for these is that a book should point the way toward the ultimate goal of human desire for fulfillment, the goal of all spiritual searching: unconditional awareness and love – not just ideas and descriptions of it, but exercises and practices that bear fruit and can be returned to again and again. What other kind of book could provide more value to a desert island dweller? *Awakening the Inner Shaman* by José Stevens fits the criteria.

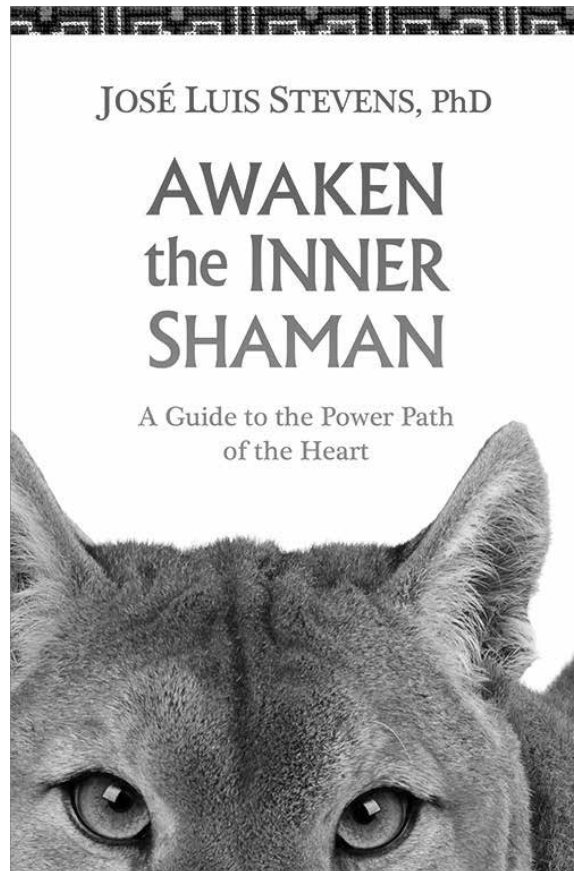
A significant sign of our times, I think, is the quest to make a more explicit leap of consciousness from shamanic ideology to a deeper spiritual consciousness and practice, from shamanic techniques to something resembling a more full-hearted way of life. This book is a major contribution to the emerging interface of shamanism, science, power, human development, evolution, and the wisdom contained in the world's great religious and spiritual traditions. As such, it is a somewhat densely compacted work of expansive integrative scholarship woven through with heart and spirit that is full of vital information that remains as yet too little known.

Stevens's approach in this book is inclusive, and it borrows freely from many traditions and teachers. It is profoundly shaped by the author's decades-long apprenticeships with Shipibo *curanderos* and Q'ero *paqos* in Peru and Huichol *maracames* in central Mexico. But it also draws on the age-old wisdom of the great religions and philosophies of the world gleaned from his years of study of with Jesuit scholars, Korean Zen Masters, Tibetan Buddhist lamas, metaphysical teachers, and Native

American elders. A helpful acknowledgment of many of these sources can be found in the bibliography at the back of the book.

At the core of all the major spiritual traditions is the mystic heart, the seat of our divine essence. Diverse names from many spiritual traditions are used to refer to this reality: *pure awareness, non-dual awareness, the True Self, the ground of being, Buddha nature, Christ consciousness, and enlightenment* to name a few. Stevens uses the term "Inner Shaman" to signify this indescribable but definitely recognizable reality. Much of the book is devoted to helping the reader perceive and open to this transparent awareness at the center of our being. He explains how this Inner Shaman connects us to the heart of the Cosmos, enables us to access and work creatively with the quantum field, evolve toward a maximum potential for the kind of world we wish to inhabit, and perhaps most importantly, unconditionally embrace all with love and compassion. I especially appreciate the way he explores the direct recognition of non-dual awareness through the lens of shamanic practice using a variety of stories and styles of expression.

The pure awareness associated with the Inner Shaman is our birthright, but most of us experience a gap between this kind of pure consciousness and our ordinary awareness which is full of content, conditions, and emotions generated by the ego. Further, most of us have inherited the sense, reinforced by most religions, that enlightenment is a too-far-off possibility for us. Stevens, however, proposes that now is time for the Inner Shaman to be lit up in many of our hearts, and brings together myriad strands of wisdom that could hasten the process. While not every individual will likely be able to access unity consciousness at this moment, it is where we are all headed sooner or later, so we might as well go in a more informed manner.



One of the primary aims of this book is to help shake loose the assumptions and fixations that keep us attached to our particular identity as a personal “me” and that cause untold dissatisfaction and suffering. Chapters with titles such as “Tearing Down the Retaining Walls of the Mind” and “Interference and Blocks to Experiencing the Inner Shaman” offer numerous exercises and practices designed to eliminate the energy leaks in our life, clear out the contents of the subconscious mind, and see through the conditioning and beliefs that lead us to believe in our manufactured stories about who we are and what is real.


Some people reading this may already have had experiences of the Inner Shaman and will be particularly interested in the later chapters, especially “Advanced Work with the Inner Shaman” which offers exercises designed to strengthen and sustain the experience of Self-realization. If you are like me, it is often tempting to skip over such exercises vowing to get to them later or you convince yourself that you can get the idea simply by reading through them. These aren’t the “same old” self-help exercises, however, and many have

an inviting, almost playful quality as opposed to a “knuckle down and get to work” one.

I think it is possible that this book could change the discourse on shamanism and spirituality by offering an initial spiritual template for inner exploration oriented toward seeing with the eyes of the heart through the lens of shamanism. If you are interested in such a map combined with spiritual practices to support it, this is a great place to begin.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

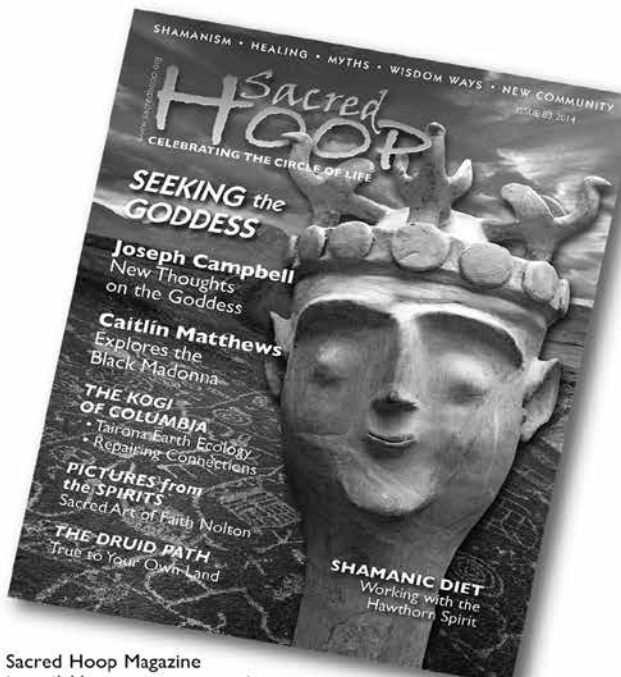
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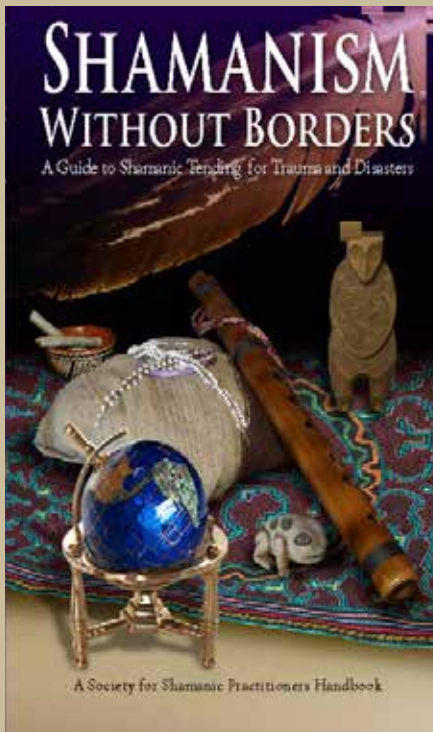
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